



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

4 March 2009

Commission on the Status of Women Fifty-third session

Statement by the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP Australian Minister for the Status of Women

(Check against delivery)

1. Mr Chair, ladies and gentleman.
2. It is a pleasure to address the Commission today.
3. Australia considers honouring its responsibilities as an international citizen a high priority, and is committed to reinvigorating our engagement with the United Nations.
4. Australia is ranked third in the world on the Gender-Related Development Index and eighth on the Gender Empowerment Measure, reflecting the value Australia places on gender equality.
5. In the midst of a global financial crisis, it is important to continue our work on gender equality. Recovery from the global financial crisis relies on every citizen having the opportunity to contribute fully and equally to their society and economy.
6. The Australian Government has announced two economic stimulus packages to help families and individuals during these difficult times with significant spending on public housing, the environment and schools.
7. Since taking office in December 2007, the Australian Government has been working hard to improve and enrich the lives of women and to support them to participate equally in all aspects of Australian life.
8. Most recently, Australia acceded to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW¹ and I am pleased to report that it came into force yesterday.

¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

9. Australia is pursuing three key priority areas for advancing gender equality:
 - a. improving women's economic outcomes and financial independence;
 - b. ensuring women's voices are heard at all levels of decision-making; and,
 - c. reducing violence against women.

Economic outcomes

10. Helping women and men to more equally share care is an important part of achieving economic security and independence for women.
11. Women in Australia are responsible for 65 per cent of all unpaid work while also steadily increasing their participation in paid work.
12. To help Australian women and men better balance their work and caring responsibilities, the Australian Government is creating fairer and more balanced workplace relations laws, has set up an Office of Work and Family and is working to address gender pay equity.
13. Australia has a maternity payment (equivalent to about 9 weeks of the minimum wage) to assist with the extra cost incurred at the time of a birth or adoption of a child.
14. We have asked an independent commission to examine the merits of a workforce based government funded paid parental leave scheme, in addition to the employer funded schemes to which nearly half of all working women already have access.
15. The Government is improving the quality, cost and availability of child care.
16. A parliamentary inquiry into the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* has been conducted and the Government is considering ways to strengthen women's human rights, as well as conducting a consultation on the broader range of human rights.
17. Australia supports greater participation and independent status for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) in the deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women. I note that several National Human Rights Institutions, including Australia's, are represented on their government delegations this year.

Decision-making processes

18. Australia actively promotes the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes.
19. Currently, just less than one third of parliamentarians in Australia are women, including the Deputy Prime Minister, seven Federal Government ministers and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Three out of our seven High Court Justices, Australia's highest court, are women and, for the first time, a woman also occupies the position of Governor General – our highest public office.
20. The Government supports a network of National Women's Alliances that consult with Australian women and provide informed advice.

21. The Government also holds events such as the recent *National Rural Women's Summit* to consult with particular groups on specific issues.

Violence against women

22. Violence against women is a violation of human rights.
23. Reducing violence is essential to achieving greater gender equality.
24. Australia is working to reduce both the impact and incidence of violence against women, including through the development of a *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children* and respectful relationships education.

Indigenous women

25. We recognise that there is much work to be done in Australia.
26. One year ago, the Australian Government made an historic National Apology to Indigenous Australians for previous government policies that saw the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families. I have appended a copy of this document to the Country Statement for delegate's interest.
27. The National Apology was a powerful symbol, and marked the beginning of a new era in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
28. While Indigenous women are often the glue that holds their community together, their leadership role is not always acknowledged.
29. As well as initiatives such as the Indigenous Women's Leadership Program, the Government has resolved to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity and is making progress in partnership with Indigenous Australians.

Care giving and HIV/AIDS

30. Fortunately, good preventative health measures have spared Australia from the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemics experienced in many parts of the world. Women still, however, disproportionately bear the responsibility for caring.
31. The Australian side event on Wednesday night will show, for example, the role that Australian Indigenous women have played in redressing the harm of alcohol abuse in their community.
32. Australia's International HIV/AIDS strategy aims to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and mitigate the effect on people living with HIV/AIDS.
33. Australia's Development Assistance Program recognises the importance of gender equality in achieving sustainable development.

Conclusion

34. In concluding, I would like to recall the work of an extraordinary Australian woman – Jessie Street.
35. Jessie Street campaigned for the inclusion of women's rights in the Covenant of the League of Nations and later in the Charter of the United Nations.
36. The work of Jessie Street so many years ago serves as a reminder of what we can achieve by working together, both within our countries and through international cooperation, and the importance of the inheritance we leave for our daughters and granddaughters.
37. Thank you.



Apology to
Australia's Indigenous Peoples
House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra

I move:
That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.
We reflect on their past mistreatment.
We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history.
The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.
We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.
We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.
For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.
To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.
And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.
We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.
For the future we take heart, resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.
We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.
A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.
A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.
A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.
A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.
A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

J. Howard
The Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Prime Minister
February 13th, 2008