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**The Impact of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on The Pharmaceutical Benefits  
Scheme (PBS)**

Peter Sainsbury, Director of the Division of Population Health in Central Sydney Area Health Service is also an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health at Sydney University, President of the Public Health Association of Australia, and a member of the NH&MRC. Peter's qualifications and experience cover medicine, health planning, sociology, health services management and public health.

In this article, Sainsbury asks:

"How many things can you think of that are Australian, good for patients, good for doctors, good for taxpayers, good for government, and widely recognised as one of the best in the world? Well, the The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is one. It ensures that all Australians have access to essential medications when they are sick."

Sainsbury explains that, "Because the PBS also involves very strict controls on which drugs get onto the PBS list and because the government negotiates very good deals with the drug companies, Australia has one of the cheapest drug bills in the developed world. We get the best drugs at the lowest prices. If a new drug is no better for patients than an existing drug, the PBS won't pay the producer any more for it. Or to put it another way, the price Australia pays for a drug is based on its usefulness to the patient (its therapeutic worth), not how much it cost the company to develop it. In fact, the system is so good that compared with prices in the USA , the PBS saves Australians about \$1-2.5 billion dollars per year. The result is that every Australian can get the drugs they need when they need them without going into debt, and without having to make impossible choices between essential medications and other essentials such as food or rent. "

So if the PBS is such a good scheme, why is the government wanting the parliament to pass the Free Trade Agreement? Is this Agreement in the best interests of Australians' health and health dollars? What are the implications of this Agreement for all Australians in the next 10 years and what does it mean for the drug companies in the USA and their Australian subsidiaries? Sainsbury focuses on these issues and provides an analysis of his position that the FTA will have harmful effects on the PBS.

### **Australia-US Free Trade Agreement and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme**



**Peter Sainsbury**

**President, Public Health Association of Australia ([www.phaa.net.au](http://www.phaa.net.au))**

[The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme \(PBS\)](#)

How many things can you think of that are Australian, good for patients, good for doctors, good for taxpayers, good for government, and widely recognised as one of the best in the world? Well, the PBS is one. It ensures that all Australians have access to essential medications when they are sick.

Specifically, but briefly, the PBS provides :

- An uncapped Federal Government subsidy of approximately \$4.6 billion per year to the price of medications for patients
- Fixed out-of-pocket expenses for patients for the 600 drugs covered by the PBS
- A financial safety net for the very sick and chronically sick so that multiple small expenses don't add up to something unmanageable.

You might think that because the government subsidy is uncapped the total cost, to the government and hence also the taxpayer, of the drugs provided on the PBS would be skyrocketing. But it isn't and here's the real benefit of the PBS. Because the PBS also involves very strict controls on which drugs get onto the PBS list and because the government negotiates very good deals with the drug companies, Australia has one of the cheapest drug bills in the developed world.

We get the best drugs at the lowest prices. If a new drug is no better for patients than an existing drug, the PBS won't pay the producer any more for it. Or to put it another way, the price Australia pays for a drug is based on its usefulness to the patient (its therapeutic worth), not how much it cost the company to develop it. In fact, the system is so good that compared with prices in the USA , the PBS saves Australians about \$1-2.5 billion dollars per year.

The result is that every Australian can get the drugs they need when they need them without going into debt, and without having to make impossible choices between essential medications and other essentials such as food or rent.

The PBS delivers great value for money, efficiency, equity and better health. It is widely regarded as one of the best, if not the best, drug purchasing and provision systems in the world.

But, surprise, surprise, the drug companies don't like this. They say :

- 'the PBS unfairly limits our freedom to charge whatever the market will pay';
- ' Australia isn't paying its share of the cost of developing new drugs. Australian patients are free-loading off American patients';
- 'the PBS doesn't allow us to recoup our immense investment in research and development (R&D) to develop new drugs' (this is like a company that produces washing up liquid saying that they've just spent billions of dollars researching

and developing a new washing up liquid and so they expect consumers to pay three times the price of existing washing up liquids regardless of whether it's any better at cleaning greasy plates);

- 'because the PBS uses very strict cost-effectiveness evidence to decide which drugs should be available on the PBS and how much they are really worth, this constitutes an unfair restraint on free trade'.

Basically, drug companies don't like the use of evidence-based decision making, don't like Australians paying what drugs are therapeutically worth, and don't like the Australian PBS limiting their ability to make even bigger profits than they already do. They want fewer limits in Australia on their ability to market whatever drug they want at whatever price they want, but still have the government pick up a large part of the bill because that guarantees them a reliable market and a reliable payer.

But let's get real here. Why shouldn't we expect our government to negotiate the best deal it can with the drug companies? Isn't that its job? ... to protect Australians' health and dollars.

And drug companies are hardly going broke :

- in the USA the pharmaceutical industry has provided the best return on investment every year for the last ten years;
- drug companies feature prominently among the ten most profitable companies worldwide – in 2002 the ten drug companies in the Fortune 500 list of America's most profitable companies made more profit than the other 490 companies combined;
- drug company executives are among the best paid in the world;
- and as for their high R&D costs, both their marketing and advertising expenses (approx. 27% of revenue for the nine major US drug companies) and their profits (approx. 18%) exceed what they pay in R&D (approx. 11%).

No one should shed any tears for the drug companies, their profits, CEOs or shareholders.

But tears will be shed if we allow the PBS to be destroyed because :

- sick people will go without essential medications because they can't afford them – just like happens now in the USA ;
- sick people, mostly the poorer and older people in society, will have to pay 2-3 times more out-of-pocket expenses every time they get a prescription filled – just like happens in the USA now;
- Australia will be paying 25-50% more as a nation for our drugs;
- drug company profits will go even higher – they are principally interested in their profits, not our health, of course;

- we'll be transferring money from Australia 's sick, Australia 's old and Australia 's poor to American pharmaceutical companies, American CEOs and American shareholders.

### The Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

It is against this background that drug companies in the USA, supported by their Australian subsidiaries and counterparts, lobbied the US negotiators hard to ensure that the PBS was included in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that was negotiated during 2003 and early 2004. Despite strong counter-lobbying in Australia , and to a lesser extent the USA , the US negotiators and drug companies were successful in getting several provisions included in the FTA which potentially weaken the PBS :

- drug companies can request an independent review of decisions by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, the committee which makes evidence-based (already independent) recommendations to the Minister for Health and Ageing about which drugs should be listed on the PBS. The Australian government is adamant that this is not an appeal mechanism but it is difficult to believe that the drug companies would have pressed so hard for this change if they did not believe it would make it easier for them to get drugs onto the PBS and/or enable them to negotiate higher prices;
- changes to patenting regulations in Australia could enable a drug company with a drug which is coming to the end of its patent to extend the patent ('evergreening') and/or delay the introduction onto the market of much cheaper, non-patented (generic) versions of the drug. Legislation proposed by the Labor Party has now passed through the Australian parliament to try to prevent these provisions adversely affecting the PBS;
- drug companies will be permitted to distribute information about drugs on the internet. This may lead to 'direct-to-consumer advertising' (DTCA) of drugs. DTCA is legal in the USA but not Australia , or most countries, because of serious concerns that it leads to inappropriate demands on doctors to prescribe unnecessary drugs and hence an increase in the nation's drug bill, not to mention unnecessary side effects. The Australian government has argued that the availability of information about drugs on the internet is nothing new but that begs the question of if so, why were the Americans so keen to have it included in the FTA;
- a 'Medicines Working Group' of health officials from both countries will be established to discuss, among other things, 'the importance of pharmaceutical research and development to continued improvement of healthcare outcomes'. Officials from the two governments seem to have very different views about the influence this group will have on Australian pharmaceuticals policy.

It is impossible to predict exactly what effect the FTA will have on the PBS. Should we believe the Australian government who repeatedly assert that they negotiated

successfully to ensure that the provisions regarding the PBS will have no effect on the availability or price of drugs in Australia ? Or should we take greater note of the US negotiators and drug company executives who have repeatedly expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the negotiations?

I personally believe that the FTA will have harmful effects on the PBS. Firstly, the changes introduced by the FTA certainly do nothing to strengthen the PBS and so unless they are all neutral they can only have deleterious consequences. Secondly, it is difficult to believe that the drug company executives would be pleased if they didn't think that they were going to gain something. Thirdly, the drug companies have immense resources to invest in lawyers, lobbyists and public relations to ensure that the changes do work to their benefit. Fourthly, it is unlikely that we will see much change in the short-term – the price increases will be incremental and will occur over the next ten years, not the next twelve months – and once the political furore and public interest has died down it will be easier for the drug companies to work behind the scenes to achieve their goals.

### Why?

People frequently ask, 'Yes, but why would the Australian government do anything to undermine the PBS? If it's so good and so cost effective, surely it's in their interest to preserve it.' I believe that several possible explanations can be advanced :

- 1 at the start of the FTA negotiation process the government simply didn't think the PBS was much of an issue or that Australians would notice or care, but once the Americans had got it on the agenda it was impossible to get it off;
- 2 the Australian government thought they could make some concessions on the PBS to secure concessions on agricultural trade (beef, sugar, etc.);
- 3 the government sees the FTA as just one part of the broader Australian-US alliance, which is more important to them than the PBS;
- 4 the government intends to meet any increase in drug prices arising from the FTA by increasing the price paid by patients for prescriptions. This would be in line with the current government's emphasis on 'user pays';
- 5 to take a Machiavellian position, the government is happy for the cost of the PBS to go out of control because then it will be able to argue for it to be converted into a safety net for the poor rather than a universal scheme for everyone. This will reduce government expenditure and allow it to keep taxes down and hence retain electoral popularity.

