



## PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN (UNIFEM) BREAKFAST  
HILTON HOTEL, BRISBANE - 8.00 AM, MONDAY 9 MARCH 1992**

Premier and Mrs Goss, Lord Mayor Soorley, my Minister Assisting, Wendy Fatin, the President of UNIFEM Australia, Beverley Perel and our esteemed guest, Ms Teresita Deles, and friends.

It is a great pleasure to be here this morning to join in your International Women's Day celebrations.

Sometimes the denomination "women" obscures the reality of women in society.

Because of the special needs of women - many of them caused or compounded by generations of prejudice and neglect - it is easy to get into the habit of thinking about women as a minority group.

The truth is, of course, women are more than half of the population and all government policy has an effect on their lives, whether it is a specific measure or a broad one.

In Australia today it is not always easy to separate policies for women from policies for society at large.

But you may be assured that this government is determined to ensure that all government policies are assessed in regard to their impact on women.

And we will go on making the specific changes necessary to improve the conditions under which Australian women live and to increase their opportunity and choice.

We will continue what has been a steady advance.

But before I talk about the government and Australian women, I would like to make a few remarks about UNIFEM.

In recent years UNIFEM Australia has done much to heighten public awareness of International Women's Day through hosting a number of successful breakfasts like this.

UNIFEM is one of the major international organisations devoted to improving the status of women. It plays a vital role in the developing world, giving assistance to women to exercise control over their lives and to participate more fully in making decisions.

These occasions provide the opportunity to highlight the critical role that women play in development.

It is also a chance to consider the changes that still have to be made if women are to find equal places, and equal access to them, in the world community.

The government takes an active interest in the improvement of women's status in the world.

At the current meeting of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Australia will be calling for gender equity issues to be incorporated into that body's work.

This meeting is a lead up to the major United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro later this year.

As I'm sure many people here are aware, this conference is of great importance in the world's quest for sustainable development.

Because women have a major part of the responsibility for growing the world's food and play a significant part in the management of the earth's resources, Australia's own aid program supports UNIFEM's efforts to highlight the role of women.

The integration of women into development programs is both more equitable and more effective.

It makes better use of the talent and energy residing in all those women at the heart of economy and society.

For the sake of equity we have to acknowledge the contribution of women - both paid and unpaid. For the sake of efficiency and commonsense, we must harness their skills, their ambitions, their energy and their genius.

What is true for the world is true also for Australia.

And I can say with confidence and pride that in the nine years so far of the Labor government, women have made great advances - and their contribution grows in proportion to their advance.

I have a feeling, an inkling, that I am not widely regarded as a feminist.

This may be because I am regarded - rightly - as that most conservative of creatures, a family man.

It may be because my ancestry is Irish.

It may be because ideological denominations have always worried me a great deal less than doing things.

My view has been that women will benefit most if the material circumstances of Australian life are progressively improved.

That I think is the starting point. As Treasurer I took the view that if I succeeded in expanding the economy, making it more robust and secure - then I was expanding opportunity, expanding the government's ability to undertake programs of reform and build essential services, increasing employment and making it possible for people to plan their lives with confidence.

In doing these things, I believe I was doing things of great benefit to Australian women.

As Prime Minister I continue to take that view, but with more windows on to it.

As Prime Minister I would like to see less of the nuts and bolts and more of the world outside.

I incline towards inclusion. I want to lower the drawbridge.

I think we should be looking for ways to increase the influence of women in national policy and social development - in the culture of Australia.

We will know we are making progress when on both sides we hear voices which are less adversarial and ideological and more authentically the voices of Australian women and men.

I think I will feel that we have succeeded when women are to a greater extent partners in the development of Australia, shaping much more of the policy for the country as a whole.

I have always thought that the crime in politics was not thinking the wrong thought, but not doing enough.

Not making the changes which your times demanded.

I have a building block model of reform. I think that if you put one block down you create the logic and the impetus for another.. and another.

In time the public sees the shape of your vision becoming concrete and they actually help you finish.

As I said, my big effort in politics has always been towards improving the material conditions under which Australians live.

At a time like this, in a recession, I know that might have a hollow ring to it.

I can only say that it distresses me that there is so much distress in Australia at present.

It distresses me all the more because in the 1980s we created jobs, we boosted business, we introduced many measures which have improved the conditions of life for Australians in substantial and enduring ways.

But bemoaning it won't solve it. Ideology won't solve it.

My big effort is still towards reform, improvement - and these days that means - recovery. I do not know of any other way.

Recovery means jobs for women and men.

Of the 1.5 million jobs we created since the early eighties, 60 per cent have gone to women.

Women's wages in the same period increased to 84.5% of the male average, which is very good by OECD standards.

We supported the women who went to work with the Women's Employment Strategy.

We trebled the number of child care places available, and 250,000 funded places will be created by 1995-96.

In the past two years the number of families receiving fee relief for long day care has increased by more than 200 per cent and average payments have increased by 60 per cent.

These initiatives which increased opportunities for women to work, were matched by measures which increased the equity for those who stayed at home to care for children.

Family Allowance was increased and indexed.

The Family Allowance Supplement was introduced for the low paid and their dependents.

Supplementary payments were introduced for low income workers - mostly women.

