

Australia Day Address Jan 21, 2014

EMBARGOED UNTIL 6 P.M. JANUARY 21 2014

**THE AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT: THANK YOU AUSTRALIA
AUSTRALIA DAY ADDRESS**

**THE CONSERVATORIUM
SYDNEY**

JANUARY 21, 2014

ITA BUTTROSE AO, OBE

I'M HONOURED TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO DELIVER THIS AUSTRALIA DAY ADDRESS.

OF ALL THE EVENTS I'VE HAD THE PRIVILEGE TO BE PART OF AS AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR, THIS OCCASION IS EASILY THE MOST DAUNTING BECAUSE I AM REFLECTING ON AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR – ONE TO WHICH I WANT TO DO JUSTICE AND ONE I SHALL NEVER FORGET AS LONG AS I LIVE.

IT'S NOT EASY TO ADEQUATELY CAPTURE THE MYRIAD IMPRESSIONS AND THOUGHTS THAT HAVE FILLED MY LIFE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS AND THEN TO BE HERE WITH YOU THIS EVENING TO TALK ABOUT OUR GREAT COUNTRY AND THE CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES WE FACE.

AS A JOURNALIST I LIKE WHAT WE CALL "A GOOD STORY", SO LET ME START WITH PEOPLE AND THEIR STORIES. IT IS TO THE MANY AUSTRALIANS WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR STORIES WITH ME DURING 2013 THAT I WOULD MOST LIKE TO GIVE MY THANKS AND TELL THEM HOW MUCH I HAVE APPRECIATED THEIR OPENNESS AND COURAGE IN SHARING WHAT OFTEN HAVE BEEN HARROWING EXPERIENCES.

WITHOUT WANTING IN ANYWAY TO ROMANTICISE THE STRUGGLE THAT MANY AUSTRALIANS FACE, IT'S THE SPIRIT THEY DISPLAY IN TACKLING THEIR EVERY DAY LIVES THAT WILL BE AN ENDURING MEMORY FOR ME.

“HOPE” IS PROBABLY THE BEST CATCHALL WORD I CAN USE TO SUM UP THE ESSENCE OF WHAT I’VE HEARD THROUGH 2013.

IT’S HOPE THAT GIVES US THE RESILIENCE AND DRIVE TO ACHIEVE THE BETTER LIFE WE WANT FOR OURSELVES AND FOR THOSE WE LOVE.

IF WE DON’T HAVE HOPE IT’S THAT MUCH HARDER – I WOULD SUGGEST IMPOSSIBLE – TO SHAPE A VISION AND THEN FIND THE MOTIVATION TO STRIVE FOR IT. SO NURTURING HOPE AND KEEPING IT ALIVE IN AUSTRALIA IS VITAL IF WE WANT A SOCIETY OF HEALTHY, WELL-BALANCED INDIVIDUALS.

A HEALTHY HUMAN SPIRIT NEVER GIVES UP AND I THINK THAT’S HOW WE AUSTRALIANS LIKE TO THINK OF OURSELVES.

THE AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT IS ALSO ABOUT LENDING A HAND, HELPING THOSE WHO NEED IT THE MOST AND ENSURING THAT WE ALL GET A FAIR GO.

I SOMETIMES THINK WE UNDERESTIMATE THESE PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF OURS, AND OUR RESILIENCE AND DRIVE. OUR NATIONAL SELF IMAGE IS SO LINKED TO BEING LAID BACK THAT WE OFTEN FAIL TO MAKE THE MOST OF OUR AMAZING “CAN DO” ATTITUDE, SOMETHING I BELIEVE IS INNATE WITHIN THE MAJORITY OF US.

THINK OF THE PEOPLE WE’VE ALL RECENTLY SEEN ON TV WHO HAVE LOST THEIR HOMES IN THE BUSHFIRES THAT HAVE RAVAGED MANY OF OUR STATES. SOME SAY THEY WILL REBUILD; OTHERS THAT THEY WILL LIVE ON THEIR LAND IN A CARAVAN UNTIL THEY HAVE THE MONEY TO GET GOING AGAIN AND NOT SURPRISINGLY, SEVERAL SAY THEY WILL MOVE ELSEWHERE TO PUT DOWN THEIR ROOTS. BUT FROM MY EXPERIENCE, FEW – EVEN THOSE STILL REELING FROM WHAT HAS OCCURRED AND IN SOME CASES, COPING WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER – DOUBT THAT ULTIMATELY THEY WILL OVERCOME THE DISASTER THAT HIT THEM.