### **Conclusion**

It may be years before the effects of the FTA on the PBS and the Australian drug industry become clear, as indeed it may be years before any conclusions can be reached about whether the FTA has been beneficial for Australia overall. It is also unclear whether the efforts of consumer groups, public health activists, health professionals, opposition political parties, trades unions and public interest groups throughout 2003 and 2004 to keep the PBS in the spotlight and try to prevent the government trading away the PBS had any effect.

Three things are clear. Firstly, that the drug industry in the US and Australia saw the FTA as an opportunity to undermine the evidence-based, strict and effective procedures underpinning the PBS. Secondly, that democratic processes and international negotiations are intimately connected to public health. Thirdly, that those who are concerned about the health of the public must maintain a vigilant eye on the whole of society, glean information from all sorts of sources, develop a keen understanding of international affairs, become skilled observers of bureaucratic processes, be prepared to involve themselves in political lobbying and develop methods to monitor the effects of instruments of government such as the FTA. And always they must analyse 'Who wins and who loses?'

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Competing interests : Peter Sainsbury is President of the Public Health Association of Australia, an organization that has lobbied for the exclusion of the PBS from the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement.

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Biography: Peter Sainsbury has been Director of the Division of Population Health in Central Sydney Area Health Service for 10 years. He is also an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health at Sydney University , President of the Public Health Association of Australia, and a member of the NH&MRC.

Peter's qualifications and experience cover medicine, health planning, sociology, health services management and public health. His professional interests include inequalities in health, social relationships and health, the experience of illness, health needs assessment, the history of public health, mental health promotion and social policy. Other interests include figurative war memorials, cooking and eating, the arts, cricket and Florence Nightingale.

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Further useful information can be found at :

1 [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)

2 The Australia Institute ([www.tai.org.au](http://www.tai.org.au)). See 'Trading in our health system?' (May 2003)

3 Harvey KJ, Faunce TA, Lokuge B, Drahos P, Will the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement undermine the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme? Medical Journal of Australia 2004 ([www.mja.com.au/public/rop/ausfta/har10408\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/rop/ausfta/har10408_fm.html))

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### **Peak Australian Community Organisations call for rejection of US Free Trade Agreement**

The Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council of Social Service, Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Doctors Reform Society, Australian Writers' Guild, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, UnitingCare NSW.ACT, Linux Australia and other organisations will launched a statement calling on the Senate to block the USFTA implementing legislation in August. A copy of the Statement with all signatories is below:

#### **Joint Statement**

Community Organisations representing millions call for rejection of US Free Trade Agreement

As Community organisations representing millions of Australians we call on the Opposition, minor parties and independents not to pass the implementing legislation for the Australia US Free Trade Agreement in the Senate. The USFTA is not in Australia's national interest because it:

- means higher medicine costs – the agreement gives US drug companies rights to seek reviews of decisions by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. Changes to patent law will delay the production of cheaper generic medicines. Public health experts believe the changes will weaken the price control of the PBS, leading to higher costs for the PBS and Australian consumers
- restricts Australian voices in new media by limiting Australian content rules for new forms of media, and allows the US government to challenge these rules as a barrier to trade. As new forms of media become dominant fewer and fewer Australian voices and stories will be heard
- "binds" or freezes state and local government regulation of essential services at existing levels, unless they are listed as exceptions. This limits the ability of future governments to regulate in many areas. Water, electricity and public transport have not been listed as exceptions. Regulation of aged care or other community services not specifically exempted may be challenged as barriers to US investment



- adopts US copyright law, meaning higher costs for libraries and schools and with devastating effects on small IT firms, especially the booming Australian local Open Source software industry
- sets up joint committees which could mean US pressure Australia to reduce quarantine standards. The American Farm Bureau Federation expects many gains for US exporters because of these committees
- Gives greater access for the US to Australian manufacturing markets than Australian access to US markets, and prevents government purchasing policies from giving preference to Australian firms. This could mean significant loss of Australian jobs in regional areas of high unemployment
- limits the power of the Foreign Investment Review Board to assess whether US investments are in the national interest by increasing the threshold from \$50 to \$800 million for all but a few exempt sectors,
- has a disputes process which allows the US government to challenge many Australian laws and policies before a trade tribunal based on trade law without considering impacts on health, culture or the public interest,
- has not been subject to an environmental impact assessment, leaving too many questions about the environmental consequences of the FTA unanswered, and
- fails to deliver the economic gains claimed by the government. Professors Ross Garnaut, Professor of Economics at ANU, Dr Philippa Dee from the Productivity Commission and ANU, and Dr Peter Brain from The National Institute of Economic and Industry Research found that claimed economic benefits were exaggerated, and are in fact limited by the restricted access to US agricultural and manufacturing markets. They predict minimal gains or slight losses.

For these reasons the USFTA is not in the national interest, the implementing legislation should not be supported in the Senate .

**Signed by:**

Sharan Burrow Megan Mitchell  
 President Director  
 Australian Council of Trade Unions Australian Council of Social Service

Don Henry Pia Smith  
 Executive Director President  
 Australian Conservation Foundation Linux Australia

Bill Whiley The Rev. Harry Herbert  
 National Secretary Executive Director  
 Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation Inc. UnitingCare NSW. ACT

Pieta Laut Bruce Hutton  
 Executive Director State Vice President  
 Public Health Association of Australia Combined Pensioners and Superannuants

Association of NSW Inc.

Dr Tracy Schrader Bishop Patrick Power  
National Vice President Australian Catholic Social Justice Council  
Doctors Reform Society

Megan Elliot  
Executive Director  
Australian Writers' Guild

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## **Women and Self Governance**

### **By Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue**

In 1986 Janine Haines became the first woman to lead an Australian political party when she was elected leader of the Australian Democrats. The Annual Janine Haines Lecture on 23 July 2004 in Adelaide was given by Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, AC CBE is a Yankunytjatjara woman from South Australia's far north. Her contribution to the advancement of Aboriginal people is great and widely recognised. Her positions have included inaugural Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission; Deputy Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Development Corporation; a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Indigenous Land Corporation; a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Indigenous Land Corporation, the National Australia Day Council and the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations (Geneva); and Director of Aboriginal Hostels Limited. Dr O'Donoghue received the Companion of the Order of Australia in 1999 and was honoured as Australian of the Year in 1984.

In her lecture, Professor O'Donoghue focuses on the difficulties women face in any sphere "to succeed in positions of leadership."

"In fact, I was recently looking at *The Australian* newspaper's 'Fortieth Anniversary' series, special edition. And in their 'forty named people of influence' during the last forty years – only **four** entries were women. And one of those was Pauline Hanson! (Another was Kylie Minogue!)

What can I say? So, don't buy the popular view that things have changed – and that we've moved beyond the need for strong action in terms of justice for women! And I

believe it is even more difficult for a woman in a leadership position if she challenges the status quo and the values that drive and protect it. If she takes this role, she challenges both male power, **and** the systems that support and maintain it. (By definition she will be regarded as mad or bad – and sometimes as both!)"

O'Donoghue speaks of her sadness at the demise of ATSIC and questions:

"Why is there such an intense level of public suspicion directed at Indigenous organisations and initiatives? From where is it generated? And what is it about?"

O'Donoghue goes on to respond to the question, "what is involved in strong leadership and good governance for Indigenous people at this time in history?"

### **Annual Janine Haines Lecture 2004**

#### **Women and Self Governance**

**By Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue**

Adelaide, **23 July 2004**

Thank you very much for inviting me to give the Annual Janine Haines' Lecture.

It is a great privilege – and actually, one of my favourite pleasures – to talk about women, social change and the sort of leadership and conditions we need to create a more socially just society.

Thank you too for coming out in such a chilly Adelaide winter!

That shows **real** dedication and commitment – which of course, are key ingredients for leadership success.

And so clearly, we have a disproportionate number of potential leaders in this very room this evening.

The Democrats have a history of attracting large numbers of incredibly intelligent, energetic women who create inspiring historical milestones!

There is Janine Haines of course, to whom this lecture is dedicated.

I was sorry to hear that ill health has prevented Janine from being here with us this evening.

I'm sure the thoughts and best wishes of us all are with her.

Janine was the first woman to lead a political party in Australia and has been inspirational in her achievements.

And Natasha Stott Despoja was the youngest ever leader of a parliamentary party.

She has inspired so many Australians – particularly younger Australians – to participate in politics and to see the connections between real life issues and political policy.

Natasha and I have often found ourselves at the same political functions around Australia, and I am always inspired by her energy and commitment, her warmth and that absolute powerhouse of a brain she has!

And I have to admit (even though I know it is **absolutely** politically incorrect) that I used to wonder:- How can all of that be wrapped up in someone so little and so young!

