



# AUSTRALIA



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## Fourth Forum on Minority Issues

### Item IV: Minority women and effective political participation

#### Statement by Australia

29 November 2011

Since it is the first time I take the floor, I would like to thank all the panellists for their presentations, and to thank the civil society representatives present for taking the time to share their experiences and recommendations.

Australia is a multicultural nation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians occupy a special place in Australian society as Australia's first peoples. In addition, since 1945, seven million people have immigrated to Australia. Today, one in four of Australia's 22 million people were born overseas. 44 per cent were born overseas or have a parent who migrated to Australia.

Today, Australians speak more than 260 languages, including Indigenous languages; identify with 270 ancestries; and observe a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions.

All Australians are entitled to celebrate, practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within law and free from discrimination. The Australian Government strongly opposes all forms of racism, discrimination, intolerance and prejudice, including against minority groups.

As a demonstration of its commitment to diversity, in February this year, the Government launched *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*. The policy commits the Australian Government to:

- a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate;
- government services that are responsive to the needs of all Australians, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and
- a society where intolerance and discrimination will not be tolerated.

Copies of Australia's Multicultural Policy are available in the room today.

The Australian Government acknowledges the vital role played by women in all communities, and has implemented a number of programs to ensure that women from minority communities are able to participate fully in Australian life.

In March 2010, the Australian Government announced it would fund six National Women's Alliances, which are made up of a mix of sector-based and issues-based women's groups each with a distinct focus and a strong capacity for networking and advocacy activities.

Australia believes it is important to include all communities in the political process, and is committed to actively fostering the inclusion of groups that have not been well-represented or heard in the past.

Two of the Alliances have a distinct representation of minority women, these are the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance* (NATSIWA) and the *Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance* (AIRWA).

The Alliances take the lead in ensuring that the voices of as many women as possible are heard, especially those who in the past have found it difficult to engage in advocacy and decision making.

The role of the Alliances is twofold, in that they:

- bring together women's organisations and individuals from across Australia to share information, identify issues that affect them, and identify solutions, and
- engage actively with the Australian Government on policy issues as part of a better more informed and representative dialogue between women and government.

An important part of the Alliances model is to foster the inclusion of groups that have not been well represented or heard in the past.

The *Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance* provides the opportunity for immigrant and refugee women to network, to build their leadership and advocacy skills and to effectively take their concerns to Government to influence policy outcomes that benefit CALD women.

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance* is comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their organisations from across the Australia and gives Indigenous women the opportunity to share information, identify issues from their own communities and raise concerns, in their own words, with their own solutions.

This enables the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia to be more strongly represented in the development of government policy and service delivery.