



# **PRIME MINISTER**

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. P.J. KEATING, MP**

**AUSTRALIA'S SECOND REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
WOMEN (CEDAW)**

This morning I had great pleasure in formally presenting Australia's second CEDAW Report to Her Excellency Mrs Mervat Tallaw, the chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Present at the ceremony in the Prime Minister's sitting room were the Hon. Wendy Fatin MP, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women; the Hon. Justice Elizabeth Evatt, President, the Law Reform Commission and former member and Chair of the CEDAW Committee; Quentin Bryce AO, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; Kaye Loder, chair, National Women's Consultative Council; and Helen L'Orange, First Assistant Secretary, Office of the Status of Women.

Australia is obliged to report every four years to the United Nations as part of our responsibilities as signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, a convention the government ratified within months of taking office in 1983. By ratifying CEDAW we committed ourselves to developing policies and programs to improve the status of women in Australia. The Government quickly responded to this responsibility by using CEDAW as one of the constitutional underpinnings for the Sex Discrimination Act which was passed by the Parliament in 1984. Ratification of CEDAW also obliges us to report periodically on our progress in improving the status of women, and the Report I presented this morning is Australia's second such report. The Report was prepared and coordinated by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) in my department, with input from all departments of the Federal Government, the State governments of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania, and the Governments of the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. Non-government organisations' views were also formally canvassed for

the first time. The National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC) held a consultation between key NGOs and members of the federal bureaucracy to explore views on Australia's progress in implementing the Convention.

Australia's achievements in the course of nearly a decade of implementing the CEDAW Convention have won us international acclaim. My government is very proud that Australia is now considered a major player in international forums concerned with status of women issues, and we are committed to continuing the process of implementing the Convention and other measures to improve the status of women.

Australia's First Report, considered by the CEDAW Committee in 1988, was commended for its scope and frankness. Our Second Report to CEDAW continues this tradition of openness about what remains to be done to fully implement the Convention. The period since our first Report has been one in which a number of important achievements have occurred.

Those achievements include the following:

- . Establishment of 30,000 new child care places under the 1988-92 Child Care Strategy
- . Child care fee relief increased and indexed
- . Fee relief for child care places extended to commercial centres
- . Child Support Agency established
- . National Agenda for Women launched
- . Sole parent rebate and dependent spouse rebate substantially boosted and indexed
- . All family payments for children (Family Allowance, Family Allowance Supplement, Child Disability Allowance, Mothers Guardian Allowance) indexed to maintain real value
- . National Committee on Violence Against Women established
- . National Program for Early Detection of Breast Cancer established
- . Early Detection of Cervical Cancer Program established
- . Ratification of ILO Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities

- . **Work and Family Unit established in Department of Industrial Relations**
- . **Equal Pay Unit established in the Department of Industrial Relations**
- . **Introduction of the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program for sole parents**

Our Government was the first in the world to issue a comprehensive policy document for raising the status of women when it released the National Agenda for Women in 1988. Each year the annual implementation reports on the National Agenda have provided a public measure of our progress, as have the annual reports under the Australian Women's Employment Strategy and the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools. The second phase of the National Agenda is presently being designed and a renewed document will be released later this year. Similarly, Australia was among the first countries in the world to set in place a mechanism to evaluate the impact of Federal Budget decisions on women. The Women's Budget Statement has been tabled in Federal Parliament as a Budget-related paper every year since 1984.

One of the most important elements of Australia's response to CEDAW has been the establishment of a specialised bureaucratic machinery in Federal, State, and Territory government departments to monitor, evaluate and advise on government policies and programs as they affect women. OSW in my department is part of this machinery.

Australia has also been in the forefront in the range of government-funded services for women. Many are run by women, for women. For instance, Women's Information and Referral Services operate in all metropolitan and some regional centres as an access point to government services for women. A national network of 313 services exists for women escaping domestic violence. Under our National Women's Health Policy, a wide range of special early detection and preventative health services are provided for women, including Alternative Birthing Services, the Program for Early Detection of Breast Cancer and the Cervical Cancer Screening Program.

Labour market reform and the processes of award restructuring have improved women's position in the paid workforce; the gender gap in wages has narrowed with the ratio of women's to men's earnings having reached 84 per cent. By international standards this figure is high, though the government remains committed to the goal of equal pay.

Women's participation in the workforce continues to grow, especially that of women with children. 61 per cent of Australian women with children aged 5-12 are in the workforce as are 45 per cent of all mothers of children aged 0-4, so the government is especially proud of its achievement in ensuring the continued growth in child-care places. When Labor came to office in 1983 there were 46,000

community-based child-care places; there are now more than 134,600 and I have committed the government to providing 250,000 places by 1995. In just the past two years the number of families receiving fee relief for long day care has increased from 44,500 to 135,800 and the average weekly fee relief payments have increased 60 per cent from \$22 to \$35 per week. Sole parents participating in the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Program have been major beneficiaries of the expansion in child care. Participation of sole parents in the workforce has increased from 36% in 1983 to 45% in 1992.

The government has placed particular emphasis on consolidating and improving payments to families. We have indexed all family payments and, as of January 1993, all will be payable to the parent most responsible for the care of the children, usually the mother.

The ratification in 1991 of the International Labour Organisation Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities was another landmark for women. It committed the Government to develop policies and programs to minimise the pressures on people with jobs and families, and in particular address the double load carried by working women with domestic responsibilities.

In the legal arena, the Sex Discrimination Act has been amended to improve and extend coverage, and the effectiveness of the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 has recently been reviewed through a process of community consultations which revealed a high level of acceptance by business and the community for these measures which aim to increase women's job opportunities

The government recognises that to achieve our ultimate goal of full equality for women all levels of government still have a long way to go but the presentation of the CEDAW Report provides an opportunity to restate our commitment to that goal, and to say we welcome the comment and advice of the highly respected CEDAW Committee in its consideration of Australia's Second Report.

CANBERRA  
25 June 1992