When I first met her she reminded me of Shirley Temple! But seriously, I know that she has an enormous role to play in the Democrats party and in the future of Australia.

And Kate Reynolds, who has invited me here tonight, is doing a great job at keeping the “bastards honest” in relation to Indigenous issues.

And truly, never has there been a more important time to monitor what is going on in this area.

But more of that later....

I am always inspired by examples of people having the courage to act on what they know to be right. It sounds simple – but I believe that it is a rare quality in the contemporary economic and political landscape.

It is difficult enough in **any** sphere for a woman to succeed in positions of leadership.

In fact, I was recently looking at *The Australian* newspaper’s ‘Fortieth Anniversary’ series, special edition. And in their ‘forty named people of influence’ during the last forty years – only **four** entries were women. And one of those was Pauline Hanson! (Another was Kylie Minogue!)

What can I say?

So, don’t buy the popular view that things have changed – and that we’ve moved beyond the need for strong action in terms of justice for women!

And I believe it is even more difficult for a woman in a leadership position if she challenges the status quo and the values that drive and protect it.

If she takes this role, she challenges both male power, **and** the systems that support and maintain it.

(By definition she will be regarded as mad or bad – and sometimes as both!)

And – bizarre as it may sound in the so-called progressive 21<sup>st</sup> century – to stand up for the rights of Indigenous people in this country, is a **major** challenge to our political leaders and to the populist thinking that they have encouraged.

It is for this reason that I am particularly pleased to see that Kate is persisting!

She has recently reminded parliament of the government's Indigenous Employment strategy launched in 2003, in which it aimed for the outcomes such as the following:

- That the SA public sector be an employer of choice for Indigenous people
- That there be increased employment of Indigenous South Australians at all levels of the public sector.

And importantly, she has raised key issues about redundancies as a result of the demise of ATSIC and the mainstreaming of the functions of ATSI, for Indigenous people living and working in SA.

This is an absolutely vital issue.

I won't tonight go into the details of the politics and problems that existed within ATSIC.

I'm sure that you will understand that, currently, Aboriginal people are heavily involved in working out our responses.

But I do think it represents a pivotal moment in our history. And I'd like to share with you some of the thoughts that I have been having about it.

Firstly, I was the first ATSIC Chair and so I feel a great personal sadness at its demise. I remember and carry with me the hopes that we had of it.

They were hopes that it would enable initiatives and projects that were effective for Indigenous people and at the same time meet the requirements of whitefellas' systems. Hopes that we could grow together in understanding and outcomes.

It needed people in it, therefore, who could straddle both worlds with credibility.

This is possible, but it is a tenuous tightrope to walk – with some people on either side more than happy to push you off from time to time.

The very fact that I spoke out on issues of Aboriginal rights and justice was enough to bring death threats and cause tyre slashings, as a regular occupational hazard.

There is also the underlying criticism or subtle message available from either group – that “you are not really one of us”.

There is a belief (perhaps it is a fear) among some Aboriginal people, that if you are getting along with the powers-that-be, then you must, in some way, have sold out.

And certainly, that is an ongoing question that has to be posed.

At the moment, for example, Aboriginal leaders understandably feel that John Howard’s proposition that the government will select prominent Aboriginal people to “advise”, falls into this ‘sell out’ category.

There is truth to the point that some members of ATSIC were not performing well. And truth to the point that some members were unsuitable for office.

However, it is also true that some terrific work was done by ATSIC, and many of the programs are operating extremely well – particularly in the regions.

Significantly, there has been little discussion about alternative structures. ATSIC apparently was, to quote John Howard, “an experiment that failed.”

Some major questions arise for me from this for example:

- Why is there such an intense level of public suspicion directed at Indigenous organisations and initiatives? From where is it generated? And what is it about?

I cannot come to grips with how it is that the Howard Government, having been frequently exposed as dishonest about serious life and death issues (to name just a few: children overboard, weapons of mass destruction), can enjoy the trust and respect of so many people.

Or, on the other hand, why the problems that ATSIC experienced are subjected to such vicious public condemnation.

There are some serious contradictions at work here – and they echo some deep contradictions within Australia generally about Indigenous people.

I’d like to illustrate this complexity with a story. It is (sort of) topical because we are now approaching the Olympic Games in Athens.

In 2000 I was acting in an official role at the last Olympic Games in Sydney. One of my pleasurable tasks was to host VIP visitors at an official dinner at the opening ceremony of the Games. (It was important that there was an Indigenous presence in this way).

Now, I have to tell you that I **loved** it! I always enjoy being sociable and putting people at ease.

I met wonderful people, the atmosphere was fabulous, the food was great (always an important point). And there was a genuine atmosphere of celebration.

And this continued throughout the Games. We were all especially elated of course, by Cathy Freeman's performance in that unforgettable 400 metre race.

The opening ceremony had been spectacular too – and contained important symbolism for the future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in harmony.

(Remember the Aboriginal Elder as he walked off into the future, hand in hand with Nicki Webster). People were absolutely captivated.

It was as if we were living in the sort of world we might all dream about – where people are actively celebrating differences and hope for a shared future.

This was great stuff!

But of course, it bore **no relation at all** to the real conditions of Indigenous people in this country.

The powers-that-be were (and often are) happy to embrace the symbolism and the exotic aspects of Indigenous culture, such as our dancing, songs, stories and art.

But it is another matter entirely when it comes to the hard and unromantic work of changing the lives and possibilities for Indigenous people so that such a dream might be realised.

I will not recite the litany of inequalities that exist for my people. I know that people here are well informed.

Suffice to say, that while John Howard is feeling “relaxed and comfortable” with life as he experiences it in Australia, Aboriginal people are struggling to survive in conditions that are comparable with the worst of those in third world countries.

And so, as someone who is regarded as an Aboriginal leader, there are serious issues involved about when to be supportive of the system and when to challenge it.

In my role as host at the dinner I would not have dreamt of “spoiling” the evening.

And yet I was aware that in attending the opening ceremony, meeting me and seeing Cathy Freeman win, many international visitors could well have a completely false idea about what the realities of Aboriginal life in Australia are all about.

It is paradoxical that at the same time that these wondrous images of reconciliation and harmony are being beamed around the world, Australia is also (without much publicity at all) being censured by United Nations Committees for its poor human rights record!

And what is our Government’s response to such censure? Well... it is as sophisticated as you might expect – I think the exact response was: *“They can’t tell us what to do”*.

Now in the face of this level of thinking and response it is clear that we need to develop and sustain strong leadership in this country – particularly in relation to social justice.

I want to talk briefly now about what is involved in strong leadership and good governance for Indigenous people at this time in history.

- It is important to remember that Indigenous people are not all the same and do not speak with one voice on all issues. Therefore, to ask a question such as “What is the Indigenous point of view?” is about as useful as asking “What is the non-Indigenous point of view?”
- Yet it is also true that Indigenous people have much in common – including of course, living with the consequences of white settlement – dispossession, marginalisation, economic disadvantage, and so on.
- So communities need to be consulted about their needs and priorities – and processes need to be in place to hear the different voices. Indigenous people will withdraw from political participation if they know that only the interests of a few are being listened to.
- Then (and this is the crucial part) we need the structural support and systems in place to be able to reach these goals in our local contexts. In a paper that Mick Dodson recently wrote, he says, and I quote:

*Governance is not only about structures, processes and power; it is also about resources. Sound governance requires access to, and control over, financial, social, economic and*



*natural resources and technology. Without an effectively resourced capacity for governance, there is unlikely to be sustained community or regional development 1[1]*

- We don't need any more quick fixes and short term studies. As one Aboriginal health worker said to me recently: "If we get any more pilots we'll be able to join Qantas"!
- I think the phrase "capacity building" has become well used as jargon in recent times. But I cannot emphasise enough its importance for Indigenous communities.

One example of the need for capacity building is in responding to the crisis in family and domestic violence in some Aboriginal communities.

It is just **not** good enough for people to turn their backs on the problem and then cop out by saying it's an issue of self-determination.

Of course communities need self-determination in establishing their needs and goals but they aren't going to be able to fix major and entrenched social problems without the structural support and resources to achieve it.

I quote Dodson again here, when he says:

*Having good governance means being capable of future-oriented planning, problem solving, revising objectives, re-designing structures, and taking action. To do this governing bodies must be backed up by supportive institutions. No social group can simply rely on the goodwill of either its leaders or its citizens, or on their promises to do the right thing. Social groups need institutional mechanisms. These are the 'rules of the game'—both formal and informal—that regulate and delimit the behaviour and authority of individuals and groups 2[2]*

- And importantly, people of influence need to put Indigenous issues onto the agenda and persist in ensuring that they stay there. I'm afraid that the harsh reality is that there are not many votes to be had in Aboriginal affairs.

Yet we need leadership that will turn the situation around.

We are quite literally talking about the very survival of the nation's first peoples here.

New Zealand is making good progress with its reform agenda for Indigenous peoples and Canada has taken its commitment in this area very seriously and maturely.

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1[1] Mick Dodson and Diane Smith, *Governance for sustainable development: Strategic issues and principles for Indigenous Australian communities*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, 2003, p. 16.

2[2] *ibid*, p. 14.

