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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**57th Session of the United Nations
Commission on the Status of Women**

SPEECH

Monday, 18 March 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Collins, Julie, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Minister for Community Services, Minister for the Status of Women and Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development) (15:20): Far too many Australian women today are experiencing violence—one in three will have experienced physical violence from the time they are 15 and one in five will have experienced sexual violence.

Globally, sadly the situation is much worse.

Earlier this month, I led the Australian delegation to the 57th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, alongside the Global Ambassador for Women and Girls, Ms Penny Williams, and Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick.

Officers from the Office for Women and four exceptional NGO delegates also joined me on the Australian Delegation:

Rebecca Vassarotti, as a community sector delegate

Michelle Deshong, as an Indigenous delegate

Karin Swift, representing women with disabilities

Zita Ngor, representing women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

The theme for this year's CSW was the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.

I delivered Australia's Country Statement to CSW and our message to the world was simple: violence, in all its forms—physical, sexual or psychological—is unacceptable. Australia has no tolerance for violence against women and girls in Australia, or internationally.

We know that violence is a universal issue and it affects women from all over the world, of all backgrounds, races, cultures and economic circumstances.

As one speaker at CSW said, if violence against women and girls was viewed in terms of a disease or a virus, then we would have a worldwide pandemic on our hands.

The Australian Government is committed to working with our international counterparts to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and girls across the world.

During my time in New York, I ensured I met with relevant ministers from many countries who are responsible for women's affairs. These included those from Samoa, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Laos, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom and Liberia, who is the current Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women.

In these meetings, I urged the ministers to stand with Australia during the negotiations and to push for a strong, global response to ending violence against women, in all its forms.

Australia was very disappointed that there were no agreed conclusions at last year's Commission on the Status of Women.

So, today, I am extremely pleased to report that after some quite difficult negotiations, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has ended in a landmark agreement on this vital issue.

All United Nations member countries have signed up to historic firsts in committing to drive global action to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

One of the most significant breakthroughs was the recognition that custom, tradition or religious consideration should play no part in denying women equality or justifying violence against them.

I cannot stress enough this achievement.

The agreed conclusions faced strong opposition during the negotiations and Australia and its delegates worked hard to bring about this result.

During my time in New York, I also met with Michelle Bachelet, head of UN Women, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Herve Ladsous, and other senior United Nations representatives. I took the opportunity to promote Australia's work on the women, peace and security agenda, which is a priority

for Australia during our term on the United Nations Security Council.

As part of this agenda, Australia is pushing for three critical elements:

Incorporating a gender perspective in all UN mission mandates authorised by the UN Security Council;

Promoting women's full participation in conflict resolution, peace-building and post-conflict political transitions; and

Ensuring regular briefings to the council on women, peace and security issues, including through country-reports.

I shared with my international counterparts Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, under which Australia is promoting efforts to protect women's rights and increase their participation in conflict resolution and in peace efforts.

I could see at the Commission on the Status of Women that Australia is actively contributing to a world where women and girls can thrive and where their safety is guaranteed.

Here at home, we are implementing the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children—internationally recognised as best practice. Central to the 12-year national plan is a strong emphasis on primary prevention and community engagement, as well as recognition of the critical role that men and boys play in reducing violence against women. The government has committed \$86 million to actions under this national plan.

One initiative I am particularly proud of is The Line—a \$17 million social marketing campaign. It encourages respectful relationships amongst young people, with research indicating the campaign changes young people's attitudes. I was able to share our experiences at the Australian hosted side event at the commission on using new technology and social media to address violence against women and girls.

I also had the opportunity to promote some of Australia's word-leading work at the Equal Futures Partnership event. Australia has partnered with the United States and other nations to expand economic opportunities for women and to increase women's participation in politics and civil society. As part of this partnership, Australia has committed to:

achieve a minimum of forty per cent women on Australian government boards by 2015;

create a National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence Against Women; and

strengthen the pipeline of female talent in traditionally male dominated industries.

Internationally, Australia is also committed to preventing violence and improving gender equality, which are key pillars of Australia's aid and development program. In responding to and preventing violence against women, our aid program centres on ensuring women have access to support services and to justice.

Australia is working to improve the stability, security and sustainable development of the Pacific islands region. We work closely with our Pacific island neighbours to assist them achieve their development objectives. At the Pacific Islands Forum last August we saw the historic Pacific leaders gender equality declaration—a strong commitment to empowering women in the region.

Australia supports this declaration through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative and the Australian government is providing \$320 million in funding over three years to this initiative. It will work to increase women's participation in leadership and political roles, to improve economic opportunities for women through better access to finance and markets, and to improve their safety through prevention of violence and access to justice.

It is essential that the Pacific region is represented strongly at international forums, in particular those relating to gender equality, so that issues facing women across our region are raised at the highest levels internationally. Australia provided \$50,000 in funding to support members of the Pacific delegation to attend the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to ensure that there was a strong voice for women across this region.

I was fortunate to meet with a number of heads of delegations from the Pacific, including the Prime Minister of Tuvalu and Vice-President of Kiribati, to discuss our shared vision for the region. Australia also co-hosted a side event with New Zealand, chaired by Ambassador Williams, where panellists discussed the progress and challenges relating to gender equality in the Pacific context.

Australia and this government are deeply committed to realising the goal of a world that is safe for women and girls, a place where each can achieve her full potential.

This requires us all to work together in a spirit of cooperation, with purpose and resolve.

The agreement at this year's Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations is a significant step forward.

I present a copy of my ministerial statement and ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Farrer to speak for seven minutes.

Leave granted.

Ms COLLINS: I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Farrer speaking in reply to my statement for a period not exceeding seven minutes.

Question agreed to.