



# Media Release

## **BOB McMULLAN MP**

SHADOW MINISTER FOR FEDERAL/STATE RELATIONS

SHADOW MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR FRASER

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## **FEDERAL LABOR IS LEADING THE WAY AGAIN ON REDUCING AVOIDABLE BLINDNESS – LIBS JOIN DAYS FROM AN ELECTION**

The need for more assistance to fight treatable or preventable blindness was highlighted in last night's "7:30 Report" on the ABC.

Dr Nitin Verma is to be commended on the invaluable work he is carrying out, restoring vision to hundreds of thousands East Timorese people.

According to the ABC, Australia's official contribution will end this year. Dr Verma says the real need is for the training of eye care personnel.

On World Sight Day earlier this month (11 Oct 07) Federal Labor announced our plan to Fight Avoidable Blindness in the Region, as part of a broader policy on disability in development.

After 11 years of inactivity, and after Federal Labor's announcement, the Howard Government followed suit and made an announcement on blindness and disability.

While the decision was 11 years late, it is nevertheless more than welcome.

It now guarantees that whoever is elected, the long neglected issues facing the poorest of the poor in developing countries - people with disabilities - will move to the centre of Australia's aid program as they should have more than a decade ago.

Disability affects 20 per cent of people living in poverty. Labor announced it will develop a disability policy to mainstream disability considerations into the aid program.

As part of our plan, a Rudd Labor government will undertake a pilot program in the South Pacific and priority countries in South East Asia, establishing at least 10 Vision Centres and at least one Service Centre as well as providing support to the Pacific Eye Institute and training crucial eye and vision personnel.

By drawing on the skills and expertise of Australian organisations like the Fred Hollows Foundation, International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE), Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI), and the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Federal Labor will develop partnerships with regional countries to work towards the goal of eliminating avoidable blindness and vision impairment in our region.

Our announcement was welcomed by members of Vision 2020, as well as the broader aid community:

*"As a first step in developing a specific disability focus in the aid program, it represents an important shift from the past."*

Paul O'Callaghan, ACFID Executive Director.

By following Federal Labor's lead, Mr Downer has once again shown that a Rudd government will provide both fresh and better leadership.