



# AUSTRALIA



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## **Fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**5 March 2013**

# **The Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls**

**Statement by**

**The Hon Julie Collins MP, Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Status of Women**

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It is an honour to address the Commission on the Status of Women, as we gather to discuss the critical issue of the elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls.

Australia has no tolerance for violence against women and girls. Violence, in all its forms – physical, sexual or psychological – is unacceptable. It is a universal issue that affects women of all backgrounds, races, cultures and economic circumstances. Living safe and free from violence is everyone's right, and reducing violence is everyone's responsibility. Domestically and internationally – including through our aid program and advocacy – Australia is actively contributing towards a world where women and girls can thrive and where their safety is guaranteed.

### **Violence against women and girls – national programs**

To address the devastating personal, social and economic costs of violence against women, the Australian Government is working across governments, and with civil society, to implement our *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. At the heart of the 12-year strategy is the recognition that only sustained, united action across generations, and jurisdictions, will achieve enduring change. Central to the Plan is a strong emphasis on primary prevention and community engagement. In particular, the Plan recognises the critical role of men and boys in eliminating violence against women and girls. Under the National Plan, Australia's federal, state and territory Governments have all committed to establishing a National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women. This Centre will promote national research into

violence against women, to better inform policy and practice. We are also undertaking a legislative review, research, education and awareness programs as part of our commitment to ending Female Genital Mutilation.

### **Eliminating violence through aid**

Australia's work to eradicate violence against women and girls, and to achieve gender equality more broadly, does not stop at our own borders. Internationally, a key pillar of Australia's development program is the empowerment of women, expanding women's opportunities and reducing violence. In 2012, Australia provided new funding targeting violence against women and girls in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. We were also pleased to announce a new ten-year, \$320 million program to promote gender equality in the Pacific region, in support of the milestone declaration by Pacific leaders on gender equality, at the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum. In partnership with Pacific States, the *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* initiative will increase the number of Pacific women in leadership and decision-making roles at national and local levels, expand economic opportunities for women and improve safety for women through better services, violence prevention and access to justice.

### **Women, peace and security**

Australia is deeply committed to promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda across the breadth of our work on the United Nations Security Council. We are working actively to support efforts to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence; to put an end to impunity for perpetrators of such crimes; and to promote the early involvement of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building. As we all know, the effective participation of women in post-conflict peace-building processes is critical to achieving lasting peace.

Consistent with Australia's commitment to the prevention of violence against women and girls in conflict situations, and the promotion of women's participation in conflict prevention and peace-building, in 2012, I was proud to launch our *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*. Women's civil society organisations played a critical part in shaping Australia's National Action Plan, and their ongoing role in monitoring compliance is central to the Plan's success.

### **Trafficking of women and girls**

In recognition of the disproportionate impact of trafficking and related exploitative practices on women and girls, such as slavery, servitude, forced labour and forced marriage, Australia has implemented strong anti-trafficking measures. Domestically, we are committed to prosecuting offenders, and we are expanding the range of exploitative behaviour that is criminalised, including through the recent introduction of a new offence for forced marriage. Regionally and internationally, Australia contributes actively to efforts to combat trafficking, including through the *Australia-Asia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons*, announced at the East Asia Summit on 20 November 2012.

## **Work and education**

Women's equal opportunity to participate in the economy and in leadership positions is an important component of preventing violence against women. Reflecting Australia's commitment to increasing equality in the workplace, we are currently undertaking legislative reform to promote women's workforce participation, remove discrimination and address the gender pay-gap. We are rolling out a suite of innovative policies and programs in support of this framework, including a Government-funded paid parental leave scheme, and programs to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions. Our significant investments in skills, education and training, as well as reforms to our superannuation, pension and disability insurance schemes, are directly aimed at strengthening gender equality in Australian workplaces and communities.

Australia is providing additional support to women with multiple disadvantage or discrimination due to race, ethnicity, disability, age or geographic location, in recognition of the specific challenges they face. Our Indigenous communities are a particular focus and we are working rigorously to improve their access to education and employment.

## **Conclusion**

Sustained, collective efforts are needed to achieve gender equality and bring lasting change to the lives of women and girls. Civil society and National Human Rights Institutions make a vital contribution to this work. Australia supports the independent participation of National Human Rights Institutions, compliant with the Paris Principles, at the Commission on the Status of Women. This will serve to improve the prospects for the empowerment of women and girls around the world.

Australia is committed to the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Cairo Programme of Action. We strongly support the work of the Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences; and Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. As a new member of the UN Women Executive Board, we also look forward to strengthening our partnership with UN Women.

The possibility of a world that is safe for all women and girls, a place where each can achieve her full potential, beckons us forward. But this requires us all to work together in a spirit of cooperation, with purpose and resolve. Achieving a strong, progressive outcome that provides UN Women with a clear mandate for its work is critical. Australia is deeply committed to realising this aim and looks forward to working with all delegations, UN entities, civil society organisations and National Human Rights Institutions to eliminate the scourge of violence against women and girls.

