



AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Commission on the Status of Women

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Australian National Statement

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Australia

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chair,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on your appointment as Chair of this unique

Women's experience of inequality, violence, discrimination, harassment, 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 policy-making.

We will not address inequality unless we do so in an integrated and comprehensive way. That is why frameworks 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 so important because they make connections between these frameworks to address human

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. It is why the composite UN Women is a major driver for the empowerment of women globally.

I wish 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. All States must do sufficient 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 should hold governments to account and collaborate with governments to achieve progress and gender equality. The independent status of these institutions in the deliberations of the CSW, commensurate with their independent status at the national level, should improve prospects globally of securing gender equality and empowerment of women.

Robust institutional 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 within 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 action for our most vulnerable women 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 our women's movement, the women, but we still face some key challenges to achieve equality between men and women.

We recognize that there is much more work to do 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 invested in closing 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 leading a global campaign to end violence against women and their children, and has strengthened Australia's response to people suffering.

At the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012, Australia's 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 Pacific region. It requires a multi-faceted approach. We urge all states to strengthen their comprehensive reproductive health and family planning services in developing countries.

Improving governance and accountability is crucial to ensure that development

The Australian Government is introducing a Paid Annual Leave system. This is a crucial step towards ensuring that women are not disadvantaged in workplace relations systems, providing 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 counterpart. Based on her 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 men more 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 joys of caring for children and their families.

The importance of measuring the changing gaps in gender equality cannot be underestimated. By measuring women's unpaid work, women's full contribution to society. We need the evidence and benchmarks to identify the gaps and challenges remaining and to measure progress towards gender equality. Australia urges member states to invest in the collection of relevant, high quality sex disaggregated data including time use surveys and Statistics 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 all children in Australia have access to quality education.

Australia also recognises the need to strengthen women's leadership in Asia 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. 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 climate change and disaster risk reduction is the vulnerability of women, who are at the least capacity to adapt. Women have leadership roles 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 interconnections between these inequalities and we understand that a whole-of-government response is needed to address them. We are building capacity across government to consider gender analysis and climate action in government action plans. Equally important, the members 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, all-women's leadership that will see real progress toward 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 made an agreement for a new gender entity. And we have here at CSW, renewed our commitment to equality. We are 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 issue. 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.