In 1998 the Canadian Government released its policy about Indigenous people. It was called *Gathering Strength* and it was a response to a five-volume report of The Royal Commission on the Indigenous people of Canada .

*Gathering Strength* begins with a statement of Reconciliation that acknowledges the mistakes of the past. It includes a statement of renewal that expresses a vision of a shared future for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. And it outlines objectives and strategies for action.

It is a beautifully worded document. And I would like to read you an extract so that you can get a sense of the generosity of spirit that drives it.

*For thousands of years before this country was founded they [indigenous people] enjoyed their own form of government. Diverse, vibrant aboriginal nations had ways of life rooted in fundamental values concerning their relationships to the Creator, the environment, and each other, in the role of Elders as the living memory of their ancestors, and in their responsibilities as custodians of the lands, waters and resources of their homelands. .... Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices.... We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of aboriginal people and nations.*<sup>3[3]</sup> [End quote]

The statement goes on to highlight particular issues such as the physical and sexual abuse that many of their Indigenous people suffered.

And it concludes with clear statements about the building of a shared future which avoids the mistakes of the past, involves all citizens, and which enhances the collective identities of Indigenous peoples.

What is even more impressive is that the statement is supported by significant actions.

Take for example, the issue of sexual abuse of children, a topic which is unfortunately very topical at the moment, especially in Adelaide.

The Canadian Government established that sexual abuse was widespread, that it commonly occurred in institutions where Indigenous people were taken, and that it happened to many thousands of people over decades.

It therefore provided \$350 million dollars as part of the *Gathering Strength* Policy, to support community based healing initiatives for people who had been affected.

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<sup>3[3]</sup> Quoted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Social Justice Report 2000*, HREOC, p.144.

A number of programs have been developed. The titles of some of them will convey their intention.

For example:

- § Healing – community approaches
- § Developing and enhancing aboriginal capacities for healing processes
- § Honour and History – the creation of historical records — and the honouring of those people who never returned home (be it mentally, physically or emotionally).

I believe this speaks of a country that is taking its history on board in a mature and honest way.

Contrast this with John Howard on the topic of guilt about the Aborigines. I quote:

*Now I totally agree that they have been appallingly treated in the past. But I didn't do that. I won't feel guilty about it. But because we feel guilty we have these nonsenses such as treaties. And it is nonsense. I say let's forget the past....4[4]*

How about that for a mature, generous response!

We **cannot** as a matter of human rights – and as a matter of the reputation of this country internationally, allow the plight of Indigenous peoples to continue to deteriorate.

And as well as the broad political directions that are needed, there must also be action from individuals. Joan Kirner once said, and I quote:

*There is no such thing as being non-political. Just by making a decision to stay out of politics you are making the decision to allow others to shape politics and exert power over you. And if you are alienated from the current political system, then just by staying out of it you do nothing to change it, you simply entrench it.5[5]*

And so self-governance also relates to your own governance of your actions and positions. As the old slogan goes: *The personal is political.*

It is important to accept personal responsibility for change, no matter how small. Don't assume that someone else will do it. Don't be complacent. Even small things like refusing to laugh at a racist joke can make a difference.

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4[4] Quoted in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, July 17-18 2004, p.14

5[5] Joan Kirner at Women Into Power Conference, Adelaide, October 1994.

And don't be daunted by the size of the problem. As Margaret Mead once said: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

Reflect on your own behaviour and on the cultural practices or beliefs that you find confronting or difficult. It is healthier to name and discuss the issues that you find difficult, than it is to try and be saintly.

And importantly, while I'm thinking of slogans, maintain your rage (to borrow one from the Labor party this time!). Also maintain your hope, your optimism and, wherever possible, your sense of humour, because you'll need it at times!

I think it is very important as well, to take the time to talk to your colleagues about the sort of workplace culture and values you want to develop and how you are going to make it happen.

After all, there is no point in advocating for women to be in positions of leadership if all that they do in them is mirror the values and practices that currently exist. (This point could easily lead me to talk about Margaret Thatcher... but I'll resist going along that path... I think you take my point.)

And, as I said earlier, any women who challenge the status quo, will, as they say in footy parlance "be under the pump". So you will need to be supportive and strategic.

Also, remember to celebrate your successes. We are often well practised at worrying about what has to be done – without taking account of the positive things we have achieved. And so in your discussions remind yourselves of the good things too.

And finally, I want to say that despite my despair about the lack of progress for Indigenous people in this country, and my fury at the current Government's responses to the issue, I still have optimism.

It is the optimism of experiencing first hand, the goodwill of people on the ground. All over this country people are working for change in the conditions of Indigenous people.

This goodwill and commitment to justice needs leadership and political representation that it can trust and look to for strength.

People need leaders who have the courage to articulate and act on their principles.

I urge you all to put Indigenous rights at the top of **your** political agenda. And I wish you all the courage, strength and creativity to make a real difference for my people.

Thank you.

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## **Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)**

The forty-ninth session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will be held from 28 February to 11 March 2005 at UN Headquarters in New York. It is planned as an expanded session, encompassing: 1) A review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA/1995) and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly (also known as Beijing+5) entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"; and 2) Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls.

In addition to the expanded CSW session, (also known as Beijing+10) women worldwide will be noting 30 years since the first UN world conference on women, the World Conference for International Women's Year (IWY), and the parallel NGO conference, the IWY Tribune, both held in Mexico City, 1975. These landmark meetings inaugurated both a UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) and a series of conferences and NGO Forums that brought women and development issues to the centre of the global development agenda. (Source: IWTC Women's GlobalNet)

In this issue, CLW features some background information about the Fourth World Conference, the follow-up process to the Conference and the current Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).

### **Background Information on The Fourth World Conference on Women**

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China from 4-15 September 1995. The Conference took place at the Beijing International Convention Center (BICC) on Beichendong Road in the Chaoyang District in northern Beijing. It was attended by over 50,000 delegates.

Around the time of the Conference, it was believed that Women will have to wait at least 450 years before they are represented in equal numbers with men in the higher echelons of economic power. At the current rate of progress, they will reach equality with men in decision-making positions only around the year 2465, reports the US Fund for Feminist Majority. A United Nations study puts the date even farther away - around the year 2490!

### **What did the Conference achieve:**

- Agreement on a five-year action plan to enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women, improve their health, advance their education and promote their marital and sexual rights. The action plan set time-specific targets, committing nations to carry out concrete actions in such areas as health, education and legal reforms.
- Galvanized some 130 countries to announce new initiatives to carry out the action plan, including, in the USA, a \$1.6 billion programme to fight violence against women, and the formation of a President's Council on Women.
- Added a new urgency to providing women with greater legal protection. The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, often described as a Bill of Rights for women, has now been ratified by 163 countries (as of June 1999), up from 139 in May 1995.

Following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the General Assembly mandated the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to integrate into its programme a follow-up process to the Conference, regularly reviewing the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action and to develop its catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities.

The following list is the Commission's multi-year programme of aims that it hopes to deal with.

**Implementation of the Critical Areas of Concern  
(Multi-year programme of work for the Commission on the Status of Women for 2002 - 2006**

2002

- Eradicating poverty, including through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world
- Environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters: a gender perspective

2003

- Participation and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women
- Women's human rights and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

2004

- The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality
- Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

2005

- Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"
- Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

2006

- Enhanced participation of women and development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work.
- Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.

#### **Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)**

The multi-year programme of work for the Commission on the Status of Women for 2002-2006 calls for a "Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly" at its forty-ninth session in March 2005.

To prepare for the review and appraisal, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, as Secretariat to the Commission on the Status of Women, will draw on a variety of sources of information and statistics. These include the national action plans designed to implement the Platform for Action (and submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women in 1998 and 1999); reports submitted since 1995 by States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and information generated since 1995 during the review by the Commission on the Status of Women of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action.

To complement this information, the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the regional commissions, has prepared a questionnaire to compile information from Governments on major achievements and obstacles in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (September 1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (June 2000).

The information gathered through this questionnaire will be utilized in the review and appraisal processes at both regional and global levels. The results of this assessment will be compiled for submission to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session in March 2005. The deadline for responses from Governments to this questionnaire was **30 April 2004**.

In Part One of the Questionnaire, reporting States are invited to provide a brief analytical overview of their specific experiences in implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. This overall picture should highlight *major* achievements and obstacles encountered.

Part Two of the questionnaire focuses specifically on implementation in the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. Reporting states are encouraged to provide examples of achievements, including policy development, legislative change and programmes and projects which they have undertaken.

Part Three focuses on institutional development or those structures and measures countries have put in place to support promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

In Part Four respondents are invited to provide information on the remaining key challenges and constraints in the reporting States as well as any plans for future actions and initiatives to address these and to ensure full implementation of the Platform for Action in each of the critical areas of concern.

The English version of the questionnaire (in PDF format) is at:  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/2005Review/Questionnaire-E.PDF>

Source: UN Division for the Advancement for Women

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## **2004 - the 20th Anniversary of the Federal Sex Discrimination Act 1984**

Twenty years ago on 1 August 1984, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed. The Act has played a crucial role in promoting a greater acceptance of the need for equality between women and men.

