

**COMMONWEALTH, STATE, TERRITORY AND NEW ZEALAND
MINISTERS' CONFERENCE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

COMMUNIQUÉ

The Hon Margaret Keech MP, Queensland Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women, hosted the Australian and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women (MINCO) in Brisbane on Friday 3 October 2008.

Ministers agreed that this year's conference heralds a new, collaborative era for women's policy. All jurisdictions are working together in the priority areas of women's economic status, leadership, and safety. Ministers also agreed on the theme of *women and social inclusion* as a priority for the Conference in future years.

Ministers valued the opportunity to meet with delegates of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering. Ministers conveyed their appreciation to participants in this year's Gathering and acknowledged that delegates had spent much time consulting with their communities so they could bring their views to this important meeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Noting the number and substance of items on the Gathering's agenda for consideration, Ministers were pleased to provide funding for an additional day for next year's meeting.

Ministers noted the collaborative approach across jurisdictions to Australia's combined 6th/7th report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and agreed that the report demonstrated Australia's leadership in a number of areas relating to gender equality.

Ministers agreed that a working group will be established to develop a set of key national indicators on the status of women. This work will assist governments to track and measure changes in the status of women over time and provide a basis for the evaluation of policy and program initiatives.

In 2007, Ministers agreed that pay equity is a priority issue for women. A working group established by MINCO will now support the actions arising from two pay equity roundtables recently hosted by the Australian Government. Information will also be provided to the House of Representatives *Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*

The previous government's *Welfare to Work* policy has been monitored by jurisdictions for its impact on women. While the Rudd Government made substantial changes to this policy in response to widespread concerns, Ministers will seek to ensure that Skills Australia, the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group; and the Workplace Participation Taskforce announced by the Minister for Employment Participation, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP; take account of issues about the impact of this policy on sole parent mothers.

The safety of women has long been a concern for this Conference. Ministers lauded the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister's commitment to developing a *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

Prior to the Conference, a special meeting of representatives of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children met with States, Territories, members of State and Territory safety councils, members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering, and Ministers' representatives, as a first step in gathering jurisdictional input for shaping the *National Plan*. Attendees hailed this as an important step in a whole-of-government approach to the *National Plan* and looked forward to further collaboration on this important initiative for women's safety and wellbeing.

All jurisdictions committed in principle to support the development of the *National Plan*. Victoria updated Ministers on the progress of its integrated strategies to prevent family violence.

Ministers advised of the progress each jurisdiction has made in addressing trafficking for sexual servitude and noted that the Australian Government has established an ongoing mechanism for consulting, testing and developing Government policy on people trafficking issues.

The Northern Territory Minister spoke of the impact on Indigenous women and communities of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, and of the implications for the dignity, independence and self determination of Indigenous people. The Minister spoke on the Northern Territory Government's submission to the independent review of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, which was announced by Minister Macklin in June. The Australian Government will give careful consideration to the Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board's Report before responding.

Key stages of a number of MINCO projects have been completed. Western Australia finalised its national research project examining barriers to the use of skills of nurses from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Tasmania has finished the first stage of its work which will subsequently identify how integrated micro-credit business mentoring and loans programs can be developed to support the workforce participation of women on low incomes. New Zealand has completed the first stage of its project about the economic impacts of occupational segregation, considering data and issues from Australia and New Zealand. The national strategy and guidelines to increase participation of women on boards is being prepared for publication, and the development of a National Strategy for the Increased Participation of Women on Boards for 2009-2011 is underway.

Ministers unanimously welcomed the Productivity Commission's draft Inquiry report *Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children* released on 29 September, and agreed this was a major step forward for Australian women and their families.

The Victorian Minister provided an update on the progress of the *Victorian Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008*. Minister's noted the information.

In closing the conference, Minister Keech acknowledged the progress made and suggested it had been a milestone in advancing women's policy issues across Australia and New Zealand.

The Conference was attended by the Hon Margaret Keech MP, Queensland Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women; the Australian Government Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP; the New South Wales Minister for Women, the Hon Verity Firth, MP; the Western Australian Minister for Women's Interests, Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA; the Victorian Minister for Women's Affairs, Maxine Morand MP; the South Australian Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Gail Gago MLC; the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Women's Policy; Ms Lisa Singh MP representing the Hon David Bartlett MP, Premier of Tasmania; Ms Sandra Lambert representing the Australian Capital Territory; and Ms Sarah Turner, representing the Hon Steve Chadwick, New Zealand Minister for Women's Affairs.

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