

ADDRESS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**RECEPTION FOR UNIFEM AUSTRALIA**  
ADMIRALTY HOUSE, SYDNEY  
24 OCTOBER 2008

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the magnificent land on which we gather this evening.

And I express my warmest welcome to you.

It is a treat to have you here at Admiralty House following today's AGM, and on the eve of your National Board meeting.

I feel so grateful for the opportunity to revive old and fond connections, and to enjoy the energy of new faces, hearts and minds.

I'm delighted too that our Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner could join us, as I know that she is working hard on a Senate inquiry submission for the very first review of the Sex Discrimination Act:

- . both Act and Commissioner, highly valued and cherished leaders in Australian society,
- . champions of equality of opportunity among our nation's men and women,
- . pioneers, once more, in reshaping attitudes and approaches to family responsibility and caring.

I last caught up with Commissioner Broderick in Brisbane when she and her team were in the final stages of their six-month Listening Tour around the country:

- . a fine example of genuine consultation and engagement with our community;
- . so empowering for individuals to be heard, and invited to contribute to better solutions for living and working together.

Having just returned from my travels through the Murray-Darling Basin, I have an even greater sense of how important these conversations are to sustaining our democracy and the values of equality, justice, fairness and inclusiveness that underpin it.

I believe we have an obligation in public office:

- . to endeavour to understand the human face and consequences of discrimination and hardship;
- . to draw upon the depth and diversity of opinion and experience that is the fabric of Australian life.

Wonderful conversations come to mind when I think of UNIFEM - a movement that, over three decades ago, trumpeted our long-silent cries for bread and roses, and launched our determined march towards women's empowerment and gender equality.

In the last few years, as Governor of Queensland, I had the special privilege of thanking the guest speakers at the UNIFEM gatherings in Brisbane, held in celebration of International Women's Day.

It is a day that fills me up like none other. I love all that it stands for, its origins, its advocacy, its inspiration, its infinite possibilities, and its deep respect for women's stories.

Well over a thousand women and men would turn up for breakfast each year.

Most of them, including me, were in tears for the best part of it.

The warmth and optimism and courage in that room were palpable.

The women's stories profoundly altered us all, galvanising comrade and stranger alike.

**Kirsty Sword-Gusmao** - a leader, a mentor, a role model to the women of Timor Leste; indeed all women - her natural positivity, drive, and commitment to improving the wellbeing of women and their families.

**Malalai Joya** - as the youngest female member of the Afghan National Assembly, she endures continuing threats to her life and liberty in advancing the rights of her people and exposing the horrific violation of women's rights in her country.

And together last year:

. coordinator in Gaza of the Palestinian NGO Network, **Wafa Abdel Rahman**, and first Israeli coordinator of the International Women's Commission, **Romy Shapira**;

. both bright, ambitious, brave and assiduous;

. they know the appalling cost of war to women, and understand our vast untapped potential for bringing about peace.

These women are our reminders, our instruction, our touchstones. No matter how comfortable we may feel in our own lives, they are our caution against complacency and neglect.

There is much yet to fall out from the global crisis in banking and financial markets.

We must be sure now to listen out especially for women's voices, and, as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged recently, we must see that the crisis does not distract or excuse us from promoting worldwide gender equality.

My friends, I am so proud of what you do: at the grassroots, throughout Australia, and internationally.

I hope that you find refreshment, encouragement and support from one another in the coming days, and I wish you the very best in pursuing your plans for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.