IT IS THESE QUALITIES THAT WE POSSESS WHICH GIVES ME THE CONFIDENCE TO BELIEVE THAT IN TIME ALL AUSTRALIANS WILL ADOPT MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TO AGEING, BE MORE INCLUSIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND DISABILITIES AND ADOPT SOCIAL POLICIES THAT ENSURE OUR COUNTRY TARGETS THE PRECIOUS RESOURCES WE HAVE TO THOSE WHO MOST NEED THEM.

I DON'T THINK WE REFLECT ENOUGH ON AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY... ON THE VERY FOUNDATIONS ON WHICH OUR COUNTRY IS BUILT.

WE FIND TIME TO CELEBRATE NATION BUILDING THROUGH OUR MILITARY EXPLOITS – YOUNGER GENERATIONS LEARNING ABOUT THE PAST THROUGH GALLIPOLI AND THE WESTERN FRONT (ALL OF WHICH IS A GOOD THING) – BUT LET'S NOT FORGET OR WHITEWASH THE FRONTIER WARS WITH AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS.

AND DAILY WALL-TO-WALL SPORTS COMMENTARIES ON ALL OUR MEDIA OUTLETS GUARANTEE THAT OUR PAST AND PRESENT SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

BUT IN MY VIEW WE DON'T REFLECT ON AND CELEBRATE ENOUGH OUR DEVELOPMENT AS A SOCIETY AND ON THE GREAT SOCIAL POLICIES OF WHICH WE SHOULD BE SO PROUD.

IN HIS THOUGHT-PROVOKING BOOK *DREAMING TOO LOUD*, GEOFFREY ROBERTSON SUGGESTS WE HAVE BECOME CAPTIVE OF OUR OWN STEREOTYPES AT SPORT BOTH WITHIN OUR OWN PSYCHE AND THE IMAGE WE PROJECT TO PEOPLE OVERSEAS, AND THEREFORE THAT THEY HOLD OF US.

HE WRITES: "WE NEVER SEEM TO BOAST ABOUT HOW WE PIONEERED UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND VOTES FOR WOMEN AND MATERNITY ALLOWANCES; HOW WE INVENTED THE SECRET BALLOT AND THE BASIC WAGE; HOW OUR MINERS AT BROKEN HILL ACHIEVED THE 35-HOUR WEEK FOR WORKERS IN DANGEROUS JOBS 50 YEARS BEFORE THAT IDEA CAUGHT ON OVERSEAS."

THESE ARE SOME OF THINGS THAT SURELY SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SELF IMAGE. OUR HISTORY PORTRAYS US AS A NATION COMMITTED TO GIVING ITS PEOPLE A FAIR GO BUT IN OUR PECULIAR AUSTRALIAN WAY THIS IS COUNTERED BY OUR REALISTIC APPRECIATION THAT LIFE IS NOT FAIR.

WE ALL KNOW WE LIVE IN A TIME OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY AND WITH THIS COMES THE RISK OF PEOPLE BECOMING INWARD-FOCUSED AND LESS CONSCIOUS OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO OTHERS.

WE NEED TO KEEP REMINDING OURSELVES THAT SOCIAL REFORM AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY CAN GO HAND IN HAND. IT'S NOT A MATTER OF EITHER/OR.

I WARM TO THE THOUGHT THAT IN THE PAST – IN THE 1890s AND THE FIRST PART OF THE LAST CENTURY, AND AGAIN IN THE POST WORLD WAR TWO YEARS – AUSTRALIA WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE NATION BUILDING WITH SOCIAL REFORM, AND WE DID IT IN OUR DISTINCTLY PRAGMATIC WAY.

AS MANNING CLARK FREQUENTLY OBSERVES IN HIS *SHORT HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA*, AUSTRALIANS HAVE BEEN REFORMIST RATHER THAN RADICAL IN ACHIEVING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

IN RECENT TIMES, BOTH SIDES OF GOVERNMENT HAVE SAID THAT “A GOVERNMENT WILL BE TESTED BY HOW IT TREATS ITS MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS”.

I COULDN'T AGREE MORE.

