



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **MODEL UN CONFERENCE**

**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2017**

**Major General Michael Smith AO (Retd)**, National President of UNAA,

**Dr Michael Henry AM**, President of UNAA Victorian Branch,

**Dr Maria O'Sullivan**, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law, Monash University and  
Secretary-General of this Model UN Conference,

**Distinguished guests,**

**Teachers and students**

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us today.

My husband Tony and I are delighted to welcome you here to Government House today, for this Model United Nations Conference.

We were keen to host this event. It feeds into a number of matters that are dear to us.

The first is that we support a focus on international relationships.

In our global world, the relationship between nations has never been more delicate or more important.

The United Nations helps to nurture international relationships, and provides a framework for them to grow and flourish.

We support too an emphasis on reasoned discourse. The need for calm and reasoned discourse is underlined by recent global events.

The UN employs processes for debate to ensure that all voices are heard. It provides a model for rational discussion, where a dissection of issues rather than an attack on personalities is to the fore. If taught to our young people, it is a model that will stand them and our communities in good stead in future.

That brings me to teachers.

We are delighted to be hosting this UN Model Conference, being the first in which teachers are participating as delegates. Victoria is the 'Knowledge State'. The contribution of our teachers to that is self-evident.

We are pleased to welcome students too. They are of course the future of our Knowledge State, and so we extend a very warm welcome to them.

Finally, we are so pleased that the topic for debate at your Model UN Conference is 'Achieving Gender Equality: Empowering Women and Girls'. In fact, I think I may have had some say in its choice!

Let me set the scene for that important topic, but briefly. I do not want to steal the thunder of those representing different countries here today.

I will simply say that it is a topic about which I have strong views, and sometimes conflicting views.

I swing between optimism at the progress made by and for women, and pessimism when it comes to the glacial rate of change, and the knowledge that so much more still needs to be done.

As Governor, it is particularly difficult to ensure that I am able to encourage and support great work being done, whilst always encouraging and motivating more. It can be a fine line.

In reality, the need for more change and faster change is brought home to me often.

Last year, I spoke at the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victorian Parliament's Women's Suffrage Petition. That was the petition in 1891 that contained the signatures of 30,000 women, (at a time when Victoria's population was only 490,000), seeking equal voting rights.

It made me reflect that women have been struggling for equal rights for so many decades, despite that early activism and several further waves of feminism since that late nineteenth century period.

We know that the figures are alarming when it comes to violence towards women worldwide, and right here at home, (where more than one woman is killed in an incident of family violence every fortnight), and that frequently the most dangerous place for a woman is in her own home and near a family member who is supposed to care for and protect her.

We know that the world is a long way from gender parity and the prediction is that things are becoming worse, not better.

In 2014, the World Economic Forum predicted that it would take 81 years to achieve global gender parity. Just one year later, in 2015, this prediction was blown out to a wait of 117 years. Last year, the prediction went further out again, to 170 years!

And we know that even right here at home, women are paid 16%, (or \$261 per week), less than men, and still occupy significantly less roles of power in politics, business, the professions and the community.

Victoria, Australia and the world can only be all the poorer, less fair and less productive if we rely upon only half of our talent.

And so I am glad that you are discussing these important issues today.

I would like to thank Major General Michael Smith AO (Retd), President of UNAA and all the staff at UNAA, and Dr Michael Henry AM, President of the Victorian Division and again, the staff, all of whom have put in so much work to ensure that this opportunity is presented to you.

I am sorry that we are unable to stay to see this United Nations in operation, but we are delighted that it will take place here, in a House that itself is a cornerstone of our democracy, and in a setting in which we are pleased to facilitate discourse and harmony across our community groups.

I would now like to invite Major General Michael Smith AO (Retd), President of UNAA to address us.