

3/11/94



**PRIME MINISTER**

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

**DEATH OF DR PETER WILENSKI, AC**

Peter Wilenski died this morning after a long struggle with a very difficult illness. He leaves behind his wife, Jill, and two young children, Michael and Katy. I offer to them heartfelt condolences on my own behalf, and on behalf of the Government, its ministers and the public service as a whole.

In a long career in many different positions - as public servant, academic, ministerial adviser, and diplomat - he made an enormous contribution to Australian public life. He played a key role in the revolutionary changes which transformed the face of Australian public administration, beginning with his involvement in the Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration in 1974 during the Whitlam Government. During his subsequent career, he headed four different government departments under three Labor governments as well as being chairman of the Public Service Board.

The necessity of change was something he saw very clearly and articulated persuasively. Successive Labor governments availed themselves of his capacity to design and implement change.

It was also a very important part of how Peter saw himself, and in that regard - as in the happiness he found with his family - his life was one of immense personal fulfilment.

Throughout his life he was passionately committed to advancing social justice. His intellectual talent and his skill at public administration were illuminated by a strong sense of fairness. He was instrumental in creating a public sector in which women could begin to have the same opportunities as men.

The pioneer Australian feminist, Edna Ryan, said today about Peter that 'he was a most unusual bureaucrat and a well-informed feminist. Probably no man gave more than Peter to the cause of the status of women in Australia'.

As Australia's ambassador to the United Nations in New York from 1989 to 1992 he applied these same management skills and social commitment to advance the cause of reform of the United Nations and to focus the attention of the international community on to the needs of women and human rights issues

He was a person of many dimensions. He had a great love of art, and a staggering array of interests in issues as diverse as his first profession, medicine, development assistance, and higher education.

Australia has lost a national figure. We mourn that. But at the same time he has left us much for which the Government and country can be deeply thankful.

CANBERRA  
3 November 1994