



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail [australia@un.int](mailto:australia@un.int)

150 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 [www.AustraliaUN.org](http://www.AustraliaUN.org)

## **Commission on the Status of Women**

24 February 2011

# **Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work**

## **Statement by The Hon Kate Ellis MP Minister for the Status of Women of Australia**

(Check against delivery)

---

Mr Chair, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on the Status of Women today on behalf of Australia.

I begin by expressing my country's support for the establishment of UN Women, which represents an exciting new era in the way that gender equality is progressed within the international community.

Australia is proud to have been one of the first countries to pledge multi-year core funding for UN Women and is committed to supporting international efforts to empower women and promote gender equality.

We wish Under-Secretary-General Bachelet all the best in her vital endeavours to improve the lives of women globally and assist them to advance and prosper.

### **Women in Science and Technology Leadership**

At the heart of this year's theme is the ability of science and technology to provide women with significant leadership opportunities, as well as improving our daily lives.

We know of the power of science and technology to transform the lives of women and assist them advance their aspirations. Both have the capacity to be key drivers in empowerment and equality for women – and are critical to the success of the Millennium Development Goals.



We are proud in Australia to currently have some remarkable women in prominent roles in our scientific community – although we recognise that this does not reflect our norm.

It is with pride that Australia celebrated the recognition of our first female Noble Laureate, Professor Elizabeth Blackburn, for her important work in molecular biology. Professor Blackburn, who graduated in 1971, chose her career at a time when women were just starting to become more involved in the sciences.

More broadly though, in Australia, women are significantly under-represented in all levels of science, engineering and technology employment – constituting 22.3% of full-time professionals in the field of design, engineering, science and transport. We must do better.

This year Australia will host a Summit brought together by UN Women Australia and UNESCO promoting the work of women's leadership in science and engineering.

We know that more must be done to ensure that women benefit from both employment in science and technology sectors, and can access the benefits that science and technology can provide.

### **Access to education**

Fundamental to achieving this, of course, is access to education.

We believe in the power of education to transform the lives of individuals and communities.

Australia is committed to supporting countries to achieve the education objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and our aid program will increase its investment in education to around \$5 billion over the next five years.

Australia continues to support improvements to girls' education in many developing countries, particularly in our Asia-Pacific region.

With this support:

- more than 60,000 girls in Indonesia have been able to access education close to their homes through new schools built under the Australia-Indonesia Basic Education Program;
- more than 46,000 girls have entered primary school in Pakistan; and
- in Vanuatu, Australia has helped the education sector address gender stereotypes by improving learning materials and teaching methods.

We recognise too that domestically we do have areas of disadvantage, especially in our Indigenous communities. Our Government is focused on Closing The Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and ensuring that every child in Australia has access to quality and affordable education. Women face multiple disadvantages related to their race, ethnicity, disability, age and geographic location that marginalise and isolate them and create barriers to their ability to access education and secure decent work.

Of course, it is vitally important that this transformative impact of education be translated into access to employment – to ensure life-long economic security for women and their families.

### **Access to full employment and decent work**

In many countries, women have restricted access to paid employment as well as land and property, and face difficulty accessing formal credit.

Our aid program is working to improve women's economic security and access to employment as a women's rights issue and also for its contribution to economic growth, poverty reduction and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Domestically, it is a priority for us to promote access to full employment and decent work, and work to address the gender pay gap.

We must also address the negative preconceptions about women in non-traditional roles and create more flexible workplace practices for both men and women with family responsibilities.

We have already made significant progress – on 1 January 2011 Australia introduced its first national paid parental leave scheme, creating more family friendly workplaces to complement and focus on providing high-quality, accessible and affordable child care.

And it is here in removing the barriers to women's further participation that our Government's focus remains.

### **Violence against women**

We note that women need freedom from the appalling levels of violence that remain in order to fully participate in education and employment.

In Australia, we are proud to have just announced a *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*. This 12-year *National Plan* recognises that only sustained, united action across generations, on multiple levels and across all jurisdictions will achieve long-term change.

While living free from violence is everyone's right, reducing violence is everyone's responsibility.

Australia accepts that responsibility and is committed to taking action to address the disturbing levels of violence against women both at home and across the globe.

### **Conclusion**

We have come a long way, but there remains a long road ahead.

Australia is pleased to participate in the Commission on the Status of Women as we work together to advance women's place globally and remove the barriers which continue to exist. We believe that the inclusion of National Human Rights Institutions in the Commission on the Status of Women with independent standing could further improve the prospects for securing gender equality and empowerment of women around the world.

Ultimately, Australia is incredibly proud of our efforts to improve the status of women locally and abroad, and we are determined to work together with you at the Commission on the Status of Women and through UN Women to continue to advance the position of women across the world.

Thank you.