The role of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner is to use the Act to:

- raise awareness on issues including sex discrimination, paid maternity leave and pay equity;



- run public education campaigns on issues such as sexual harassment; and
- contribute to landmark court cases that have furthered equality for women by, for instance, embedding anti-discrimination principles in the industrial and workplace relations system, advancing pay equity, extending understanding of discrimination against women on the basis of their family responsibilities and ensuring the rights of all women to access IVF and other forms of reproductive technology.

In 2000 Australia was ranked number one on the United Nations Development Programme Gender Development Index.

But if Australia is to remain at the forefront of gender issues and continue to set the global benchmark there remain important equality issues to address, such as:

- overcoming a significant and stagnant pay equity gap
- engaging men on work and families issues, and
- putting in place a universal system of paid maternity leave.

Pru Goward, Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, wants to hear from women and men around Australia about how we should celebrate the 20th anniversary of the *Sex Discrimination Act*, mark our achievements and focus on the challenges that lie ahead.

You can email your suggestions to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Sex Discrimination Act to [SDA20thanniversary@humanrights.gov.au/](mailto:SDA20thanniversary@humanrights.gov.au)

Some suggestions offered by the Commission for how your organisation can mark this day are:

- Inviting a prominent woman to address your organisation or local area e.g. A local female member of parliament or a leading local female figure
- organising a morning or afternoon tea, lunch, picnic or walk
- Making a video or compiling a book on the history of women in your organisation or local area
- Getting together with the women in your organisation or local area for a women's film night.
- Organising a photograph/essay competition around the theme of "Twenty years since the Sex Discrimination Act: How far we have come, where we have got to go?" or any women's issues
- Committing your organisation or local area to supporting a local or national or global women's issue
- Raising funds in support of this issue. You may host a movie night or organise a raffle.

Source: [humanrights.gov.au](http://humanrights.gov.au)

## **A Tribute to Wendy Weeks**

This is a special Tribute to Wendy Weeks by the Australian virtual Centre for Leadership for Women (CLW). I interviewed Wendy Weeks for CLW's Glass Ceiling Program in 2002. As a Tribute to Wendy, below is a link to that interview as well as a brief bio in her own words.

Weeks had a long involvement with feminist theory and practice, women-friendly social policy and women-specific and other community services. She taught social work at Mc Master University, Canada; at Phillip Institute of Technology (now RMIT University) and at The University of Melbourne. She was committed to sound organisational and industrial practices, and to social justice, including gender and racial justice. Only three weeks ago, Wendy formerly retired from the University of Melbourne.

## **A Tribute to Wendy Weeks**



**Wendy Weeks - BA, DipSocStud, MA(McMaster)**

### **Biography by Wendy Weeks**

"I was born in the 1940s and had the great benefit of loving parents, and in particular a mother who was committed to girls' education. At MLC (Methodist Ladies College), where I was a scholarship girl, leadership was fostered in an all-female environment. As a young woman I became active in church youth groups, and learned formal meeting procedures in the statewide Methodist Youth Fellowship. At University, where I studied Arts and Social Work in a predominantly female profession, there were opportunities to be editor of the student association newsletter and be active in student affairs. I married at 21 and in the following decade bore two sons.

Moving to Canada to live in 1970 led to my involvement with the Canadian Women's Movement. I started to see leadership as more collective, and began to be active in feminist organisations, where leadership was shared and passed around. When my youngest son was two I returned to part time work, and took six years to complete a higher degree amid family life and activism. In 1982 I returned to Australia and spent the next decade in social work tertiary educational administration. After three years as a head of department I stepped 'out and down' to do more research, writing and connect more with feminist community-based organisations. As one poked one's head through the 'glass ceiling' it seemed to me to be both tough and a bit lonely!

During the 1990s I have convened a women's studies research unit at the University of Melbourne, which has fostered a lot of women's higher degrees and research. It has been great to see women claim their intellectual capacities and make contributions with their work: a very socially conscious form of community leadership. I also learned how to write and edit books, which I have enjoyed immensely: ***Women Working Together: lessons from feminist women's services*** (Longman Cheshire, 1994); co-editor of three editions of ***Issues Facing Australian Families: human services respond*** (1991, 1995 and 2000, Pearsons Education) and co author with Tony Dalton, Mary Draper and John Wiseman of ***Making Social Policy in Australia*** (Allen and Unwin, 1996).

I am currently an Associate Professor in the University of Melbourne. My local activities include having been a member of the Victorian Community Council Against Violence and other community committees. I am presently a new member of the Committee of Management of WHIN (Women's Health in the North). In 2001 I completed a study for the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV), and also was pleased to be invited to present some research papers in Norway. I am currently very interested in and concerned about the situation of refugees and asylum seekers, and the development of international human rights."

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Wendy Weeks' **research interests** included: Women and Social Work Practice; Feminist Approaches to Social Policy Analysis; Women's Services; Family/Work-place Policy Issues; Community Services Policy and Delivery; Women's Paid and Unpaid Labour in Community Services, Violence Against Women Policies and Programs.

Wendy Weeks' **recent publications** included:

Wendy Weeks, Lesley Hoatson & Jane Dixon (eds), (2003). *Community Practices in Australia*, Pearson Education Australia, ISBN 1-74091-033-8.

Wendy Weeks, "Women: Developing Feminist Practice in Women's Services", Chapter 7 in Allen J., Pease B. & Briskman L., (eds), (2003). *Critical Social Work - an Introduction to Theories and Practices*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 107-123.

Wendy Weeks, "Towards a Gendered and Anti-Racist Professionalism", Chapter 3 in Lund L. (ed), (2002). Professionalisation of Social Work - Same Concepts in Different Praxis? Pomor Project, Norway, pp. 41-67.

Wendy Weeks, "Access and Equity in Services against Sexual Violence", (2002). Women Against Violence, 11, 22-34.

Wendy Weeks & Devaki Monani, (2002) "Expanding our Horizons: Understanding the Complexity of Violence Against Women", Women Against Violence, 11, 66-71.

Wendy Weeks, (2002). Cultural Diversity and Services Against Sexual Violence. CASA House, Melbourne, ISBN 0-95855-953-8.

Deb Walsh, Wendy Weeks, Anna Moo, Keran Howe & Marg D'Arcy, (2001). "Domestic Violence in Pregnancy", Women Against Violence. July 2001 (10): 32-40.

Wendy Weeks, (2001). "Hard Won Survival: Women-Specific Services in Victoria". Just Policy, 21, 37-45.

Wendy Weeks & Marjorie Quinn, (2000). Issues Facing Australian Families: Human Services Respond, Third Edition. Pearson Education Australia, ISBN 0-58281-173-2.

Wendy Weeks, "Women's Citizenship: Back in the Family?", in McMahon A., Thomson J., Williams C., (ed), (2000). Understanding the Australian Welfare State, 1-283. Macmillan Education Australia Pty. Ltd., ISBN 0-86458-135-1.

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## **Interview with Associate Professor Wendy Weeks by CLW for the Glass Ceiling Program 2002**

### **Why do you think the 'glass ceiling' exists for women in Australia?**

The Australian state was historically developed and constructed with a very strong division of labour that located women as wives and mothers in families. Men were head of the family and household, as well as the expected and 'normal' participants in public life. In the 1880s it was inappropriate for women even to call a public meeting, and many arguments were mounted to try to keep them out of adult suffrage. The Harvester judgement of 1908 was a landmark industrial decision because it raised the possibility of wages being set according to need. But it also entrenched the idea that wages should cover the needs of a man, his wife and three children. The 'concept of the Family Wage' became a plank in the growing Australian welfare state.

Such structural and cultural arrangements have proven very hard to change. Technically women and men have had equal pay since the early 1970s, but we know that women's wages and earnings are substantially less than men's – even now.

Technically now women have 'equal opportunity', but as Clare Burton's work on 'merit' showed, even 'merit' is heavily imbued with cultural assumptions and expectations. This particularly applies in recruitment and selection for leadership positions.

Emily's List has been remarkably successful in the Australian Labor Party in demonstrating that women are interested and willing to stand for political preselection, and can be preselected in the 1990s. But from all political parties there are stories of women being asked to support male candidates, and the struggle to have 'merit' recognised has proven considerable.

The 'suitability' of men for leadership in political and public organisational life continues to be widely supported, and women in those positions continue to be scrutinised as 'tokens', with every error they make being heavily counted against them, as illustrations of women's 'lesser suitability'. Now – in 2002 after a decade of backlash against women - I think there are contradictory public views. At the level of rhetoric few people would deny that women have made and can make a major contribution to public life. However, co-existent with the general 'formal' acceptance of equal rights, there are strong currents of opinion which continue to expect women to put husbands and children, and male organisational leaders, first and foremost, rather than directly contribute as leaders.

### **Do you think that the barrier is confined to any particular groups of women?**

The cultural barriers affect all women, but high socio-economic status, and high social class connections can be a great benefit for women who aspire to positions of public leadership.

Cumberland's 1999 study of women local councillors showed that women who seek to become local councillors are typically in their 40s, occupied either with home duties or in part-time work, and are overwhelmingly of anglosaxon origin. This is of particular concern because, for many years, local government had the highest representation of women – steadily 20%. Young women, Aboriginal women and immigrant women were markedly absent.

