

Presentation

The Progress of Gender Mainstreaming and Problems to be Solved

Greeting

I would like to begin by conveying the disappointment of my minister, the Hon Julie Bishop, Minister for Education, Science and Training and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues, that she could not attend this meeting, as she is at the OECD meeting in Greece.

I would like to congratulate Minister Inoguchi for her initiative in bringing together ministers and representatives from 16 East Asian nations and international organisations to take forward regional cooperation on gender issues.

Australia's approach

- Let me talk first of all about how Australia works on achieving gender equity. While some other countries have moved to a Ministry of Gender Equality, Australia has decided to maintain a focus on women. It has a Minister for Women, and an Office for Women supporting her to work as central coordinating points within government.
- In any process to develop good outcomes for women, the Minister needs to start with developing some good ideas, that she can work with her colleagues on. This is a partnership model, where she can bring a unique perspective about women to other Ministries with particular responsibilities, such as transport, or families.
- Often this starts with commissioning research, or seeking the views of women in the community. The Office for Women has a research budget that it uses to make a solid case for change.
- An example would be recent research that was undertaken about older women and what factors cause them to retire. The research shows that many older women would like to stay working, but can face workplace discrimination. Poor health can also be a factor in early retirement. So, this can give a clear guide as to what responses government may need to make.
- As well as working up research and ideas, and liaising with other Ministers, the Minister is asked by the Prime Minister to monitor and report to him regularly on the impact of Government policy on women.
- The Minister is also expected to report publicly on what is being achieved. For example, information is made available every year when the Budget is announced on what the government is doing for women.

- The benefits of working across government on gender equity can be seen in our Government's achievements for women. There have been key advances in many areas, and I would just like to highlight a few today.

Women's education and training

- The Australian Government sees education and training as a key means of improving the economic status of women and helping women to achieve their goals. Australian women and girls continue their strong performance and participation in education and training. This mirrors many of the countries in the region.

Women's employment

- The Australian Government provides legislative protection to enable women's participation in the workforce and to assist employees in balancing work and family. It also supports a quality child care system to assist women to manage their work and care arrangements.
- More Australian women are participating in the labour force than ever before. In May 2006, 65.3 percent of women aged 16 to 64 years were in employment and 54.9 percent of these worked full-time.

Women and their families

- As well as child care assistance, a broad range of family assistance is provided to families in Australia, predominantly paid to mothers. Almost all Australian families with dependent children, about 2.1 million, receive family assistance to help with the costs of raising children.
- The Australian Government has also introduced a universal, flat rate Maternity Payment, currently \$AUS4,000 for each child born.
- Australia's fertility rate has been increasing recently and is now 1.8. Australia has been able to achieve both an increase in the fertility rate, and an increase in women's workforce participation recently, by creating the right enabling environment.

Women in Retirement

- Australia has a unique retirement income system that has two main parts. First of all, a minimum pension is available to everybody, whether they have worked or not. This provides an important safety net for women.
- Second, workplaces pay a guaranteed amount of 9 per cent of a worker's wage into an individual savings account. The government has encouraged further saving for retirement through generous tax breaks, and matching contributions. This has been of particular benefit to women and we expect to see a rise in their retirement incomes over coming years both as a result of their increased workforce participation and changes to retirement incomes policy parameters.

Women's Leadership

- Having more women in leadership positions means that a different perspective can be brought to issues. In April 2006, the number of women

in Australia's parliaments was the highest it has ever been, ranging between 28 and 40 per cent.

Women's Safety

- Australia has demonstrated a strong commitment to preventing, reducing and responding to domestic violence. It is currently running a very successful community awareness raising campaign – the national *Violence Against Women. Australia Says NO.* media campaign.

Lessons Learned

- While much has been achieved for women in Australia, we must continue to make advances on complex issues where there remains scope for improvement. My Minister is particularly focused on some key areas. We would like to have more women in key leadership positions, better economic security for women, particularly as they grow older, better financial skills, a focus on preventative health for women and a reduction in violence in the lives of women.
- We look forward to working with countries in the region on these issues. Again, I thank Minister Inoguchi for taking this important initiative to gather us here together to improve the lives of women in our region.