



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

Commission on the Status of Women

March 2010

Australian National Statement

**Statement by Sally Moyle
Office for Women
Australia**

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chair,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission today. I express my congratulations to you on your appointment as Chair of this historic meeting.

Women's experience of inequality is the result of interconnected burdens: violence, discrimination in the workplace and the expectation women will clean and care for their families.

Women's experiences of violence impede their ability to participate economically and to secure financial independence. Poverty and financial dependence restrict women's abilities to assume leadership roles. Women's continued underrepresentation in leadership roles means it is less likely that issues of concern to women such as violence against women will be adequately addressed in public and private policymaking.

We will not address inequality unless we do so in an integrated and comprehensive way. That is why framework documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals remain so important. It is also why it is so critical to make connections between these frameworks for gender equality.

Integrating these international frameworks into our work is not only essential to reduce gender inequality but is also critical for sustainable development and economic recovery.

Robust institutional mechanisms underpin this work. That is why the composite UN gender entity is so important to the empowerment of women globally.

Australia welcomes our collective decision to establish a composite UN entity for gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women. The next steps should follow swiftly – the particularly the appointment of a competent Under-Secretary-General. Australia calls for sufficient funding to ensure a dynamic and innovative entity that is able to fulfil its mandate.

National human rights institutions play an important role in achieving gender equality. They both hold government to account and collaborate with government to achieve gender targets. Australia supports greater participation and independent status of these institutions in the deliberations of the CSW, commensurate with their independent status at the Human Rights Council. This would improve prospects globally of securing gender equality and empowerment of women.

While international mechanisms are important, equality between men and women also requires robust and effective national women's machineries. In Australia we are proud of our achievements in this regard. Three agencies work together to improve gender equality in Australia. The Australian Government Office for Women promotes equality across government; the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency works proactively with the private sector, and we have a powerful advocate in our Sex Discrimination Commissioner, a member of our national Human Rights Commission. I am pleased to say that each of our three women's machineries is represented on Australia's delegation today. This demonstrates our commitment to equality. Our State and Territory governments also have similar mechanisms to promote and protect the rights of women.

Australia is proud of its achievements in empowering women, but we still face some key challenges to achieve equality between men and women.

We recognise that there is much more work to be done for Indigenous Australians who experience considerably poorer outcomes than other Australians on most socio-economic indicators. Indigenous women are particularly disadvantaged. Australia is working hard to address this. The Government has resolved to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

Violence against women continues at unacceptable levels in Australia and internationally. Our Prime Minister has stated that the Australian Government has zero tolerance of violence against women. Australia is developing a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, and has strengthened Australia's response to people trafficking.

At the Pacific Islands Forum in Cairns, Australia this year, our Prime Minister and the leaders of the other Forum countries committed to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence.

Maternal mortality is alarmingly high in the Asia-Pacific region and is a problem that requires a multi-faceted approach. We urge all states to strengthen their support for comprehensive reproductive health and family planning services for women in developing countries.

Improving economic outcomes for women is critical if gender equality is to be achieved.

The Australian Government is introducing a Paid Parental Leave scheme in Australia. This is a crucial step towards building equality between men and women. And our new workplace relations system provides greater protection and flexibility for all workers, particularly women.

But more needs to be done. From the moment a woman enters the workforce in Australia she is likely to earn less than her male colleagues. Regardless of her career, industry or level of education, in Australia she will receive, on average around 83 per cent of what her male counterpart earns.

Women cannot continue to bear the major responsibility for unpaid caring and domestic work. We need to give more men the opportunity to be more active fathers and carers, not just to ease the burden on women but because many men want to share in the rewards of caring for children and their families.

The importance of measuring the changing gaps in gender equality can not be underestimated. By not recognising or measuring women's unpaid work, women's full contribution to social and economic development is under estimated and under-valued. We need the evidence and benchmarks to indentify the gaps and challenges remaining and to measure progress toward gender equality. Australia urges member states to invest in the collection of relevant, high quality sex-disaggregated data including time use surveys and Systems of National Accounts.

High quality education for girls will provide them with skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary for lifelong learning, employment and full participation in society. Australia's education system is of the highest standard and enjoys international renown. Areas of disadvantage still exist however, especially in our Indigenous communities. The Government is focused on ensuring that every child in Australia will have access to affordable, quality education.

Australia also recognises the need to strengthen women's leadership in Australia and internationally.

Currently, about one third of parliamentarians in Australia are women and for the first time a woman occupies the position of Governor General – our highest public office. Three of the seven judges in our highest court are women. Nevertheless, women's representation on private sector boards in Australia is low at around 8.3 per cent.

One of the most urgent issues of our time is climate change and those with the fewest resources – the majority of whom are women – are vulnerable to its impacts and yet have the least capacity to adapt. Women have a leadership role in driving change and

sustainability, including at the household and community level, and we recognise the important contribution they make to reducing carbon emissions.

Australia recognises the intersections between these inequalities and we understand that a whole of government response is needed to address them. We are building capacity across government to conduct gender analysis and ensure all government action promotes equality. Together the elements of Australia's national women's machinery are working to ensure government and community share a vision and take steps toward equality. It is equally important that we, here at CSW, support the UN to take the next steps toward a strong and well-supported system that will see real progress towards equality across the UN system and across the world.

We know the importance of equality. We have the frameworks in place to guide us. We have the agreement for a new gender entity. And we have, here at CSW, renewed commitments to equality from governments around the world. We can now see real progress toward equality over the next decade.

International cooperation to achieve tangible results for women in these areas of common interest is crucial.

Finally, Mr Chair,

To accelerate change, gender inequality cannot continue to be seen as just a woman's burden. Achieving equality must be a shared vision between women and men. After all, it is the whole community's responsibility and will benefit us all.

Australia's commitment is unwavering, as we continue to build on our achievements toward equality between men and women.