BUT I WORRY THAT OUR PREOCCUPATION WITH BALANCED BUDGETS WILL LEAD TO THE CHIPPING AWAY OF THE THINGS WHICH PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND COULD CREATE THE RISK OF US TURNING OUR BACKS ON WHAT ARE VERY NECESSARY DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX SOCIAL REFORMS.

AS ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST NATIONS IN THE WORLD THIS WOULD BE UNFORGIVABLE.

WE OFTEN DO FORGET JUST WHAT A LUCKY COUNTRY WE ARE. A REPORT FROM CREDIT SUISSE RELEASED IN OCTOBER 2013 IDENTIFIED AUSTRALIA PER CAPITA AS THE WEALTHIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.

BUT THE TOP 10 PER CENT OF AUSTRALIANS EARN 31 PER CENT OF ALL INCOME IN AUSTRALIA AND 12 PER CENT OF AUSTRALIANS ARE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. DISTURBINGLY, THE RECENT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF HOUSEHOLDS (HILDA) SHOWED THAT CHILD POVERTY HAS INCREASED BY 15 PER CENT SINCE 2001.

MOST AUSTRALIANS SHARE A VISION OF AN INCLUSIVE COUNTRY WHERE PEOPLE, WHETHER THEY ARE RICH OR POOR, HAVE ACCESS TO A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE; A COUNTRY WHERE POVERTY IS ON THE DECLINE RATHER THAN INCREASING; A COUNTRY WHERE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND SERVICES IS IMPROVING RATHER THAN BECOMING MORE DIFFICULT.

WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO WORK HARD TO ACHIEVE THIS WITHIN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS WHETHER THROUGH REALLOCATING FUNDING OR TAX REFORM. THIS IS ALL ABOUT DECIDING THE PRIORITIES FOR OUR NATION.

WE ALL CARE ABOUT THESE ISSUES OR WE WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY. HOW WE ADDRESS THEM IS DETERMINED BY OUR INDIVIDUAL PRIORITIES AND VIEWS – SOME DEEPLY HELD.

MY HOPE IS THAT OUR APPROACH AND SOLUTION ARE NOT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND THE VULNERABLE LOSE OUT IN THE PROCESS. I ALSO HOPE WE RECOGNISE IT'S THE FREEDOM TO EXPRESS THESE VIEWS THAT MAKES AUSTRALIA A GREAT COUNTRY – AMONG THE FEW IN THE WORLD WHERE THERE IS A GENUINE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THAT.

THE FREEDOM THAT AUSTRALIA OFFERS IS PRECIOUS AND MUST BE PRESERVED.

WE HAVE THE FREEDOM TO MAKE OUR OWN CHOICES; TO EXERCISE OUR RIGHT TO SPEAK OUT, TO HOLD A POINT OF VIEW ABOUT ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING; TO DISAGREE; TO BE AN INDIVIDUAL; TO TRAVEL WHEREVER WE WANT IN OUR OWN LAND; TO AIM FOR THE TOP.

TO DREAM DREAMS AND MAKE THEM COME TRUE; TO EVEN MAKE MISTAKES AND LEARN FROM THEM AND STILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE ANOTHER GO.

FREEDOM IS THE INCREDIBLE GIFT THAT AUSTRALIA GIVES ALL OF US AND IT'S SOMETHING WE CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON. SURE LIFE CAN BE DIFFICULT AT TIMES AND THINGS DO GO WRONG. I KNOW THAT AND I KNOW MANY OF YOU DO TOO.

WE CAN LOSE OUR JOB, EXPERIENCE LOSS OF INCOME, A CLOSING OF BUSINESS, ILLNESS, SUFFER THE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT AND BUSH FIRES...BUT WE NEVER LOSE OUR FREEDOM.

EVEN WHEN OUR LIVES ARE AT THEIR LOWEST EBB...WE STILL HAVE FREEDOM...OF SPEECH AND MOVEMENT. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE SPIRIT WE HAVE COMBINED WITH FREEDOM WILL ENABLE US TO SUCCESSFULLY MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE.

OF COURSE AUSTRALIA HAS MANY OTHER BENEFITS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THE WAY WE LIVE.

WE DO HAVE A VAST AND BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. GEOGRAPHICALLY AUSTRALIA IS EXTRAORDINARY WITH ITS DRY ARID AREAS, ITS LUSH PLAINS, MAGNIFICENT COAST AND SNOWFIELDS.

