

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**RECEPTION FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (IWDA)**
ADMIRALTY HOUSE, SYDNEY
2 AUGUST 2010

I'm so thrilled to welcome you here at Admiralty House this evening.

There is something very Australian about this really beautiful old home that belongs to us all.

Everyone has a sense of it when they come here:

our world-envied harbour lapping so near

those iconic sails - we could almost stretch out and touch them
the energy of a big, boisterous Australian city right there for the taking

and the proverbial sounds of Australian life

all of it, reminding us of what we cherish about this country of ours

the extraordinary among the ordinary
our respect for one another; for fairness, and equal opportunity and access to a good, fulfilling life
and, more so now than ever before, our special part in the wider world.
And so it feels like just the place to be to celebrate something else that is very proudly Australian.

A milestone that signifies some very Australian qualities:

starting small and letting big things grow, but never letting go of the roots that support and sustain us

doing the hard yards and the hard years, and knowing that the harder we work, the better we get at it

trusting, championing, empowering women to participate fully in society

giving women the licence to shine, to do what we're good at without restraint, to bring about positive
and lasting change in our own lives and in our communities

and being so wholly Australian and yet a friend and partner and mentor across borders and oceans.

IWDA, I still can't quite believe it's been 25 years:

the memories of your nascent days seem so fresh

and yet the depth and reach of your work surely mean you've been around forever.

These occasions - these birthdays - are so important.

If we don't mark the milestones, we remember growing old, and forget that we've grown wiser.

If we don't celebrate the achievements, we expect the successes, and forget how hard we fought for them.

If we don't acknowledge the individuals who are at the heart and soul of it all, we assume they will always be there, and forget that we must look after the carers as we do those we care for.

IWDA's story is one of tenacious grassroots action by three equally tenacious Australian women - Wendy Poussard, Wendy Rose and Ruth Pfanner.

Women who were very clear about what needed to happen, and they set about to do it with some fundamental principles firmly in mind:

when women benefit, the whole community benefits

aim to nurture and partner, not impose and control

act local, think global, and before long you will be known to the world.

Of course we're all familiar now with this sort of language, but it nevertheless remains central and crucial to our conversation and action today around women in development.

And 25 years ago it was groundbreaking.

It is what gathered Australian women - young and old, across cultures and backgrounds - in odd, pokey rooms in fringe buildings in Fitzroy and Camperdown.

They came together because they wanted to know about the issues, and what they could do to make a difference.

They learnt about the devastating effects of sexual, physical and emotional violence on women's capacity to participate in social, economic and political life.

They learnt that a mother without an education is powerless to influence the course of her own life and that of her children and family, and to contribute to the wellbeing and stability of her community.

And they learnt that women's absence from the processes that determine the health, wealth and future of communities puts those communities seriously at risk.

The early members of IWDA - and all those who joined and followed them - volunteered countless hours and boundless energy to these issues and many more.

They did it with great humour, generosity and goodwill.

What I remember were the International Women's Day breakfasts at the Sydney Town Hall in the 90s.

Judy Fleming, Mayor Frank Sartor's wife, used to host them.

They were noisy, lively dos, filled with warmth and camaraderie, and a sense of celebration and common purpose.

There were hundreds and, soon enough, there were thousands coming along.

So much fun, and madly shambolic, but:

they raised money

they engaged people in the issues, got them thinking and talking

young women really rose to the task

and they invited marvellous, courageous women from the Pacific, Cambodia, Burma and Kosovo to talk to us about their experiences with pioneering development projects.

A quarter of a century on, and you've preserved this ethos and essence and spread your wings in the most remarkable ways.

You will all 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:

against the odds;

with the leanest of resources.

It's harrowing reading, but it's not a story of victimisation.

It's about:

transformation,

emancipation,

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.

In March this year, 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.

Of course, the founders of IWDA worked these things out a long time ago.

And it was their efforts then, and your continuing efforts today that have helped to tell and realise the powerful story of women in global development.

The authors I've mentioned say there's no doubt that in recent years there has been a surge in female leadership of social movements.

Women are playing an increasingly important role in the philanthropic sector, and the women's funds that support women and girls are booming.

They say the time is ripe for a new emancipation movement to empower women and girls around the world.

For IWDA, the time is ripe to use its longstanding leadership and position at the frontier to capture this moment and lead another wave across another generation.

I know you are saying farewell to a treasured member of your team - Jane Sloane, your Executive Director - who has been responsible for some outstanding work, including the formation of the Asia Pacific Breakthrough.

Only recently, Jane gave her time and eminent expertise and insights to a roundtable discussion here on the issues surrounding maternal mortality.

It is hard losing our leaders, but, in the most positive sense, they make way for new leaders.

The transition forces us to think again about what we do and how we do it.

It's the natural evolution of a strong and maturing organisation, and an essential part of its enduring success.

As your patron, and on behalf of all of us here tonight, and all the women and men of Australia who support you: Happy Birthday IWDA!

We are honoured to call you ours and honoured to share you with the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you, and please have a wonderful evening.