Country Statement by Australia’s Head of Delegation, Catherine Hawkins

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review

(to be delivered on 27 November 2019)

4-minutes (maximum)

Madam Chair, Distinguished colleagues

It is my privilege to address you today, and to represent the Australian Government and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, on this important occasion.

The empowerment of women and girls is critical to economic prosperity, sustainable development, and to more peaceful and stable societies. While significant progress has been made in our Indo-Pacific region there is more to be done.

We must redouble our efforts to break down the barriers to women’s full and meaningful participation in all areas of life.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring women are safe, economically empowered, and supported in their leadership aspirations.

Key Achievements

We are taking vital steps to end violence against women and their children.

This year, the Australian Government made the largest ever investment in prevention and frontline services, to support the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022.
The Fourth Action Plan places an emphasis on primary prevention, to stop violence before it starts. It also elevates the importance of addressing the diverse and lived experience of women who have experienced family and domestic violence, and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

To protect the safety of women in our workplaces, the Australian Human Rights Commission has launched a world first national inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace.

We know there’s a discrepancy between men and women in doing unpaid work, and that it is a driver of the gender pay gap. Women who forgo paid work are likely to experience lower long-term economic security than their working peers. So Australia is restoring a national Time Use Survey to help us better understand the distribution of unpaid work between men and women.

In 2018, Australia introduced its inaugural Women’s Economic Security Statement. This package of initiatives aims to promote greater choice for Australian women, including by improving women’s skills and employability, encouraging their return to paid work, and assisting them to establish their own businesses. The Government has committed to deliver a second Women’s Economic Security Statement.

A healthy community draws on the strengths of women leaders. Australia’s Minister for Women has initiated a national series of roundtable meetings with grassroots organisations and community leaders to hear their voices on gender equality, women’s economic security, safety and leadership.

The Australian Government also works closely with six National Women’s Alliances to ensure that policy-makers can hear the voices of Australian women, in particular those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
We must understand and respond to the needs of women and girls in all their diversity. Indigenous women, women with disability, LGBTQI peoples, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; all bring different perspectives and experiences.

Strong government links with civil society are vital. I’m proud that our delegation to this conference includes three civil society colleagues, and that many others from our civil society community are with us here.

Through the Australian Government’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy (2016) and the Foreign Policy White Paper, we also pursue gender equality as a core Australian value and a top priority across Australia’s foreign policy, economic diplomacy and development initiatives, including in the Indo-Pacific region.

Madam Chair

Gender equality is a fundamental human right, and respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms makes Australia and the world safer, secure and more prosperous. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains a touchstone for the global community in advancing the rights of women and girls and realising gender equality. It’s right that we take the time to celebrate our achievements, acknowledge the challenges we still face, and renew our commitments.

While no country has yet achieved gender equality, there is much we can learn from each other.

When we work together, our efforts are amplified and women’s voices throughout our Indo-Pacific region grow stronger. Thank you.