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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN, SENATOR MARGARET REYNOLDS.

The Federal Government today released its National Agenda for Women which sets out steps to advance the status of Australian women to the year 2000.

For the first time in Australian history, a Government has made a long term commitment to ensure that women can exercise a real choice about how they spend their lives and how they can participate fully in Australian society.

This National Agenda for Women is one of the Government's most significant and important achievements. Australia cannot meet the challenges of the future if it does not allow the full and equal participation of women in society. The Government is committed to act where it can to remove barriers to that participation.

The National Agenda for Women is the Government's response to the views expressed by the women of Australia during the National Agenda consultations of 1986. Over 25,000 women from all walks of life participated in the consultations.

The Agenda sets out specific action plans for the next five years in those areas nominated by Australian women as important, and establishes general objectives to the year 2000.

Strategies to increase the capacity of women to participate in decision-making, to allow greater access to education, employment and training, which acknowledge the work done by women in the home, and which improve women's access to child care and other community services are included in the Agenda.

The Government is also looking to consolidate its substantial achievements in removing discrimination on the basis of sex, and continuing recent initiatives in the areas of domestic violence prevention, the portrayal of women in the media, housing and health.

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The Government will remove the overall exemption for sex and marital status discrimination in superannuation funds and schemes from the Sex Discrimination Act.

The major group of women who will benefit by an increase in the availability of superannuation will be women in full-time permanent employment who change jobs frequently or who take time out from the paid workforce.

Financial security, particularly in retirement, is a serious concern for women. Few women are covered by, or have access to, adequate superannuation compared to men. Yet, women retire earlier than men, are more likely to live longer, and to spend part of their retirement single.

The Government is committed to providing women with a greater access to superannuation.

The proposed legislation will be developed in consultation with the superannuation industry and, once passed, will provide a two-year transition period to enable necessary changes to be made.

It follows consideration of the report of the former Human Rights Commission inquiry into discrimination in superannuation.

The Agenda is yet another step in the real advancement of the status of women. The Government regards the National Agenda for Women as a dynamic strategy which would need to be modified as time passes, as achievements are realised and as new issues arise.