Organisational scholars, such as Deborah Sheppard from Canada, found that pregnant women were seen as inappropriate in workplaces. This means that the federal review of pregnancy discrimination has touched on an internationally important area of discrimination. Other authors have identified discrimination against lesbian women.

Indigenous women have been active in their own Indigenous organisations. Carol Martin's election in 2000 to the West Australian parliament marked the first time an Aboriginal woman was elected to a State parliament. Women from minority ethnic communities are rare in elected politics, in spite of 40% of Australians being born overseas, or having parents who were born overseas.

**How prevalent do you think this barrier is in Australia?**

I think the culture of the glass ceiling (which is still associated with the belief that women's primary place is in the home) is deeply ingrained in the structure and culture of Australian society and is visible in parliament, government and non-government organisations and the trade union movement.

**Are there any strategies that can be used to overcome this barrier?**

The Affirmative Action legislation of 1986 was a very important piece of legislation. Unfortunately the committee decided to avoid looking at part-time work, and emphasised women in full-time employment, in spite of part-time work being a major way in which Australian women participate in the paid labour force - especially when they have children.

The Equal opportunity legislation in each State and Territory has also been an important step.

For these strategies to be successful they have to be implemented. This is where cultural change is important: changing attitudes and practices are necessary. That is, people have to widely believe something for it to be supported, accepted and implemented systematically.

**Are there any networks that women can turn to for assistance in how to handle the problems associated with this phenomena?**

Yes, there are national, statewide women's associations and many organisational women's groups which have initiated change, and constantly monitor and further develop the conditions for equality.

There are many national women's lobby associations which are active campaigners for equality for women. For example, WEL (Women's Electoral Lobby); the National Council of Women; the Business and Professional Women's Associations; CSMC – Council for Single Mothers and their Children. There are women's organisations which speak for Indigenous women and Immigrant women. WWDA – Women with Disabilities, Australia – speak out for the human and civil rights of women with disabilities.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) under the current leadership of Sharon Burrows, and previously Jennie George have advocated for better and more family friendly workplace conditions for women , originally adopted by the ACTU in 1987 as the Working Women's Charter.

Many workplaces and local communities have women's groups to support women and to campaign for change.

**Have you experienced the Glass ceiling? If yes, what effect did it have on you? If no, why do you feel that you never encountered it?**

Yes: in different ways at different stages of my life. When I married, in 1965, I was a new permanent Commonwealth public servant. As the Marriage Bar was in place until 1966, I was retired from the permanent to the temporary workforce at marriage. This reminds me that the 'Glass Ceiling' applies to all women in the labour force – not only senior women. So preparation for 'not belonging' in the 'serious' workforce begins early for women.

Later (in Canada) when I worked part-time with young children, I was ineligible to participate in the superannuation scheme, only available for full-time workers. Over my life time this is an economic cost. The assumption was that husbands would provide for women economically.

Later still, when in fact I was a Head of Department and Acting- head of one of nine Schools in a large tertiary institution, I recall often sitting at Academic Board mainly among men. The only other women present were the minute secretary and sometimes a woman student representative. I was welcomed and listened to, but in Kanter's terms was clearly a 'token', that is I was 'different' and certainly felt the difference.

As Canadian research has found, many women have stepped down from senior positions near to the Glass Ceiling, just as women have also left non-traditional occupations. I also chose to 'step down' to a lower rank in another institution. This cost me thousands of dollars a year for some years.

Was this choice? Yes and no. In short, the climate of male dominated organisations develops a male-oriented culture which isolates women, and casts them in the role of 'other' and 'different'. It is not the structure of the workplace which is really defined as 'the problem'. Many women do not find the culture of public leadership, and the way organisations and parliament are organised, meets their needs to also have time for family and friends. Furthermore, 'femininity' is seen as contradictory to competence: competent women are not seen to be 'feminine', and so they may become personally less attractive to men. Perhaps they are a threat. Perhaps men feel stronger when they are in a socially stronger position. Many women have wished they, too, had a 'wife' to care for them when they were working hard!

Personally, as well as lost income, lost power and status, the major effect of the glass ceiling and its associated culture has been related to me losing interest in the 'ladder' of traditional success. I became more respectful of the other ways women have lead, in families and communities, while making time for personal life and the human beings around them. I became less impressed with or interested in 'the rat race' or the 'ladder to success'. I joined many other women in setting social goals and trying to live them out.

### **What other barriers do you consider to be significant for women in the workplace?**

As I have suggested above, the glass ceiling is just one part of the culture of gender power relations which keeps the majority of positions of power being filled by men. Women are better educated than men as a gender (as measured by formal educational outcomes), so formal education is not a barrier.

In the mid-nineteenth century medical science thought women had smaller brains and therefore less ability. Fortunately women's achievements have made this view untenable! Yet the structural barriers to women making their full social contribution continue. Until workplaces are designed to be more family friendly I expect that many women, especially during the years they have children at home, will be too busy to bother about senior positions. Until care arrangements are much more accessible and low-cost, I expect it will be predominantly women who care for sick and elderly relatives, rather than developing their own careers.

### **What are your perceptions of the Glass Ceiling internationally and the methods used to dismantle it?**

Social class appears to be one factor in women's leadership opportunities and this appears to be influential in women in developing countries achieving public leadership. Some women have broken through the gender power barriers to significant heights: Mrs Ghandi was Prime Minister of India, and Margaret Thatcher and Mary Robinson have led their country's governments.

The international strategies are similar to those adopted in Australia: legislation and policy development, associated with cultural change strategies. Many western countries have introduced Anti-Discrimination as well as Affirmative action legislation. The United Nations adoption of conventions( such as CEDAW, the convention against discrimination) and platforms for women have been important international benchmarks for national women's movements to use in their lobbying within nation states. Perhaps the struggles over women's sexual and reproductive rights are among the most uneven: abortion is not widely legislated, nor is access to contraception always available. Sex selection testing, and subsequent abortion, is used to favour male children in some countries. Trafficking of girl children and women into the sex industry is an international social problem, as is violence against women. Such issues diminish



the importance of 'the glass ceiling' experienced by Western women, being much harsher practices of unequal gender power relations.

**In your OSW speech, Women's Leadership in Public Life, you said a major challenge is to diversify and democratise women's leadership so that women's leadership is not only for "able-bodied white women" but also for 'Indigenous women, women from minority ethnic communities, women with disabilities and single parent women'. Do you think that the perception that women who break through the Glass ceiling are leaders is warranted?**

Statistically my claim is supported by the predominantly 'able-bodied white' characteristics of senior women in business, parliament and other forms of public leadership.

**How would you like to see those women who have overcome the Glass Ceiling Barrier assist others gain leadership positions?**

Some women who cross the glass ceiling and associated barriers for women seem to forget the centuries of women's campaigning which paved the way for their opportunities. This is a pity. I would like such women to remember the history of women's struggles, and honour this tradition and history. Ideally I would like to see an accurate and gendered history taught in our schools which told the truth about women's lives, experiences and abilities. Many historical accounts still read as though men made history, and women continue to have their achievements unrecorded and under-celebrated. It would help us all if this distortion were corrected, as it would generate a culture of respect for women as well as men.

I would like to see senior women and men really acknowledge those who do the work, and acknowledge women's social contribution- not only as leaders.

I would like to see senior women continue to demand that adequate and affordable child care services are available (even after their own children are grown); and to demand family friendly working hours and arrangements, rather than feel they have to conform to existing practices in order to be taken seriously.

I would like to see women supporting women leaders, rather than cutting them down as 'tall poppies'. Women leaders would then feel and be stronger.

Mentoring happens a lot, but often women in senior positions are so busy with their work demands and juggling act of family and caring work that they have little energy left for mentoring more junior women. Rather than ask more of them, we all need to be supporting them, and campaigning for the conditions which make gender friendly workplaces and organisations more of a reality for all of us.

## **1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005**

The first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly in 1901 to the Swiss Jean Henri Dunant, founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Frenchman Frédéric Passy, founder of the International League for Peace in France. The Prize has since been awarded 84 times, either to private persons or to institutions that have distinguished themselves and received worldwide recognition for their commitment to the cause of peace.

The first woman to receive the prize, in 1905, was the Austrian Bertha von Suttner for her activities as honorary president of the Permanent International Peace Office. The eminent role of women, their strategies for sustainable peace work, their constant and courageous actions for their families and villages, their country and their culture, are not yet acknowledged as peace-promoting.

In March 2003, after intensive conceptual work, Dr. Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, Member of the Swiss Parliament (National Council) and of the Council of Europe, with Maren Haartje of Swisspeace, started the project entitled, 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005.

"In the year 2005 the Nobel Peace Prize should be awarded to 1000 women for their untiring pursuit of peace. We want above all to profile such courageous women, to throw light on their lives and work by means of films, photos and other documentation.

The story behind the idea: As a member of the Council of Europe, I have been visiting refugee camps in various crisis and war areas for many years now – in Azerbaijan, Armenia, in Bosnia and Kosova, in Serbia, Georgia and Chechnya ...