WE HAVE IMMIGRANTS FROM MORE THAN 170 COUNTRIES NOW CALLING AUSTRALIA HOME AND BRINGING TO OUR ISLAND CONTINENT THEIR CULTURES, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN TO AUSTRALIA'S GAIN.

OUR ABORIGINES ARE ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PEOPLES AND WITH ALL THE MANY OTHER PEOPLE WHO MAKE UP OUR POPULATION, WE ARE A FASCINATING, COMPLEX SOCIETY; A UNIQUE MIXTURE OF OLD AND NEW.

OTHER NATIONS LOOK AT THE WAY WE GET ON WITH EACH OTHER AND MARVEL AT HOW WE'VE DONE IT. BUT WE HAVE. WE ARE AN EXCELLENT MODEL FOR THE FUTURE FOR OTHER NATIONS TO FOLLOW.

YES WE HAVE POCKETS OF RÉSISTANCE; WE ARE ALL AWARE THAT SOME RACISM EXISTS. WE ARE NOT PERFECT AND WE NEED TO KEEP WORKING AT RIGHTING THE WRONGS AND NOT TRIVIALISE ISSUES OR SEEK TO SILENCE VOICES THAT RAISE CONCERNS.

ACTIVISM WILL ALWAYS HAVE ITS PLACE IN A FREE SOCIETY... BUT WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE AUSTRALIA IS ONE OF THE BEST INTEGRATED MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES IN THE WORLD.

SO IN DRAWING TOGETHER THE THREADS OF MY TIME AS AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR, LET ME SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF THE VIEWS I'VE FORMED.

WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AUSTRALIA'S SPIRIT AND COURAGE TO SHINE THROUGH IN MANY KEY AREAS

WHEN I ACCEPTED THE HONOUR OF BECOMING AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR I SAID THAT I HOPED TO CONTRIBUTE A LITTLE TO ACHIEVING A MORE POSITIVE APPROACH TO AGEING, DELIVERING ON THE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA *FIGHT DEMENTIA* CAMPAIGN AND PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE NEED FOR MORE MEDICAL RESEARCH FOR DEMENTIA.

IT HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE TO HAVE A PLATFORM ON WHICH TO PROMOTE A MORE POSITIVE APPROACH TO AGEING AND TO TACKLING AGEIST ATTITUDES IN OUR SOCIETY.

I'VE ENJOYED ADVOCATING FOR THE NEW THINKING THAT CHALLENGES US ALL TO LOOK AFTER BOTH OUR PHYSICAL AND BRAIN HEALTH THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES AND AM ENCOURAGED BY THE ENTHUSIASTIC REACTION OF AUSTRALIANS, BOTH YOUNG AND OLD.

I'VE ALSO ENJOYED AND AGAIN, BEEN ENCOURAGED BY THE REACTION TO MY SPRUICKING OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA'S DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION PROGRAM *YOUR BRAIN MATTERS*.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT IT TAKES SOME 17 YEARS FOR THE EVIDENCE FROM MEDICAL RESEARCH TO GET TRANSLATED INTO PRACTICE.

I SET MYSELF THE OBJECTIVE OF MAKING SURE THIS WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO THE EXCITING POSITIVE RESEARCH CARRIED OUT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND DENMARK LAST YEAR ON THE SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE PREVALENCE RATE OF DEMENTIA BETWEEN SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS.

THIS RESEARCH FORCES US TO ONCE AND FOR ALL PUT ASIDE THE ASSUMPTION THAT DEMENTIA IS AN INEVITABLE PART OF AGEING. WE NOW KNOW THAT THE PREVALENCE RATES OF DEMENTIA ARE NOT SET IN STONE.

THE FINDINGS SUGGEST PREVENTION IS POSSIBLE. IMPROVED CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH, BETTER DIET AND HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT MIGHT ALSO PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE

WHAT COULD BE MORE EXCITING THAN THE THOUGHT THAT OUR GRANDCHILDREN MAY BE LESS AT RISK OF DEMENTIA THAN OUR OWN GENERATION?

AUSTRALIA HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUE LEADING THE WORLD IN TACKLING DEMENTIA NOT ONLY THROUGH BETTER QUALITY DEMENTIA CARE BUT ALSO IN PROMOTING TIMELY DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA, SAFER HOSPITALS AND DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION.

