



## PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON. P J KEATING MP

FORUM ON THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Thank you for your invitation to attend today's Forum and to accept, on behalf of the Federal Government, the National Strategy on Violence Against Women.

I am aware that Commonwealth, State and community representatives have worked together on this document and I am pleased to know that you have been able to reach agreement on an approach towards dealing with this extremely serious issue.

It is a matter of great concern to me that violence against women seems to be increasing.

Freedom from fear is a basic, inalienable right. It is enshrined in the Atlantic Charter. It is a responsibility of democratic governments to fight it in the same way that we fight poverty, repression or discrimination of any kind. -

It is also the responsibility of communities to fight it. It is the responsibility of all Australians - particularly, it has to be said, of men who cause most of the fear and do most of the violence.

Violence against women is intolerable.

All Australian women are entitled to be safe, and to feel safe - on the streets and in their homes.

I know that personal safety is of major concern to Australian women. For many women, fear of attack by men is a constant source of anxiety and stress.

It is a matter of shame that in our major cities women are afraid to use public transport, particularly trains, outside of peak periods because they do not feel safe.

That nurses and other shift workers are afraid to walk to their cars except in groups.

That students in our tertiary institutions cannot freely walk about the campus at night.

I know that this evening women around Australia are taking to the streets to march to "reclaim the night", to assert their right to be safe, and to feel safe, at night wherever they live.

I fully support the aims of the march.

I often make the point that Australia is a pretty good place to live in, that our values of democracy and equality, and our concern for those who need help, make us a society to be envied.

But it is also pretty obvious that these values are undermined, and even contradicted, by violence - and especially by violence within the home.

We do not know the true extent of domestic violence but I think we can say that it is a much larger problem than many people are prepared to recognise or admit.

I find this both tragic and totally unacceptable.

In recent days we have had to confront a truly awful example of such violence.

All Australia was shocked and appalled by what happened on the Central Coast of New South Wales earlier this week, and our hearts go out to the surviving families and friends of the victims. And to their communities.

I find it appalling when individuals resort to violence to deal with feeling frustrated or aggrieved.

We as a society have an obligation to do something about it.

We have to reaffirm the integrity of women and their equality as fundamental values which violence undermines. We have to instil in our children, especially in our boys, the notion that disputes should be resolved in non-violent ways.

Our schools have a role to play here but most particularly parents.

And so does our media. There is far too much violence on television, in my view, and this is encouraging violence to be seen as normal and acceptable. It is sending totally the wrong signals to our children, and to those individuals who are wont to resort too readily to violence.

As a federal government, our powers are limited in this area but there are some practical actions we can - and do - take.

For instance, we provide funds for 263 women's refuges Australia-wide which offer safe shelter to women and children escaping domestic violence.

We provide funds under the Commonwealth -State Housing Agreement to ensure women escaping domestic violence can have priority of access to public housing. This means they and their children have a real alternative and are not forced to return to a violent situation simply because they have nowhere else to live.

Similarly, we ensure that women escaping domestic violence have immediate access to the Sole Parents Pension so they can support themselves and their children and not be dependent on the man who has been violent towards them.

But perhaps most important of all, the Federal Government can, and should, provide leadership on this issue.

We can help set the tone of public discussion and public debate.

We can speak out loudly in saying it is simply not on. We do not want a society where it is regarded as acceptable or excusable for a man to attack a woman. It is not - and it never can be.

We are prepared to put money into reaffirming this strong view.

Early next year the Government will be launching a \$3.5 million community education program.

We will be using television and other media to proclaim the message that violence against women is not to be tolerated in Australia today and should stop.

I welcome the comprehensive strategy on violence against women which I have just received as a source of further

ideas and thinking on how we tackle this sore on our society.

I look forward to reading its proposals - and to discussing with my Cabinet colleagues how we can act to do our bit towards ending the toll of violence against women.

I urge my fellow political leaders at the State level to take this document to heart, to study it and to take the appropriate actions.

This issue is not a partisan one.

It is one on which we can all agree.

We can agree that we want the world to be safe.

I want a world where none of us is prey, where all Australians can feel safe, a world where women can get on with their lives without fear or anxiety.

This is a goal we as a nation can work towards and I pledge that I will do all I can to see that we do.

Today's national strategy document is a first step. I look forward to there being many more.

Canberra  
30 October, 1992