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# PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL AGENDA FOR WOMEN  
BONDI JUNCTION - 29 FEBRUARY 1988**

Premier Barrie Unsworth,  
Ministerial colleague Margaret Reynolds,  
Parliamentary colleagues Jeanette McHugh and Pat Giles,  
Edith Hall, Convenor of the National Women's  
Consultative Council  
Ladies and gentlemen.

Three years ago, an extraordinary gathering took place in Nairobi, in Kenya, which brought to a climax an extraordinary decade in the development of new policies and new hopes for the women of the world.

The conference in Nairobi was convened to review the many achievements of the United Nations' Decade for Women, and to work out how to keep the momentum going.

Australia was represented at Nairobi and our delegation endorsed the conference's conclusions. Those conclusions in effect threw down the challenge to the governments of the world to abolish, by the year 2000, all obstacles to the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society.

Today, three years later, we are gathered to show that, in Australia, that challenge is being met.

Those obstacles are falling.

Full and equal participation by women is certainly not yet attained.

But it is on the way.

And this document that I have the honour to launch today - the National Agenda for Women - is

- a demonstration of what we have achieved;
- a proof that we are on the right track; and
- a guarantee that we will achieve our goal.

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In 1985, in a statement to Parliament, I announced the way in which the Government, in attempting to meet the challenge of Nairobi, would continue to raise the status of Australian women.

The best resource at hand for advice on this matter - the most accurate source of information about the needs and priorities of women - is of course the women of Australia themselves.

So in our search to create a National Agenda for Women we embarked in 1986 on a massive process of consultation with some 25,000 women throughout the nation.

This led in 1987 to the report Setting the Agenda, and in turn that has led to this report on the National Agenda.

This National Agenda goes further than any previous statement by any Australian community group, political party, or Government.

It is the most comprehensive series of commitments to women and of strategies on women's issues ever produced by an Australian Government.

It sets a new high water mark for our thinking, and our planning, as a nation, about how we can realistically advance the interests of women.

The catch-cry of the National Agenda is "A Say, A Choice and A Fair Go"

A Say - which is about involving women in the planning and implementation of policies which will affect them;

A Choice - which is about ensuring women in fact have real options to enlarge their lives through full and equal access to education, employment, training;

and A Fair Go - which underlines the need for full and equal access to all the opportunities which our society offers.

This formulation provides the structure of the Report - supplemented, as it should be, by sections on Australia's international links on the advancement of the status of women - links which hark back to the initial impetus given this process by the Nairobi conference.

The Report spells out in detail the initiatives my Government has already taken to advance these goals of A Say, A Choice, and A Fair Go.

It sets out the way in which we will make further progress on these goals as we approach the year 2000.

And it has an action plan for more immediate work over the next five years, which will be monitored and modified as we move towards the long-term objectives for the twenty-first century.

We recognise of course that many women choose to seek fulfillment within the home. That is their right and it is to be respected

Our achievements already on behalf of all women - those within the home and those in the paid workforce - are not insignificant. Indeed in five years we make the proud and the entirely accurate claim that we have done more than any preceding Government to advance the interests of Australian women.

We have passed the Sex Discrimination Act in fulfilment of our commitments following ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy in employment, education and other areas.

We have passed the Affirmative Action Act which requires companies and higher education institutions to develop strategies to give women equal employment and promotion opportunities.

These are landmark legislative acts and I want to pay tribute in passing to the work of the former Minister for the Status of Women, Senator Susan Ryan, for the diligence and vision she displayed in creating them.

We have elevated the Office of the Status of Women in my Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, so it can provide input at the highest level of government.

We have established the National Women's Consultative Council to make sure Australian women do indeed have A Say. I pay tribute to Edith Hall, the Convenor of the Council for her consistent and effective hard work over the last four years.

We have created more childcare places than any previous Commonwealth government, allowing thousands of women to enter or re-enter the workforce with the knowledge that their children are being adequately cared for.

We are funding women's refuges, we are undertaking a campaign to eliminate domestic violence, we have established a Child Support Agency to help ensure single parents - usually single mothers - receive the help they deserve from the non-custodial parent.

We have taken a number of other initiatives in the areas of education, training, health, and others which are itemised in the report.

And let's not lose sight of the fact that in addition to all these programs specifically directed at women, my Government has ensured through its overall policies, that Australian women are not left out in the cold.

For instance, we have created, in our nearly five years in office, one million new jobs in the Australian economy - and women have taken their fair share of them.

We have lifted the number of school children staying on to complete their secondary schooling from about one-third in 1983 to over one-half - and many of these students are girls.

We have revolutionised assistance to less-well-off families by introducing the Family Assistance Package late last year which is to direct new, tax-free, cash assistance to those families - typically to mothers. May I take this opportunity to seek your assistance in ensuring that this payment indeed reaches those for whom it is intended.

Not as many people as we know are eligible for this payment have applied for it and I trust you will pass the word on to friends or work colleagues who you think may be eligible.

So reviewing our progress, we can take satisfaction with what we have done. But on the other hand we cannot promise that remaining discrimination against women will vanish overnight.

What we can offer is our commitment to work over the long haul for economic security and independence and equality of opportunity in all spheres of activity.

Today I am pleased to announce another step forward, of special importance to the many women who, during the consultations leading up to the National Agenda, told us of their concerns about income security.

In the past, very few women have had access to superannuation schemes. Yet women retire earlier than men, are more likely to live longer, and often spend part of their retirement years living alone.

As part of a five year plan under the National Agenda, we intend to ensure that women in the fulltime permanent workforce have equal access to superannuation schemes.

Up till now super schemes have been totally exempted from the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act.

Cabinet has decided to eliminate the general exemption which will have the effect of removing many of the discriminatory aspects of these schemes.

The removal of this general exemption will pave the way for the overall elimination of discrimination against women in superannuation.

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Ladies and gentlemen

Awareness of the legitimate needs of women is well established in the Australian community - an achievement due in no small part to the growing numbers of women's groups working across a range of issues.

It is due also to the steadily growing number of women who have won election to office at the local, State and Federal level - including, as this gathering makes very clear, in this part of Sydney.

The growing awareness of the needs of women has also been due to the steady progress made at the State level.

I want today to make special mention of the important and innovative policies in this regard of the New South Wales government.

Barrie Unsworth recently announced the establishment of the NSW Women's Employment Company to boost business opportunities for women.

The NSW Government has enacted significant legislation to improve protection for the victims of domestic violence - a complementary measure to the Commonwealth's recently announced research and education program to combat domestic violence.

And just one year ago, to mark International Women's Day, Barrie Unsworth launched a policy statement which covered 100 specific women's policy issues including housing, health, employment and education.

Problems that remain - at the State and the Federal levels - cannot be solved overnight. Progress will require of all of us patience, hard work and commitment.

But the National Agenda shows us the way forward and gives us confidence that solutions will be found.

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