



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

International Women's Day

SPEECH

Monday, 2 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Hawke, Alex, MP

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Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11:15): I want to commend the member for Newcastle and the member for Dobell for bringing forward this motion to celebrate International Women's Day and add my voice as a man in support of these worthy objectives that are in the International Women's Day platform, the Beijing Platform for Action. Men have a critical role to play in so many of these areas and so many of these facets, including combatting violence against women, ending stereotypes and ensuring that women have a role to play in the economy. It is very important men speak up as well.

As a young person in the parliament, growing up in Australia today, I still find it completely unbelievable that we have pay that is unequal for women, that we do not have the same pay for the same work, based on gender. It is a violation of individual rights, it is a violation of human rights and it is certainly something that we need to see action on within our society—that there is no discrimination based on gender at any level.

I also want to say that mainly the government is focused on domestic violence at the moment, and I think this is perhaps where men have the most critical role to play. We know for a fact in international circles that in conflict, or where there is violence in countries around the world, it is often women or girls who bear the brunt of this awful tragedy and awful violence and it is completely unacceptable. But also within our own country, and within Western democracies, there is a hidden scourge of domestic violence. That is why it is so important that Australia recently launched its Second Action Plan, moving ahead with the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. This will unite the Australian community to make a significant and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women and their children. Nothing can be so important, especially when we are celebrating this important achievement in international women's affairs.

In my own electorate, we have the start of a new foundation to end domestic violence, a very important foundation, the Lisa Harnum Foundation. People in Sydney were gripped by the shocking and awful incident involving Lisa Harnum, who was murdered and died tragically when her then fiancé, Simon Gittany, threw her from the 15th floor balcony. This really galvanised attitudes in Sydney against domestic violence and hardened people's approach, encouraging men everywhere to stand up against violence against women and other men. Lisa's mother has given permission for this foundation to be established.

Aileen Mountfield, who is setting up this foundation, is looking at new technologies and ways of dealing with domestic violence, allowing women who are in difficult situations to reach for help when they are usually unable to reach for help. As we know from police and other services, women in these very difficult environments with abusive partners, or men who have them under their thumb, are unable to reach out for help or access that help. So the Lisa Harnum Foundation is looking at very advanced ways—ways that we do not discuss in public because they are hidden—of allowing women to access those services. This is really a step forward and I think that is a great tribute to Lisa Harnum and her life and her story.

The Commonwealth has a zero-tolerance approach not just to domestic violence but to issues such as female genital mutilation. We also have a zero-tolerance approach to the marrying of young girls within our own society. This is something we have unfortunately seen, even in Sydney in recent times. Some cultures think it is still acceptable today for an older male to, by force, marry an under-age girl against her will—within our own society. It occurs even to the extent where girls have been forcibly taken from Australia and sent to other countries. This is completely unacceptable as well and something that I think all of us as Australians need to take a stand on.

In 2014 Australia released its first progress report on the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-18. The national action plan is part of Australia's commitment to integrate a gender perspective into peace and security efforts, protect the human rights of women and girls and promote women's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. The first progress report shows that we are tracking well. But there is a lot to do.

We hear every day from women in difficult situations in all of our electorates all around the country that violence against women continues at unacceptable levels and in unacceptable ways. Australia is absolutely committed and focused on partnering and supporting all of these efforts, including motions like this in the parliament today, and doing whatever we can to recognise that we face serious challenges, recognising that men have an equal and important role in delivering better outcomes for women and ensuring their individual and human rights are respected. I absolutely endorse and commend this motion to the House.