Everywhere I meet women who perform reconstruction and peace work in extremely dangerous surroundings. They manage the difficult task of obtaining food and medicine for those in need. They look for missing persons and struggle to acquire better living conditions for refugees. They give schooling to orphans in order to distract them from their war experiences and ghastly memories and to bring structure and courage into these children's daily lives. They unequivocally condemn torture, murder and abductions, and they document with clandestine photos the war parties' brutalities. They take to the streets and, against the will of the authorities, hold vigils of protest in public places. It is women who are victims of war. It is women who weep for the dead, they are the survivors who press for a return to peace. Courageous and resolute, and without regard for personal safety, they demand peace.

My contact with these women and the awareness that their work leaves scarcely a trace outside their sphere of activity preoccupied me incessantly. I realised that people from countries at peace must render visible the concrete work for peace done by women. Thus the idea 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 gradually took form. The fact that since 1901 the Nobel Peace Prize for the recognition of peace efforts and courage in war situations has been awarded mainly to (states)men, but only 10 times to women, deepened my conviction that this situation must be remedied. The widespread enthusiastic reaction to this idea encouraged me to launch the project."

*President of the Association 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005, Bern, mid-April, 2003*

### **The Criteria**

Nineteen women from every region of the world are the coordinators responsible for seeking and nominating the 1000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005. They come from diverse cultures with varying biographies, are between 30 and 79 years of age, and work, for example, as human rights and women's rights activists, physicians, journalists, researchers, and trainers; most important of all, they are integrated in networks that extend beyond borders.

The coordinators have agreed that at least one woman from every country and area in the world should be nominated. For the selection of the other 775 candidates, population density as well as the insecurity and gender situation in specific areas of the world will be considered.

In addition the project team has specifically decided to nominate mainly unknown women at the grass-roots level, without however forgetting to include more prominent women. The following figures were agreed upon:

- 35% of the women nominated should be involved at the grass-roots level (clan, ethnic group, neighbourhood, village, town)
- 25% of the women should be involved at the sub-national level
- 20% of the women should be involved at the national level
- 10% should work at a regional (cross-border) level
- 10% international

The women of peace should also be involved in different fields of activity. The project team envisions at least four:

- Human rights and political change for justice (racism, identity, politics, democratisation, etc.)
- Basic needs, alleviating poverty, social and economic justice
- Gender-based and domestic violence and discrimination
- Wars, violent and armed conflicts (refugees, etc.)

The public nominating procedure closed at the end of May 2004. In August 04, the coordinators will have examined the nominations and, together with a regional advisory committee or national committees, and made a pre-selection. In October 2004, the project team (coordinators, board members, and administrators) will examine the recommended pre-selection. In February 2005, the Association 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005, together with a team of international experts, will officially nominate the 1000 women in Oslo.

Of course it is not certain that these 1000 women will win the Nobel Peace Prize. But even if they do not, they and their achievements must not sink unnoticed into oblivion.

Source: [www.1000peacewomen.org](http://www.1000peacewomen.org)

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## **Labor's women's policy scored attention, but will it help at poll time?**

**Meaghan Shaw**

The Age 24 July 2004

Women's policies? Both parties had them at the previous federal election but they barely rated a mention. Even the idea leaves veteran pollster Rod Cameron bemused: "I haven't heard the term 'women's policies' or 'women's issues' for many years. It's irrelevant now."

Yet this week Labor launched its women's policy and scored front-page headlines, opinion pieces and letters to the editor.

Cameron calls it "the last gasp of the ageing femocrats who still delight in having a women's policy. It's being done for form only, to keep the Joan Kirners and the Anne Summers happy," he says. "It doesn't cut any ice in the wider electorate. There's such a process of convergence going on that there are no women's issues."

But Labor's launch struck a chord. Perhaps it was partly due to the "extreme makeover" of leader Mark Latham from anti-feminist to women's warrior.

"I know from personal experience that women's issues are now men's issues," Latham said over the noise of children playing at a Sydney kindergarten. "Real equality for women means we also need to help men play a greater role in raising children and managing the home. Men need work and family rights as well, delivered through a modern industrial relations system."

Labor's policy is aimed at helping women in five areas: personal safety, work and family choices, access to the health system, education opportunities and status. While parts were repackaged policies, such as improving Medicare, other parts were directed solely at women.

A Labor government would speak out on violence against women and fund a national advocacy group on the issue. It would have a pay equity fund - a move that has concerned business - worth about \$1.4 million over four years. The fund would help unions and employer groups meet the costs of equal-pay cases in industrial tribunals.

The party says it would help women return to work part-time after giving birth and convert from long-term casual employment to permanent status. And it would aim to protect women's rights and ensure legal equality by rejecting any attempt to water down the Sex Discrimination Act - which the Government has tried to do to ban IVF treatment for single women and allow male-only teacher scholarships.

Labor's policy, called "Choice and Opportunity", was well received by women leaders and academics, although they want to see more details and costings.

The Government has yet to release its women's policy. But at the previous election, its policy, with the familiar sounding name "Opportunity and Choice", also had a plan to combat domestic violence and sexual assault. It looked at education, training and health. It was committed to a flexible workplace system that helped working parents, and it claimed to have already strengthened equal opportunity laws.

The rhetoric sounds the same: the reality could be somewhat different. Latham has yet to firmly establish his feminist credentials - he once called a female journalist a "skanky ho" and dismissed former Victorian premier Joan Kirner as a "feminist rights advocate" obsessed with a "rights-only agenda".

But Labor has a strong track record on women's issues under the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments. And Latham is close to many women in caucus, including Nicola Roxon and Julia Gillard, who sought a vow from him the night he became leader to launch a women's policy.

John Howard is different. Author and former head of the Office of the Status of Women under Labor Anne Summers says he has a traditional view of women. "He thinks that women should be in the home and he's used every arm of policy to try and achieve that," she said.

Women's Electoral Lobby spokeswoman Sarah Maddison said the Government's track record had been "appalling". "This is why Labor is looking good on this issue. It's hard to imagine any group of politicians doing a worse job for women than the Coalition has done over the last few years," she said.

"Women's status in Australia has gone backwards dramatically since 1996 in a number of ways."

WEL was one of about 30 women's groups to lose all Government funding under the Howard Government.

The Government also slashed staff and funding of the Office of the Status of Women and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and scrapped units tracking women's statistics, pay and employment.

Maddison says such moves explain why women's issues have not been higher up the political agenda - because women's voices have been silenced.

Other issues important to women are yet to be addressed. Both parties have committed to a baby payment instead of formal paid maternity leave.

Businesswoman Eve Mahlab says neither has looked at women living in poverty in retirement.

And the issue of child-care affordability is still raging-hot. The Government has committed to more places for out-of-school-hours care but not long-day child care, while Labor is expected to announce its policy soon.

Rod Cameron says that in the 1970s it was useful to highlight "women's issues" because there was a gender gap, with Labor seen as too "blokey" for many.

"These days, whether it's education or health or some so-called women's issues, or whether it's industrial relations or economic management - the so-called men's issues - they're the same now."

But Summers, who advised former prime minister Paul Keating before the 1993 election, said special appeals to women pushed Labor over the line in the 1983 and 1993 polls.

Rebecca Huntley, who is on Labor's national policy committee, has written a thesis on the gender gap and Labor in federal polls. She says demographics of the gap are hard to chart.

"But the Labor Party has shown time and time again if it does craft its policies in a particular way, the women's vote can be part of a coalition of votes that help them get across the line," she says. "It can't hurt."

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## **The Courage of Afghanistan's Malalai Joya**

"At the Loya Jirga's (Grand Assembly) convention to debate Afghanistan's new constitution in December 2003, Malalai Joya, a 25-year old female social worker from the rural province of Farah, said what no-one up to now has dared say: that many of the Jirga's chairmen were criminals who had destroyed the country and instead of being given influential positions in the Jirga, they should be tried for their crimes in courts.

A furor ensued with many in the mujahideen-(holy warrior)-dominated Jirga shouting "death to Communists". Joya's microphone was cut-off and she was temporarily removed from the room 'for her own safety'.

It was an extraordinarily brave stand by Joya. Many Afghans share her sentiments yet most are too afraid to voice them in public. With death threats received, Joya herself is under UN protection for the duration of the Jirga.

The 'actions' she was referring to took place largely during the reign of the Jihadis (most religiously conservative mujahideen) from 1992-6. The Jihadis, notorious for throwing acid in the faces of women, slicing off their breasts and other atrocious acts, gained power during the 1980's when the U.S saw fit to fund, arm and train them in the fight against Soviet occupation. During their rule, they terrorized the civilian population with blanket rocket shellings, rape, torture and killing, to such a degree that when the Taliban emerged in 1996, they were initially welcomed.

After the fall of the Taliban these same Jehadi leaders, including Buhruddin Rabbani, Abdul Sayyaf, and members of the Northern Alliance, have re-emerged, with disastrous consequences for Afghans, especially women."

**(Znet.com, Los Angeles Times, Sydney Morning Herald, December 29, 2003 by Meena Nanji)**

Below is an article that appeared in the Daily Telegraph in UK on 14 July 2004 about Malalai Joya and the continuing threats she faces for voicing her views.

