



# AUSTRALIA



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## Economic and Social Council High-Level Segment 1 July 2010

### General Debate

### Statement by the Hon Bob McMullan MP Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance

(Check against delivery)

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One of the founding foreign ministers of the United Nations in 1945, Australian Foreign Minister Doc Evatt, a vocal advocate of the interests of small and medium-sized nations, recognised the importance of economic and social issues. His efforts to ensure these issues were reflected in the UN Charter became known at the time as the 'Australia pledge'. He was at the forefront of efforts to create the Economic and Social Council. Against that legacy, it is my pleasure to address the Council today with Australia serving as a current Council member. We continue to value the Council's work, including its recognition of the importance of economic, social and human rights.

Mr President,

Australia has a strong commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, and we recognise that collective efforts through the United Nations are critical. Robust institutional mechanisms are essential to support these efforts.

We welcome the historic decision this week to establish a new United Nations gender entity. This new entity will provide a strengthened and integrated platform for advancing work on gender issues at the international level and also, through its increased focus on country programming, at the national level. We look forward to the appointment of a highly effective Under-Secretary-General to lead the work of the new entity.

National human rights institutions also play an important role. Where they exist, they hold government to account as well as collaborating with government to achieve gender targets. For this reason, Australia supports greater participation and the independent status of these institutions in the Commission on the Status of Women, a subsidiary body of this Council. This would improve prospects of securing gender equality, advancement of women and the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr President,

Australia is proud of its achievements in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women. We will present a National Voluntary Presentation at the Council this afternoon and we look forward to exchanging views with others in a spirit of openness and transparency.

Mr President,

There are a number of thematic issues that warrant the Council's special attention today.

Education is a key component of gender equality and empowerment of women. The MDG recognises the importance of universal primary education to development. Australia believes that all children worldwide should have a chance to go to school. Education can create opportunities for children to escape the cycle of poverty. It can have positive effects on many areas of life, including employability, wage earnings, reproductive health and involvement in decision-making. Education allows women and girls to reach their full potential.

Australia has substantially increased its funding of education through our overseas development assistance program to \$744 million this year. In Indonesia, our support has helped girls go to school through the construction and rehabilitation of schools and sanitation facilities. Girls account for more than 50 per cent of the 70,000 new students in the more than 2,000 schools built with Australia's support. In the Philippines we are supporting UNICEF to assist girls and boys affected by armed conflict.

Achieving better health outcomes for women and girls is also essential, particularly in the fight against maternal, infant and child mortality. Maternal and child mortality rates in the Asia Pacific are among the highest in the world. Australia has supported the development of an investment case for maternal, newborn and child health in the Asia Pacific, which has identified the gaps and highlighted the value of investing in women's and children's health. Australia is promoting access to reproductive health services and working with partner countries to improve the performance, affordability and accessibility of health systems for women and girls.

Women living with disabilities can also face multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Australia's five year strategy "Development for all – Towards a Disability Inclusive Aid Program" sets out our approach to assisting women and men, girls and boys, tackling the challenges of disability as well as poverty.

The elimination of violence against women is a critical cross-cutting gender issue and producing better development outcomes. Australia does not tolerate violence against women and children and we are developing our national plan to reduce such violence. But because violence against women and girls affects all countries, Australia is also contributing to international efforts to end this violence.

Today I can announce a further contribution of \$1.25 million to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, to add to our previous support to the Fund and UNIFEM's Pacific Fund to End Violence Against Women.

We recognise there is a gap in international knowledge in tackling the complex problem of violence against women, we do not fully understand "what works".

What particularly pleased me is that a priority identified in the JIN Trust Fund strategy is to build and disseminate knowledge in the field of ending violence against women, generating solid evidence of effective initiatives that will help to accelerate local, national and global learning.

Mr President,

More remains to be done to achieve all the MDGs by 2015, including those specifically addressing the needs of women and girls. Leaders of all nations must take up the challenge to prioritise and resource the MDGs. Australia stands ready to work in partnership with others, toward our shared goal of achieving tangible results for women and girls.