THIS MUST TRANSLATE AS A CHANGE TOWARDS THOSE PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA. THERE IS NO PLACE FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA – INDEED AGAINST AGE – IN THE AUSTRALIAN PSYCHE.

MY ACTIVISM IS DEMONSTRATED THROUGH MY FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF OLDER AUSTRALIANS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WITH DEMENTIA, WHOSE WELLBEING IS PROGRESSIVELY DEPENDENT ON OTHERS.

THERE HAS BEEN A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN HOW WE ARE THINKING ABOUT CARE AND SUPPORT. FOR INSTANCE, FOR THE FIRST TIME CONSUMERS ARE AT THE CENTRE OF AGED CARE AND DISABILITIES. IT IS AN OUTCOME OF WHICH ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA AND OTHER CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS CAN BE RIGHTLY PROUD.

I BELIEVE THIS SETS THE TONE FOR THIS CENTURY – PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA HAVE BEEN EMPOWERED TO SPEAK OUT FOR THEMSELVES ABOUT WHAT LIFE IS LIKE WITH DEMENTIA AND WHAT THEY NEED TO BE FULL MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY.

THEY'VE ADOPTED THE SLOGAN OF "NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US" AND I AND MY COLLEAGUES AT ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA BELIEVE IT IS OUR DUTY AND OUR ORGANISATION'S DUTY TO ENSURE THAT REMAINS THE CASE.

IN ADDITION TO AGEING THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER AREAS OF SOCIAL REFORM THAT I CONSIDER AS CRITICAL TO THE AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT.

THE FIRST IS EDUCATION... EDUCATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT TRANSPIRES ARE AMONG OUR COUNTRY'S GREATEST ASSETS.

SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY AND THE HARNESSING AND APPLICATION OF USE OF KNOWLEDGE WILL ENABLE US TO CONFRONT FUTURE CHALLENGES SUCH AS CLIMATE CHANGE, POPULATION AGEING AND CHRONIC DISEASE.

TRAGICALLY MANY PEOPLE HAVE NO IDEA THAT AUSTRALIA BOASTS 13 NOBEL LAUREATES...SCIENTISTS LIKE HOWARD FLOREY AND PETER DOHERTY, AND MORE RECENTLY BARRY MARSHALL, ELIZABETH BLACKBURN AND BRIAN SCHMIDT.

WE ALSO HAVE SOME REMARKABLE SCIENTIFIC SUCCESS STORIES. WI-FI WAS DEVELOPED BY THE CSIRO; THE COCHLEAR IMPLANT WAS DEVELOPED IN MELBOURNE; AND THE CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE WAS INVENTED IN QUEENSLAND.

PLASTIC SURGEON FIONA WOOD, WHO WAS AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR IN 2005, DEVELOPED A REVOLUTIONARY TREATMENT THAT HAS TRANSFORMED THE LIVES OF BURNS VICTIMS.

THE VALUE OF THESE INNOVATIONS IS NOT LIMITED TO AUSTRALIANS EITHER; THEY BENEFIT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. BUT HOW MANY AUSTRALIANS KNOW OR CAN BOAST ABOUT THEM AS ACCOMPLISHMENTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO FELLOW COUNTRYMEN AND WOMEN?

I'D LIKE TO SEE THE SETTING UP OF A NATIONAL REGISTER OF SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS SO THAT WE COULD CONSISTENTLY CELEBRATE THE PHENOMENAL BRAIN POWER THAT EXISTS IN OUR COUNTRY.

EDUCATION ALSO PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS WHO HAVE THE DESIRE AND THE DRIVE TO MOVE UP THE SOCIAL LADDER THROUGH ACCESS TO BETTER CAREERS.

HOWEVER EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THERE MAY BE CAUSE FOR CONCERN.

THE DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BETWEEN OUR HIGHEST AND LOWEST PERFORMING STUDENTS ARE STRIKING AND MORE DEPENDENT ON THE INFLUENCE OF CLASS, FAMILY AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND THAN IN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES...AND I'M THINKING OF COUNTRIES SUCH AS CANADA, IRELAND, AUSTRIA, KOREA, FINLAND AND OTHER SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES.

THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN AUSTRALIA BETWEEN RICH AND POOR STUDENTS, WITH CHILDREN IN THE POOREST SCHOOLS EFFECTIVELY TWO AND A HALF YEARS BEHIND IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

INSTEAD OF BEING THE GREAT SOCIAL EQUALISER, EDUCATION RISKS BECOMING THE GREAT MAGNIFIER OF EXISTING DISPARITIES.

MORE WORK IS TO BE DONE ON THE EDUCATION REFORMS UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENT, BUT ACHIEVING GREATER EQUALITY WITHIN EDUCATION AND CREATING A SYSTEM WHERE EDUCATION PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS MUST BE A FUNDAMENTAL FOCUS IF WE ARE TO ASPIRE TO THE AUSTRALIAN DREAM OF A FAIR GO.

ONE AREA OF INEQUALITY, CLOSE TO MY OWN HEART, IS OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN. I AM STRUCK BOTH BY HOW MUCH WE'VE ACHIEVED IN THE LAST 50 YEARS AND HOW FAR WE STILL NEED TO GO.

I JOINED MY FIRST MAJOR CORPORATE BOARD, AUSTRALIAN CONSOLIDATED PRESS IN 1974. I BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN DIRECTOR OF NEWS LTD AUSTRALIA IN 1981 AND THE FIRST WOMAN DIRECTOR OF PRUDENTIAL ASSURANCE IN 1990.

BY NOW I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED WOMEN TO HAVE EQUAL REPRESENTATION ON BOARDS THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA YET WE MAKE UP ONLY AROUND 15 PER CENT OF DIRECTORS OF OUR TOP ASX 200 COMPANIES. 62 PER CENT OF TOP ASX 200 COMPANIES HAVE NO FEMALE BOARD MEMBERS. THIS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

THIS IS NOT JUST AN ISSUE FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES. WITHIN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE, 57 PER CENT OF ALL STAFF ARE WOMEN. YET ONLY 39 PER CENT OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE IS WOMEN.

GIVEN HOW LITTLE PROGRESS WOMEN HAVE MADE I NOW FAVOUR A QUOTA SYSTEM. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME I'VE EXPRESSED THIS PARTICULAR OPINION BUT IT WOULD BE REMISS OF ME NOT TO SEIZE THE MOMENT AND USE THIS INFLUENTIAL PLATFORM TO PRESS MY ARGUMENT FURTHER.

I BELIEVE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD PASS A LAW SIMILAR TO THE ONE NORWAY PASSED IN 2003 REQUIRING ALL PUBLICLY-LISTED COMPANIES TO HAVE AT LEAST 40 PER CENT FEMALE BOARD REPRESENTATION WITHIN TWO YEARS. IN NORWAY IN 2003, IT WAS THEN NINE PER CENT.

WHEN VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE FAILED, THE LAW BECAME COMPULSORY IN JANUARY 2006. FIRMS THAT DID NOT COMPLY BY JANUARY 2008 WOULD BE FORCED TO DISSOLVE.

BY APRIL 2008 – ACTION HAVING BEEN TAKEN AGAINST 77 TARDY COMPANIES – ALL NORWEGIAN FIRMS HAD COMPLIED AND TODAY NORWAY'S WOMEN DIRECTORS TOTAL 40 PER CENT.

IT'S NOT JUST AT SENIOR MANAGEMENT LEVELS THAT WOMEN STRUGGLE TO GET ACCESS TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.

WOMEN WHO ARE TRYING TO BALANCE FAMILIES, BEING A CARER AND THEIR CAREERS ALSO FACE DIFFICULTIES. FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION RATES ARE APPROXIMATELY 65 PER CENT WHILE MALE PARTICIPATION RATE IS AT 79 PER CENT.

I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO THINKS IT MAKES ECONOMIC SENSE TO TACKLE THESE ISSUES. INCREASED FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY TO BOOSTING AUSTRALIA'S PRODUCTIVITY.

A STUDY DONE BY EY IN CONJUNCTION WITH CHIEF EXECUTIVE WOMEN (CEW), FOUND THAT, BY EMPLOYING MORE PRODUCTIVE FEMALE WORKERS IN FLEXIBLE ROLES, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND COULD COLLECTIVELY SAVE AT LEAST \$1.4 BILLION IN WASTED WAGES.

