

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**OFFICIAL LAUNCH, AFRICAN WOMEN'S COUNCIL PART OF RACISM REVISITED:
ANTI-RACISM LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICE – NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON RACISM**
KIM BEAZLEY LECTURE THEATRE, MURDOCH UNIVERSITY, PERTH
19 MARCH 2010

Chancellor, Murdoch University
Mr Terry Budge

Vice-Chancellor
Professor John Yovich

Deputy Vice-Chancellor - Academic
Professor Jan Thomas

President, African Women's Council
& Equal Opportunity and Social Justice Manager, Murdoch University
Dr Casta Tungaraza

Distinguished scholars, speakers and guests

Ladies and gentlemen, I feel privileged to join you for this special part of a very important symposium.

Yesterday, I spoke at Edith Cowan University about -

^O the legal and legislative history of Australia's Racial Discrimination Act,
^O and the vital role of law reform in leading social change, and in shaping our aspirations for a modern democracy.

Fifty years ago as a girl starting out at University, I was imbued with noble ideals about justice and fairness, about making the world a better place.

I thought that law was the best way to pursue my altruism, so I embarked on my course with clear purpose, and with optimism.

In ways I could never have imagined then, many of my hopes and aspirations have been fulfilled.

In the decades since, I have seen again and again the powerful role that legislative reform can and does play --

^O in implementing the principles of human rights,
^O in recognising the dignity and worth of every human being.

I have seen, again and again, the role of anti-discrimination laws in giving a source of courage, support and inspiration to people when they suffer discrimination because of their sex, race, disability.

And importantly, giving them a remedy, a way to take action if they choose to.

Discrimination against women, in particular; gender equality; and the empowerment of women have been an enduring commitment of mine, throughout my work and life.

I therefore feel especially honoured by your invitation to me today:

- ^O with International Women's Day so fresh in our minds,
- ^O to participate in the launch of the African Women's Council.

I was heartened and assured earlier this month to read news stories of the extraordinary efforts of women and men around the world:

- ^O to inspire further awareness and action towards equal rights and equal opportunities for all,
- ^O from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to development workers, to individuals in tiny, poverty-stricken villages.

So many projects and initiatives, as we check our progress towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals:

- ^O preventing trafficking, honour killing, sexual violence against women and children;
- ^O extending formal education for girls;
- ^O investing in rural women for food security;
- ^O improving sexual and reproductive health for adolescent girls - maternal and newborn health;
- ^O helping women fight HIV and AIDS;
- ^O building women's economic power, political participation and access to justice;
- ^O the campaigns go on, everywhere.

You will know that evocative Chinese proverb - women hold up half the sky.

Last year a book with that title was published in the United States.

The authors, Pulitzer prize winners Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, take the reader through Africa and Asia on a journey of women's struggle and achievement:

- ^O against the odds;
- ^O with the leanest of resources.

It is harrowing reading.

But it is not a story of victimisation.

It is about --

- ^O transformation,
- ^O emancipation,
- ^O and empowerment.

In the words of Kristof and WuDunn --

Women aren't the problem but the solution.

The plight of girls is no more a tragedy than an opportunity.

Last week, Ms Rita Sharma, co-founder and President of Women Thrive Worldwide, said:

Whether in Afghanistan or Haiti or anywhere in the world, women are the best investment to build stronger families and communities and more stable economies.

Women of the African Women's Council, you have deep understandings of these issues --

^O as a result of the experiences and lessons you bring from your homelands;
^O and through the remarkable work you do here with newly settled African-Australian women, men and families, governments and NGOs.
^O You work hard to address the barriers to women's safety, physical and emotional well-being, and their economic independence;

And all through, you never forget to preserve, celebrate and share African culture and identity.

Friends, I have known for a very long time what happens when women get together.

Instinctively, family and mothering are where we begin - where the early bonds of understanding and friendship are formed - then onto business.

It happens wherever I go: in Australia, overseas, and when I visited Africa last year.

There, one of my many privileges, was to meet Luísa Diogo, Mozambique's first female Prime Minister.

At the end of our meeting, Prime Minister Diogo handed me a parcel:

^O beautiful maroon and gold fabric unfolded;
^O she then proceeded to literally wrap me up in traditional Mozambique dress;

We looked at each other and fell about laughing.

Who had ever heard of a woman prime minister dressing a woman governor-general?

It was a precious moment for me, and I think for her too.

I arrived in Africa aware that the face of poverty is a woman.

I left having learned that the face of its future leadership is also a woman.

I want to say, on behalf of all Australians:

^O indigenous and non-indigenous;
^O long and newly-settled;
^O of African and every other origin,
^O how grateful I am that such leadership has found its way to Australian shores and into the heart of our communities.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my enormous honour to officially launch the African Women's Council of Australia.

Many thanks.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY