



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **The International Women's Forum Australia: 2018 Cornerstone Conference**

**Wednesday 2 May, 2018**

**Ms Heidi Victoria MP**, Shadow Minister for Arts and Culture, and for Consumer Affairs, and for Tourism and Major Events

**Ms Teresa Weintraub**, President, International Women's Forum

**Ms Kate Mason**, President International Women's Forum Australia

**Ms Karen Hayes and Ms Michelle Loader**, Co-Chairs, International Women's Forum Australia 2018 Cornerstone Conference

### **Delegates**

### **Distinguished guests**

### **Ladies and gentlemen**

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering, thank Aunty Di for her warm welcome to country, and pay my respects to elders past and present and to elders here with us this evening.

I am particularly proud to welcome the International Women's Forum to Australia.

First, as an honorary member of the IWF Australia, I am delighted to be here.

Secondly, as the Governor of Victoria, I am so pleased that you have joined us here in Melbourne, voted the world's most liveable city for the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, (albeit just one of many beautiful parts of Australia).

But also, as the first female Governor of Victoria, I am of course delighted to welcome so many prominent women to visit us here. The collective wisdom of this group will be well-received.

As many of you are visiting from other countries, let me say just say a few words about Australia.

Almost half of all Australians were either born overseas or have one parent born overseas. I am one of them. My father came to Australia from Europe before I was born. But I was never left in any doubt as to just how fortunate we were to be raised in this lucky country.

Indeed, as an adult, I am fortified in that view.

We have the good fortune of a strong system of government, a long democracy and respect for the rule of law. We have relative economic stability, good education and good public health. A richly diverse community. A magnificent island home. And the Australian ethos of mateship that helps us to support each other.

And yet, what an enigma it is that we have still not managed to come close to achieving equality for half of the Australian population. The female half.

Now, I am conscious in this setting of an international conference that, just as women are faring better in some countries, they are also faring significantly worse in others.

But wherever our respective countries fit on a league table of parity, we have so much in common.

Whether it is for the right to be safe from violence, to be educated, to have control over our bodies and our lives, or it is for parity of pay, job opportunities and respect, we all continue to advocate for the basic human right of equality.

I say 'continue', because this is obviously not a fight to be won in the first round – not a battle easily won.

Certainly, we have seen many waves of feminism across history.

The women's movement of the 1960's is particularly familiar to me. But it was neither the first nor the last time that feminism and equal rights have been firmly on the agenda.

But STILL, in Australia, as in other countries to greater and lesser extents, women continue to experience significant disadvantage.

In this country, we have had one female Governor-General and one female Prime Minister. In Victoria, we have had one female Premier and one female Governor....and one female jockey who has won our famous Melbourne Cup in its more than 150 year history.

These, and many other significant leadership positions, are still being counted in ones!

In business and industry, only around 20% of our top 200 company Board positions are held by women and a woefully low 5% of Chair and CEO roles.

The pay gap has not yet been conquered. Australian women are currently paid on average 15% less than men.

And worse still, more than one woman is killed in an incident of family violence every fortnight in this country. Many more are injured, and one in four women have experienced at least one incident of violence at the hand of an intimate partner (and we know that in some parts of the world, the figures are even more horrific).

And yet, I am optimistic. We are optimistic.

We do see change. And we do see a growing understanding that these are not just 'women's issues'. They are the issues that, if set right, will liberate both our male and our female children, will ensure that our economy can prosper, and will enhance well-being within our communities.

It is gratifying to see male champions of change: men who understand that diversity and parity are issues that belong to us all.

But I still have no doubt as to the special role that women leaders can, and must play in a time of such transition.

Which is why I am a keen supporter of the International Women's Forum.

Across six continents and 33 nations, the IWF provides a wonderful platform and community for more than 6,500 female leaders.

How impressive that this conference brings together over 500 such leaders, from over 30 countries around the globe.

Each woman in this room has been hand selected. Each of you is recognised as a leader in your particular field. Each of you is committed to leadership now, and to cultivating the women who will lead us tomorrow.

Collectively, your might is enhanced.

Collectively, you can celebrate a multitude of successes, and reflect on unique challenges faced - and overcome.

And collectively, you can effect change and influence local, national and international agendas on issues that matter the most.

The evolution of work, changing oceans, fake news, genetics, superannuation, biodiversity, art, geopolitics and sexual harassment.

What a conference agenda!

Thank you to each one of you. Thank you for using your considerable expertise to talk on such important topics.

Thank you for taking the time and the trouble to share your own stories. And thank you for helping to ensure that the evolution of gender equality, so ardently sought for so long, is hastened. Thank you for giving other women hope and inspiration.

A particular thanks to the IWF President Teresa Weintraub for all that she does internationally, to champion and support women's leadership.

Thank you too to IWFA President, Kate Mason, for her work here in Australia. And congratulations to the IWFA Conference Co-Chairs, Karen Hayes and Michelle Loader, for their hard work, tenacity and vision in bringing all this together.

To those from interstate and overseas, I hope that you will enjoy your time in beautiful Melbourne, and that at least some of your important discussions will be held in one of our many hundreds of cafes or restaurants, or strolling the magnificent gardens or avant-garde laneways that lie in the heart of our city.

Better still, hold longer discussions as you visit our wineries, spectacular coastline and the multitude of natural wonders further afield in regional Victoria!

Now, it is my great pleasure to declare the International Women's Forum 2018 World Cornerstone Conference open.