I could list a great many other measures which have made Australian policies in regard to women, in many cases, a model for other countries.

We established the Child Support Agency, addressed the poverty traps that sole parents face; introduced a retirement incomes strategy which improves women's access to superannuation while guaranteeing maintenance of the age pension; we've trebled rent assistance; introduced the National Women's Health Strategy; set up the Office of Indigenous Women to work towards the elimination of

discrimination and disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; established the National Committee on Violence Against Women; introduced a Sex Discrimination Act and an Affirmative Action Act.

These specific initiatives have been no more or less important than general measures we have taken to extend opportunity, strengthen the social net and modernise our economy and society.

When we doubled the school retention rate, women benefited - more than two out of every three girls now finish secondary education.

More than half of all higher education places are now taken by women.

Medicare benefited and continues to benefit women.

And of course it would be a travesty if Australian women felt excluded from our fundamental objective and the landmark reforms we have made to achieve it - the effort to build a strong, internationally competitive society - for on our success in this, our future and our children's future depend.

The jobs, the opportunities, the security, social justice, the quality of our society depend on this.

So then do women depend on it. And it depends on women.

The Economic Statement, One Nation, we released on February 26 builds on our reforms - more than that, it sets the scene for recovery.

One Nation is about strength through partnerships: partnerships between government and business, the Commonwealth and the States, employees and employers, communities.

It's a statement of inclusion - the idea is to include everyone in the productive processes, in education and training, in the social safety net, in the ability to make the most of and enjoy this country.

It is aimed at creating a greater sense of belonging, a greater spirit of cooperation, a much greater degree of social cohesion.

As it closes gaps between people it closes distances -

- with a national rail freight highway which makes the country economically much more efficient and the highways safer for cars
- city ring roads which have a similar effect:

- an electricity grid which, by combining our resources and building in an element of competition, will make electricity cheaper
- by deregulating the airline industry which will make travel cheaper.

The idea behind One Nation is to build Australia's strength - to build a recovery which will carry us well into the future.

The idea is to set common national goals and create a stronger sense of national purpose.

It is to pull this vast and sometimes divided country together.

I would like to think that everyone in this room will read the One Nation document.

In conjunction with the National Agenda for Women which lays out the government's objectives through the next decade I think it lays out real and achievable reforms, reforms which will be undertaken, which will benefit all Australians.

This year we will be reviewing our progress in the implementation of the action plans of the National Agenda and setting our goals for the rest of the decade.

One Nation will create 800,000 new jobs.

Areas of particular benefit to women include the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry which will receive \$51 million to help the industry adjust, become more efficient and so create secure jobs in manufacturing.

The tourism industry, which employs a high proportion of women, will benefit enormously from deregulation of the airlines, the improvement to our roads and new depreciation allowances on tourist related buildings.

One Nation also contains substantial new incentives to small and medium business, many of which, of course, are owned and run by women, and in which many women work.

Reforms to Australian workplaces which will make Australian business and industry much more efficient will have also have a profound effect on working women's lives.

Enterprise bargaining will make it possible to negotiate flexible working time arrangements and other improvements to make workplaces more compatible with family life and responsibilities.

We have also established a Work and Family Unit in the Department of Industrial Relations to explain to employers the advantages of having family friendly practices in the workplace.

Meanwhile the government will continue to guarantee that the wages system is equitable and protects those with little or no bargaining power.

The government emphatically does not believe in the "survival of the fittest" among Australian workers.

The \$720 million we have allocated to vocational training will be a great benefit to women, particularly as this massive funding increase goes hand in hand with the specific direction in the National Agenda to improve training and employment outcomes for women.

The One Nation statement increases assistance to families on low and medium incomes.

It makes rental assistance immediately available to people in need.

This is to name just a few of the measures One Nation contains.

The statement combines, I believe, a mix of the bold and enduring nation-building projects Australia needs, and measures which will help people through the hard times.

The point of One Nation is the point of my government - get the economy moving, get people back to work.

Do it the only way it can be done: do it by calling on all of our strength - our resources, our institutions, our people. Do it in partnership. Build the partnerships.

At the start I said that it is increasingly difficult to conceive of women as a distinct social or economic category.

There is a long way to go before we reach the point when discrimination has been eliminated, the extra difficulties for women in the community, in the workplace, the home and in business have vanished, and we don't so frequently include women among the disadvantaged.

But I think one can read in the signs evidence of social progress.

We're getting there, we've made more headway in the last nine years than we made in the previous hundred, and we're going to make a lot more in the next nine.

I am sufficiently proud of what has been achieved and confident enough of what can and will be, to say that I can help.

I think we can build a very good society in Australia and its key element will have to be the opportunities, the chance to participate and have a voice, the options of work

and home, the security, and the centrality of women in this one nation.

I must conclude by congratulating UNIFEM on the great work it is doing.

I trust that my comments today were not taken to mean a lack of interest in the condition of women in the developing world.

Far from it - the government will continue to support UNIFEM and remains committed to its objectives.

But today, I have taken the opportunity to tell Australian women that, of all the partnerships we seek in the One Nation Statement, none is more significant than that between the women and men of Australia. Here, no less than in the developing countries, Australia needs their skills and energy and we will only reach the goal of the good society we want by continuing to extend their influence.

Thank you for having me.