### **One woman's words defy might of Afghan warlords**

By Hamida Ghafour UK Daily Telegraph 14 July 2004

The most powerful warlords in the country call her a communist and in Afghanistan that is enough to seal a death warrant.

But Malalai Joya, 25, who runs an orphanage and health clinic, refuses to give up her crusade to rid the country of what she calls "warlords and criminals" involved in drug trafficking, land seizures, rape, and looting of houses.

"Our government can't recognise that we have people with dark backgrounds," she said in Kabul where she has been in hiding after her home in the western province of Farah was ransacked by soldiers.

"These people should be taken to court. The destruction of this country can speak for itself. The walls, the houses, the children, the people can recognise their enemies."

Miss Joya has become feted as a heroine in a country where ordinary people live under the rule of the gun. She speaks at rallies, inspires debates on radio talk shows and even has a website dedicated to her called "Defend Malalai Joya!". Her fame has gained her audiences with President Hamid Karzai and his cabinet.

This week, armed with petitions and video testimony of ordinary Afghans documenting human rights abuses in her province, she and a delegation of 50 tribal elders managed to persuade Mr Karzai to dismiss the governor of Farah, a former Taliban commander. "I am so happy he is finally gone," she said.

Miss Joya became famous during the constitutional loya jirga last January when, as an elected delegate, she gave a speech in front of the gathering of tribal elders against the warlords. Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, an influential mujahideen leader, called her a communist and infidel.

The United Nations gave her four armed bodyguards because it was feared she would be killed. She has refused to keep quiet even though her clinic and orphanage have been attacked, and she receives daily death threats and warnings of suicide attacks against her family.

"I have seen too many sorrows and I have no fear in my soul anymore,"

she said. "My relatives told me to come to Kabul because they were scared for my life.

"I'm sleeping in a different house every night and I have cars with blacked out windows following me everywhere."

Mr Karzai is facing his own showdown with the nine most powerful commanders.

Between them, they control approximately 60,000 soldiers and he has said they present a greater threat to Afghanistan's security than the Taliban insurgents.



Yesterday Mr Karzai ordered the nine to report to Kabul and threatened to punish them if they refused to give up their private armies.

Among the commanders summoned to Kabul are Ismael Khan, who is also the governor of the western province of Herat, Mohammad Atta, the Armani-wearing northern leader, and the whisky-loving Abdul Rashid Dostum.

Commanders have been reluctant to give up their armies because of doubts about the long-term commitment of the outside world, said Hafiz Mansoor, editor of the newspaper Mujahideen's Message. "America could decide after their elections that they don't want to commit soldiers and resources. We are not going to get support forever. Then who would defend the country if the Taliban came back?" he asked.

In any case, Mr Karzai's threats are empty. His national army has only 10,000 soldiers and officers and the Americans are unwilling to back him for fear of sparking a civil war, said a senior United Nations official.

"They are not willing to rock the boat because they don't want Afghanistan in the news before the American elections," said the official. By the time of the Afghan presidential election on Oct 9, 60 per cent of the militia groups have to be disarmed as part of a

£97 million UN programme. So far, only 18 per cent have given up their guns.

The programme has become such a farce that as the UN tries to disarm military units, senior figures in the defence ministry who have their own armies order the commanders to re-recruit men and weapons.

"If the government is not tough on these people maybe they will lose their credibility," said Miss Joya.

"Those people will be in parliament and the country will revert to bloodshed. Maybe it will be me they kill, but there will be others whose voices will be louder than mine."

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### **World Media Leaders Launch Aids Initiative**

"If there is anything we have learned in the two decades of this epidemic, it is that in the world of AIDS, silence is death", United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan told leaders of more than 20 of the world's leading media organizations, during a round-

table meeting at Headquarters launching the Global Media AIDS Initiative at the start of this year.

Participants included leaders from the BBC, China Central TV, Discovery Communications, Inc., MTV Networks International, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, Viacom Inc., and Black Entertainment TV.

The Secretary-General told the gathering that experts now agreed HIV/AIDS was the worst epidemic humanity had ever faced. Its impact had become a devastating obstacle to development. Yet, among the public at large, there was still a profound lack of knowledge and awareness about the pandemic, especially among young people. Leaders of the media had the power and the reach to disseminate the information people needed to protect themselves from the disease.

Media leaders could create an enabling environment where individuals were free to explore ways of keeping themselves safe and changing their behaviour as necessary, he said. Media leaders could designate the fight against HIV/AIDS as a corporate priority and could dedicate airtime to public service messages. Prominent news coverage of the epidemic could be provided to help ensure it was kept high on the national and global political agenda.

"Together, the UN family and the media can build an alliance with an ambitious agenda: to inform, to educate, to entertain people as a means to giving them the knowledge and incentive they need to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS", Annan said in conclusion.

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### **UN Experts Say Gender Equality Essential to Fighting Spread of AIDS in Asia**

Asian-Pacific political leaders have a brief period to save millions of people from HIV infection, but among their biggest challenges are gender inequality, which weakens a woman's defences against an HIV-positive man, along with stigma, which discourages people from finding out their HIV status, United Nations experts said today.

"In South Asia women are more vulnerable both socially and economically. They have less opportunity to protect themselves," Dr. Nafis Sadik, UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, said during the satellite session she chaired at the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

According to a report from the Asia Pacific Leadership Forum on HIV/AIDS and Development, about 1 million people in the region were infected with HIV in 2003 alone, bringing the number living with the virus to more than 7 million.

Leaders need to break the silence encouraging stigma and discrimination and not only speak out but take effective action on sensitive issues, the report says.

"In a society where there are religious, social, cost and other constraints, it's even more vital to have political leadership," said Anand Panyarachun, former Prime Minister of Thailand and chairman of the Leadership Forum steering committee.

Though India's HIV prevalence is only between 0.4 per cent and 1.3 per cent, it has the largest number of people living with HIV outside South Africa - an estimated 5.1 million in 2003, the report said. Meanwhile serious epidemics have broken out in several territories and states.

Experts at the satellite session pointed out that low condom use in South Asia is a major hurdle in AIDS prevention, while indicators suggested a close link between the poor status of women in patriarchal societies and their vulnerability to HIV. Poverty, discrimination and violence against women and girls have been fuelling the epidemic.

"The needs of vulnerable groups, including women and young people, continue to be neglected throughout Asia," said Kathleen Cravero, Deputy Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). "Until women and girls have equal access to effective HIV prevention and treatment services, there is little hope to beat the epidemic."

Elsewhere in South Asia, warning signs of future HIV outbreaks from pervasive injecting drug use and sex work show that even low-prevalence countries could see epidemics surge suddenly, the experts said.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which is chairing the UNAIDS Committee of Co-Sponsoring Organizations, has pledged to spotlight the impact on the pandemic of injecting drug use, imprisonment, human trafficking and conflict.

"Drugs and crime are important, yet often neglected, factors in the evolution of the HIV/AIDS pandemic," said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa, who is also attending the Bangkok conference.

Meanwhile, at UN Headquarters in New York, spokesman Stephane Dujarric told journalists that the Global Media AIDS Initiative, a collaborative group of the world's most powerful media launched last January by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, announced that it would begin new HIV-focused public education efforts in Russia, India, China, Indonesia and the United States.

He quoted UNAIDS Executive Director Dr. Peter Piot as saying, "The coming together of media organizations to harness their collective power to fight against AIDS is one of the most important partnerships forged to date."

UN 13 July 2004

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## **Adult Learners' Week around the world**

### **Background**

When governments met in Jomtien for the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, among the goals set were universal access to and completion of primary education, and reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to one half its 1990 level by 2000. Ten years later, governments met in Dakar and still 113 million children have no access to primary education and 880 million adults, the majority of them women, are illiterate.

It is against this background that International Adult Learners' Week takes place.

### **What is International Week?**

The move to create a wider celebration of adult learning began with the American Association for the Advancement of Education (AAAE) in the late 1980s. The US week focused on a Congressional Breakfast for outstanding adult learners backed by an activities pack for AAAE members.

Adult Learners' Week commenced in the United Kingdom in 1992. Australia, along with South Africa and Jamaica, picked up on the success of Adult Learners' Week and the first Australian ALW was organised in 1995 to promote and encourage lifelong learning

When UNESCO's General Conference in November 1999 approved the International Adult Learners' Week, a larger dimension came into being. The aim is to bridge the activities during the national adult learners' weeks, to learn from the experiences of other countries, to share the celebration with people in other contexts and to amplify the cooperation between agencies active in the promotion of adult learning at international level.

Since then, organisers in more than 40 countries (see below) have organised or are preparing learning festivals. These not only raise awareness of the need to create more opportunities for adults to learn, but celebrate the efforts and achievements of the thousands who find the courage to 'take that first step back'.

The week in Australia was coordinated from the beginning by the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE), which changed its name in November 1998 to Adult Learning Australia.

The breadth of supporting organisations has grown over this time and Adult Learners' Week now includes events and activities from the community adult education, health, aged care, museums and environmental sectors.

**This year's Adult Learners' Week runs from 1 - 8 September with the theme *Sharing between the generations*.**

**For more information on Adult Learners' Week and how you and your organisation can participate, see: <http://www.adultlearnersweek.org/index.html>**

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