



**AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Remarks by Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Graeme Wilson for
International Women's Day Eve Reception**

7TH MARCH 2013

Thank you for your remarks, Sarah. The Australian High Commission is pleased to be co-hosting this reception to mark International Women's Day 2013.

As many of you would know, International Women's Day emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century. It has been recognised since 1911 and is increasingly commemorated globally to highlight the importance of women's economic, social, and political empowerment. It is a time to reflect on the progress and achievements of women globally, and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by women in shaping the history of their countries and communities. I agree wholeheartedly with Sarah's reminder that International Women's Day is also a moment to focus minds on change, particularly in light of this year's theme of *'Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls'*.

In my diplomatic career I've been privileged to talk with many extraordinary women around the world.

In all the places I've visited, while the languages may differ, the message is always unchanged: women rightly want the full realisation of their human rights. They don't want charity. Rather, they want equal access to education, employment, and opportunity. They don't want to be seen as victims; they want to participate and be treated with dignity, to live free of violence and coercion.

And there is no more important building block for the empowerment of women and girls than the elimination of violence.

So this International Women's Day, Australia adds its voice to the global call for an end to violence against women and girls - in all its forms and wherever it occurs: in the home, in the workplace, in schools and universities, in situations of conflict.

We are speaking out with particular resolve on this issue as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

We are working with our Council partners, and with the UN system more broadly, to ensure that the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls is recognised and that women are active players in peacekeeping and peace-building. In addition, we are partnering with UN Women to end impunity for those who employ sexual violence as a weapon.

In 2011, Australia appointed Australia's first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls. The Ambassador's priorities include co-ordinating Australia's work to eradicate violence against women, improving access to services for women, protecting women and girls in conflict zones and increasing the representation of women in leadership roles.

In Africa, Australia has committed itself to supporting the professional development of women since the 1960's, through our *Australia Awards* scholarships program. In 2013, female scholars from Africa have been awarded a record number of scholarships:

- of a total of 394 long-term scholarships (including Masters and PhD), 194 (49%) were awarded to women
- of a total of 452 short term scholarships, 199 scholarships (44%) have been awarded to women.
- 29 outstanding African scholars were selected for Australian Leadership Award Scholarships last year and 14 (48%) of them were women.

Last October, the South African Minister of Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, and my predecessor, Ann Harrap, jointly hosted a Women in Mining Leadership Forum. The Australian government acknowledges the important role played by women in mining, but also the opportunity that exists for women to work together to leverage the benefits of mining toward a more sustainable future for Africa.

That's why we also organised a Women in Mining Study Tour to Australia last November, and have subsequently established a virtual "Women in Mining network", to help women working in the African mining sector share experiences, and further develop their networks. The Australian Government will also shortly launch a more general support group, the "African Women in Leadership Special Interest Group" to support and encourage female candidates to take up scholarships for post-graduate study in Australia.

Finally, the Australian High Commission in South Africa also coordinates several small grants schemes to support NGOs working to promote the economic and social empowerment of women in southern Africa. A number of our current projects focus on the prevention of domestic violence and abuse.

We look forward to continued positive collaboration with our partners in southern Africa to ensure that every woman and girl can reach her full potential with dignity, without constraint and in complete safety.

Thank you.