THERE ARE TOO MANY WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA TODAY WHO WANT TO BE IN THE WORKFORCE BUT DUE TO LACK OF FLEXIBILITY OR UNAVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE HAVE TO POSTPONE THEIR CAREERS UNTIL AFTER THEIR CHILDREN ARE IN SCHOOL... AND TODAY A GROWING NUMBER OF WOMEN ARE PUTTING THEIR CAREERS ON HOLD IN ORDER TO CARE FOR ELDERLY PARENTS.

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THIS HAS LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR CAREER PROSPECTS, THEIR FINANCIAL WELFARE AND THEIR ABILITY TO SAVE FOR RETIREMENT.

MANY ISSUES LIKE WOMEN'S LACK OF ADVANCEMENT NEED TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE PUBLIC FORUM BUT OFTEN AREN'T BECAUSE OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IS STIFLING DEBATE IN AUSTRALIA....CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY, PEOPLE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES; POLITICIANS ARE HESITANT TO SAY WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT ISSUES BECAUSE OF A POSSIBLE MEDIA FRENZY...

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS HESITATION...NO ONE WANTS TO BE TRENDING ON TWITTER...BUT WE, THE PUBLIC, NEED TO BE ABLE TO SAY WHAT IS ON OUR MINDS ABOUT THE ISSUES THAT CONCERN US...WE CANNOT AFFORD TO BE WIMPS....PUBLIC DEBATE USED TO BE A WAY OF LIFE IN AUSTRALIA. BUT THE DEBATE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY MUFFLED AND CONTROLLED BY PR SPIN. THIS IS NOT IN AUSTRALIA'S BEST INTERESTS.

**AUSTRALIANS USED TO PRIDE THEMSELVES ON SPEAKING THEIR MIND;
AND AT THE SAME TIME BEING FAIR-MINDED. WE SHOULD NEVER LET THE
FEAR OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS OR AMBITION STOP US FROM
EXERCISING THAT RIGHT.**

**WE SHOULD NEVER BE AFRAID TO TELL IT AS IT IS; THE WAY WE SEE
THINGS THAT AFFECT OUR NATION'S FUTURE.**

**EARLIER IN THIS SPEECH, I SUGGESTED THAT THE AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT IS
ABOUT LENDING A HAND, HELPING THOSE WHO NEED ASSISTANCE THE
MOST AND ENSURING THAT WE ALL GET A FAIR GO.**

**IN NO TWO AREAS OF POLICY HAS THIS BEEN MORE CHALLENGING IN OUR
HISTORY THAN INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION.**

**WE HAVE MADE PROGRESS SINCE FEDERATION BUT WE ALL KNOW THAT
THERE IS MORE TO DO.**

**IN INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS WE CAN CELEBRATE THE 1967 REFERENDUM TO
CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION TO COUNT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AUSTRALIANS IN THE NATIONAL CENSUS OF THE POPULATION
AND GIVE THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT POWER TO MAKE
SPECIFIC LAWS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.**

WE CAN ALSO CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL PROGRAMS THAT HAVE BEEN PUT INTO PLACE AS A CONSEQUENCE OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ACHIEVE THEIR RIGHTS AND ASPIRATIONS, THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LANDS RIGHTS AND MOST RECENTLY THE APOLOGY.

THE REALITY OF COURSE IS THAT THE DISPOSSESSION AND DISCRIMINATION THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED (AND IN FAR TOO MANY INSTANCES, STILL EXPERIENCE) WILL NOT BE REVERSED IN ONE OR TWO GENERATIONS. THE EVIDENCE IS IN POOR HEALTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND IN UNACCEPTABLE RATES OF INCARCERATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE...AND IN WIDESPREAD LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND HISTORY, WHICH LEADS TO A PERVASIVE LACK OF RESPECT

IN IMMIGRATION THE MOST RECENT CENSUS FOUND THAT ALMOST A QUARTER OF AUSTRALIANS WERE BORN OVERSEAS AND 43 PER CENT OF US HAVE AT LEAST ONE PARENT WHO WAS BORN OVERSEAS.

IN 1939, 98 PER CENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN POPULATION WAS EITHER BORN OR DESCENDED FROM FAMILIES IN THE BRITISH ISLES. BY 1979 NEARLY 12 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION HAD NO SUCH CONNECTION. AND TODAY LESS THAN HALF OF US REPORT BRITISH OR IRISH ANCESTRY.

