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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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COUNTRY STATEMENT – AUSTRALIA

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TO THE COMMISSION

Madam chair

Australia is honoured to be here to join with other member states to progress the commitments to women we all reaffirmed at Beijing Plus Five and to contribute to CSW's work priorities for the next five years.

My delegation looks forward to opportunities over the next two weeks, to help build even stronger links among member states – so that together to we can help deliver real improvements in the lives of women and girls around the world.

Australia hopes that we will be able to achieve significant outcomes for women from the panel discussions on HIV/AIDS and racism. These are critical issues that deserve our urgent attention and action.

Today I would like to share with you some innovative measures Australia has taken to progress gender equality in Australia.

Australia's Beijing Plus Five Action Plan

Since June last year, the Government has taken a number of significant steps to take forward the Beijing Plus Five *Outcomes Document*.

The Government consulted and worked closely with key actors in the community to develop an implementation strategy – called Australia's *Beijing Plus Five Action Plan*.

Building on the many effective strategies to promote gender equality that are already in place in Australia, the *Action Plan* sets priorities to:

- tackle the most pressing problems including remaining areas of discrimination against women in Australia; and
- take forward the most innovative strategies in the *Outcomes Document*.

Some key priorities include:

- eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault;
- promoting women's economic self-sufficiency; and
- addressing negative stereotypical attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.

The *Action Plan* aims to ensure that all strategies are appropriate to the diverse needs of different groups of women, including [by] working in partnership with Indigenous women.

Australia's *Action Plan* acknowledges that all actors in society share responsibility for the achievement of gender equality [including] government, the media, academia, non-government organisations, the private sector and individual men and women.

Partnerships between government and civil society are a key strategy [of the Plan] for implementing Beijing Plus Five in Australia.

The Australian Office of the Status of Women will work with key stakeholders – government departments, businesses, women’s and men’s groups and community groups – to take forward the Action Plan’s strategies.

The Australian delegation will be delighted to share our experiences in developing and taking forward this *Action Plan*.

Recent advances for Australian women

The Australian Government’s strong commitment to the pursuit of gender equality can be measured by some of the recent important advances for Australian women.

- More women in Australia are in the paid work force than ever before [65.7% of working age women were in the labour force in December 2000].
- There has been a steady increase in women’s entry into non-traditional areas of work and study, including computer science and information technology.
- Women make up 58% of new undergraduate university students and almost 53% of postgraduate students.
- There are now more women studying medicine than men.
- A quarter of Federal parliamentarians are women, almost double the international average.

Making use of best practice models

The Australian Government believes that we must all work together in striving to achieve gender equality and that sharing of innovative best practices is vital.

Innovative best practices are an essential ingredient for advancing gender equality. As part of our commitment to sharing best practices I am very pleased to be able to share the following examples of recent innovative strategies to improve the lives of women.

The elimination of violence against women and girls remains a top priority of the Australian Government, supported by a major national domestic violence campaign (more than \$50 million over four years).

This campaign focuses on:

- building cooperative partnerships across all players, including the business sector
- early intervention;

- eliminating family violence in Indigenous communities; and
- identifying and expanding innovative approaches to encourage perpetrators to take responsibility to end their violence.

In 2000, the Australian Government officially launched *International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women* and supported a range of community projects – including a White Ribbon Campaign – to raise public awareness of the unacceptability of gender-based violence.

In addition, the Australian Government is funding innovative projects on sexual assault to increase awareness among university and school-age students and improve data collection and sharing of best practices.

The Government is helping to fund an all-time first documentary on the Rape of Women in War.

The Australian Government supports a range of ground-breaking initiatives to give greater official recognition to women's achievements.

In January this year, the Prime Minister of Australia launched the *Honouring Women's Network* to acknowledge the outstanding contributions that many women make to the economy and the community. More than 30 distinguished Ambassadors – high profile women from diverse backgrounds – will raise public awareness about the achievements of Australian women and encourage women's nomination for official honours and awards.

Later in the year, the Australian Government will host a major National Women's Conference. The Conference will focus on women's achievements over the last 100 years and share information on emerging issues that are important to women's lives.

In the area of women's health, Australia has a number of highly innovative measures to make the health system more responsive to the needs of women. A highlight of this is:

- the *National Cervical Cancer Programme* which focuses on the early detection of warning signs to prevent cervical cancer. This has played a major part in the massive 40% decline in the cervical cancer mortality rate in Australia between 1986 and 1998.

At the regional level, Australia is helping to take forward women's rights and economic equality in the Asia-Pacific region.

In January 2001, Australia took over as Chair of the APEC *Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Gender Integration* – a group established to increase women's involvement in the activities of APEC.

Australia is also working to:

- increase women's participation in leadership in APEC fora,

- strengthen women's participation in economic activities in the region, including enhancing women's involvement in trade ; and
- enhance women's financial well-being.

The Australian delegation to CSW will be looking for opportunities to share information and materials on these and other Australian best practices with delegates during the session.

CSW's role in achieving gender equality

Australia believes that sharing best practices is vitally important in helping to advance equality for women around the world. CSW can play a catalytic role here in helping to take this forward.

Australia believes that it is important that CSW builds strategies from the *Outcomes Document* into its priorities and working methods, including institutional mechanisms that could facilitate the sharing of best practices among member states and international organisations.

Australia believes that it is vital to focus on practical mechanisms and outcomes to achieve the goals of the *Platform for Action* and the *Outcomes Document*. For example, CSW could consider setting up a UN Gender Web Site of practical 'best practice' materials.

The Commission could also play a catalytic role in helping to take forward some of the key strategies designated for the international level in the *Outcomes Document* – such as:

- a global 'Zero Tolerance' Campaign Against Violence Against Women
- developing an international consensus on indicators and ways to measure violence;
- developing mechanisms to share information on good practices, lessons learned, training models and research; and
- gender mainstreaming in the UN system including improved coordination between UN Conferences/Summits and sharing information of the work of gender units and focal points.

Gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and of Racism

My delegation hopes that this Session's focus on the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and racial discrimination will lead to practical outcomes.

These are critical issues for many women around the world and the devastation that visits their lives and those of their families demands practical measures and actions.

While CSW has an important role to play here, it is vital that these issues are also substantively addressed in other key UN fora – including the Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the World Conference on Racism later this year.

CSW's role in gender mainstreaming

Australia places a high priority on CSW's role in actively supporting the UN's efforts to mainstream gender among member states and within the UN system.

Australia believes that it is vital for all UN bodies to integrate a gender perspective into their work. We are very pleased to be associated with a Canadian/Australian/New Zealand resolution on gender mainstreaming at this CSW. We hope that once adopted the resolution will lead to further practical measures to increase the gender focus of ECOSOC and other UN bodies.

Australia hopes that there will be opportunities at this Session to explore practical ways that CSW can help achieve greater integration with UN fora, and help demystify 'gender mainstreaming'.

A very impressive example of effective gender mainstreaming in action, was the UN Security Council's resolution last year on Women, Peace and Security. Australia commends the Security Council for this very important initiative.

Conclusion

Australia strongly supports international efforts to achieve practical, tangible outcomes for women.

Australia commends the valuable work by member states, CSW and the UN to take forward our agreed commitments to women from Beijing Plus Five.

Australia hopes that its experiences and approaches to continuing to improve outcomes for women prove valuable to fellow member states. My delegation looks forward to opportunities to share these further with delegates and to learn about other member's innovative strategies for women.

We look forward to working together with you to further advance women's human rights around the world, over the coming days and into the future.