

Commission on the Status of Women (50th Session)

February 2006, New York



Australia's Country Statement

Madam Chair

It is a pleasure to address the Commission today to outline Australia's progress in implementing our commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the areas of women's equal participation in decision-making and women in development.

Australia is performing well on international indicators of women's participation, development and empowerment. The 2005 United Nations Human Development Report ranked Australia second in the world in its *Gender Related Development Index* and seventh in the world in its *Gender Empowerment Measure*. Australia was also ranked tenth in the world in the World Economic Forum's 2005 study titled *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap*.

We take pride in the success of our society to advance the status of women and will continue to work to meet the challenges that remain.

Women's Equal Participation in Decision-Making

Australian governments at both the national and sub-national level are strongly committed to building women's leadership and participation in Australian life. Clear improvements are evident. Australia has a federal system of government consisting of a national government and sub-national state and territory governments. We are pleased to report that the number of women in Australia's national, state and territory parliaments is the highest it has ever been, ranging between 27 and 43 per cent, and including six Indigenous women. In recent years, four of our state and territory governments have been led by women and three have had women opposition leaders. Twenty-nine per cent of the appointments made to the Federal Judiciary since 1996 have been women.

We do not take our progress for granted in the area of women's participation and leadership in public life. The Australian Government does not operate a system of quotas to achieve equal participation of women in decision-making roles, rather it is committed to the merit principle and to providing targeted support to create and maintain an environment which enables women to compete equitably on merit.

- In September 2005 Ministers for Women at the national and sub-national level agreed to a National Strategy to Increase the Participation of Women on Boards. Women hold 32 per cent of government controlled positions on Australian Government Boards and around 30 per cent of senior executive service positions in the public service across Australian governments. It will also be important to continue working to increase the number of women on private sector boards, as currently women only hold eight per cent of Board Directorships in the top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange and around ten per cent of private sector executive management positions.

- In our last national Budget, the Australian Government allocated AU\$15 million over four years to a *Women's Leadership and Development Program*. This programme will build women's capacity to take on greater leadership responsibilities and fund communication and consultation activities with women's groups.
- In recognition of the particular disadvantage faced by Indigenous women in Australia, the government provided a further AU\$16.5 million over four years to fund the *Indigenous Women's Development Program*, which is developing the leadership capacity of Indigenous women.

Gender and Development

Australia's international aid programme places considerable emphasis on ensuring that women and men should have equal access to resources and decision making by mainstreaming gender into all aid related activities. In our last financial year, Australia spent well over AU\$52 million on activities where the principle objective was promoting gender equality.

Our current gender policy objectives include improving women's access to education, health and economic resources; promoting participation and leadership in decision making at local and national levels; and promoting human rights of women and working towards eliminating discrimination against women.

Australia is proud to be a part of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth and we support the important role these organisations play at the Commission.

CSW Forward Programme of Work

Finally, I would like to congratulate the CSW Bureau on its proposal for a forward programme of work from 2007 to 2009. We support the proposal for the following reasons:

- Selecting themes for 2007 to 2009 that reflect significant work being undertaken by the United Nations during that year will enhance the Commission's capacity to influence the United Nations' broader agenda.
- Identifying emerging global issues for consideration at each Commission will allow the Commission to highlight how these issues might affect women in particular.
- Taking time during the Commission to review the implementation of agreed conclusions from previous meetings will be a very practical way to measure our ongoing progress.

We look forward to consideration of the Commission's forward work programme and would like to work closely with the Commission and with the other nations represented here to ensure that our work in the coming years is relevant, practical and looks to the future.

Thank you