MANY AUSTRALIANS SHARE A COMMON STORY OF COMING TO AUSTRALIA LOOKING FOR HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY.

MANY PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE PROSPERED THROUGH THE OPPORTUNITIES AUSTRALIA HAS GIVEN THEM AND HAVE SUCCESSFULLY EMBRACED THE AUSTRALIAN WAY OF LIFE.

INDEED THE VERY FIRST BUTTROSE – WILLIAM BUTTROSE – CAME TO AUSTRALIA WITH HIS WIFE AND SIX CHILDREN FROM SCOTLAND IN 1852 IN SEARCH OF A NEW LIFE. I AM SO GLAD HE DID.

BUT WE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO SHARE OUR COUNTRY WITH MANY MORE REFUGEES THAN WE CURRENTLY WELCOME AND I BELIEVE WE HAVE A MORAL IMPERATIVE TO DO SO.

OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST CENTURY AUSTRALIANS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE ABILITY TO EMBRACE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE TEST OF OUR AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE READINESS WITH WHICH WE WELCOME PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE THEIR OWN COUNTRIES.

I BELIEVE ALL AUSTRALIANS SHOULD REFLECT WITH PRIDE ON THE BUILDING OF OUR NATION.

IN HIS *SHORT HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA* MANNING CLARK CONCLUDED THAT “AUSTRALIANS HAVE LIBERATED THEMSELVES FROM THE FATE OF BEING SECOND- RATE EUROPEANS. AUSTRALIANS HAVE BEGUN TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEVER-ENDING CONVERSATION OF HUMANITY ON THE MEANING OF LIFE, AND THE MEANS OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING.”

I THINK THAT QUOTE CAPTURES WELL WHERE WE STAND TODAY AS AUSTRALIANS, BUT I WOULD ADD THE THOUGHT THAT NATION-BUILDING INDEED LIFE IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND IF WE, AS INDIVIDUALS AND A NATION, ARE NOT INCLUSIVE THEN WE WILL FAIL TO BUILD ON ALL THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE FEDERATION.

FOR A LONG TIME WE'VE DEFINED OURSELVES AS AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY WHERE EVERYONE HAS A "FAIR GO" IN LIFE, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY WERE BORN RICH OR POOR.

OUR AIM SHOULD BE TO CREATE A SOCIETY IN WHICH WE WOULD WANT TO LIVE IF WE DIDN'T KNOW IN ADVANCE WHETHER WE WOULD BE RICH OR POOR; HEALTHY OR ILL; WHETHER WE MIGHT HAVE A DISABILITY OR NOT...A SOCIETY THAT MARRIES COMPASSION WITH A CAN-DO ATTITUDE.

I THINK THAT PERHAPS FOR THIS REASON, THERE IS A GROUNDSWELL OF GRASSROOT SUPPORT FOR MAJOR SOCIAL REFORM SUCH AS THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME, AGED CARE AND EDUCATION, ALL OF WHICH STRIVE TO BRING AUSTRALIA CLOSER TO THIS IDEAL.

WE SHOULD TAKE TO INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS THE VALUES OF RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AND THE CULTURES OF OTHERS THAT WE HAVE FORGED IN THE HEAT OF OFTEN INTENSE DEBATE AND DISCORD.

WE SHOULD BE PROUD OF OUR AUSTRALIAN PRAGMATISM AND GETTING THINGS DONE, AND WE SHOULD NEVER BE AFRAID TO QUESTION AND CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO.

**I FINISH MY 12 MONTHS AS AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FEELING
OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE AND CONFIDENT THAT IN SPITE OF THE
CHALLENGING TIMES WHICH CONFRONT US, WE POSSESS THE IMPETUS
AND INHERITED SEED OF HOPE, WHICH I MAINTAIN WE INHERIT NOT JUST
IN OUR GENES BUT FROM THE SOUL OF THIS GREAT LAND OF OURS, TO
STAY TRUE TO THE EGALITARIAN SPIRIT OF OUR NATION.**

**AT THE SAME TIME, I GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THAT AUSTRALIA HAS GIVEN
US AND WHICH, WITH STRONG VISIONARY LEADERSHIP, WILL CONTINUE
TO GIVE IN INCREASING ABUNDANCE, TO ALL WHO ARE BLESSED TO CALL
AUSTRALIA HOME.**

THANK YOU.