

AIFS at Asia and Pacific Region conference

The Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, *David Stanton*, reports on the recent Twelfth Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific.

The Twelfth Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific was held by the International Social Security Association (ISSA) in Bangkok from 20–23 November 2000. Some 30 countries of the Asia and Pacific Region were represented, as well as representatives from various International Agencies, such as ISSA, the International Labour Organisation, and the World Health Organisation.

Papers were presented on: Globalisation and social safety nets; The current economic and social context of social security in Asia and the Pacific; Challenges to providing social protection in the informal sector; Issues in disability protection; and Measuring social security performance.

Papers were presented from the perspectives of the diverse social protection systems that apply in the region, from the developed systems of countries such as Japan and the Philippines to those countries at an earlier stage of economic development who depend more on the extended family and rural subsistence activities to provide social protection. The Region has considerable diversity in the types of systems, including in the contingencies covered, benefits available, and the coverage of the population. The role of the extended family continues to be critical in most Asian societies.

Providing social protection to families in the informal sector continues to be a major preoccupation

and challenge in the Region. Most informal sector workers continue to rely on traditional family support. There was some discussion about how it might be possible to foster group initiatives that would support families by the coordination and financial support of the activities of non-governmental organisations, voluntary agencies and other concerned organisations. Informal sector workers are mostly in self-employment in very small production units in both urban and rural-based activities.

We can get some idea of the dimension of the problems being faced when we consider that of the world's 6 billion people, some 1.2 billion live on less than \$US1 a day, with some 70 per cent of them living in East and South Asia (World Bank, World Development Report, 2000/2001).



Pictured at the Twelfth Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific are (from left): *Ross Mackay*, Special Advisor, Ministry of Social Policy, New Zealand; *Cheryl Schmidt*, Director, Disability Policy, Australian Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS); *David Stanton*, Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies; and *Keith Ogborn*, Project Leader, Enterprise, Housing and Social Security Reform Team (FaCS), People's Republic of China.