



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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## **65<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**15 March 2021**

### **Statement by H.E. Senator The Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women of Australia**

This year, at its sixty-fifth session, the Commission on the Status of Women focuses the world's attention on the importance of women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

As Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, I have the privilege of conveying Australia's commitment to advancing women's leadership at all levels and in all areas of our lives, free from discrimination and violence. And this year's priority theme could not be more relevant in today's world.

As we have seen globally, women's presence, contributions and courage have been, and remain, critical to charting a strong, inclusive, and sustainable recovery from the health and economic crisis of COVID-19. We know the pandemic is having a significant impact on women and girls, interrupting their access to health services, education and employment, and increasing the risk and severity of violence for all too many. We must also recognise that many women are our first responders, working tirelessly

on the frontlines to provide essential health and education services and, in their homes, caring for others.

COVID-19 is a shared crisis, reminding us that multilateral institutions and constructive international cooperation is important to solve the problems that affect us all.

We all have an essential part to play – governments, the private sector, civil society and individually – to support our COVID-recovery efforts.

This is what we're doing in the Pacific, with women leaders working together to identify and implement measures that address the impacts of COVID-19 on women's safety, health and economic security.

In facing these shared challenges, it is important to pause and acknowledge the successes and progress made so far. For Australia's part, we have made, and continue to make, real advances in increasing women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in public life.

Women's workforce participation now exceeds 60 per cent. And we are working to further increase it. To take just one example, as part of our 2020 Women's Economic Security Statement additional funding is being provided to women entrepreneurs to grow their ideas and create jobs.

Targeted measures do work. We have almost achieved our target of 50 per cent representation of women across Australian Government Boards, with women holding 48.5 per cent of positions in 2020. And, as an Australian

Senator, I'm very proud that for the first time in 2019, the Australian Senate reached equal representation of men and women.

Alongside efforts to increase women's meaningful engagement in public life we have been taking measures to reduce violence against women and their children. This is a national priority.

Since 2013 Australia has committed over \$1 billion to help ensure women and girls can be safe in their homes, communities, workplaces, and online. We are currently developing a new National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. This will address domestic, family and sexual violence, including sexual harassment.

Internationally, Australia has strongly and consistently advocated for the end to gender-based violence and for the realisation of the rights of women and girls, especially for women's economic empowerment and their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is inextricably linked to women's wellbeing and ability to participate in public life. We are also committed to fully implement the Women Peace and Security Agenda.

*Australia's Partnerships for Recovery Strategy* articulates the actions we will take towards an intersectional and inclusive approach to COVID-19 recovery in the Indo-Pacific. I have also co-convened Pacific Women Leaders meetings to hear about the impacts of COVID-19 and to help inform a response that is gender-sensitive.

Through our individual and collective efforts, we can work to help ensure women's full and effective participation and leadership at all levels in public life, as a worthy end in itself and as needed to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

I look forward to a time when we can meet in person again to discuss progress towards gender equality. Thank you.