Good evening

As Patron of the Australian Red Cross—an organisation that does so much for so many—it is my very great honour to welcome you to this very important occasion.

Because tonight we recognise four outstanding Australian nurses…

· Elizabeth Bowell
· Nola Henry
· Amanda McClelland
· And Kerry Page

…four nurses who have served with great honour and distinction in some of the most trying and dangerous conditions imaginable.

We will present them with the Florence Nightingale Medal—the highest international distinction a nurse can receive.

And on behalf of those they have treated and whose lives they have saved—we say a big and heartfelt ‘thank you’.

Whether it be fighting ebola in West Africa or saving lives in war torn South Sudan—these women have made a difference to our world.

And in the process they have done themselves, their families, the nursing profession, the international Red Cross, and this nation proud.

And what has really struck me reading about tonight’s medal winners, is that they have been committed to helping the disadvantaged, the dispossessed and the displaced their entire careers.

This isn’t a flash-in-the-pan moment of service; this is who they are and what they do.

And as we pause to acknowledge their contribution, I think we are also taking a moment to acknowledge those they have worked with and all nurses practising in dangerous and difficult conditions.

Because without the skill, compassion and humanity of these nurses—the word we live in would be a very different place.

Today, and for centuries, it has been nurses who have cared for the sick and vulnerable, helped those in times of crisis, tended to those wounded in battle and provided emergency treatments when disease and disaster hits.
None of these are easy or glamourous tasks.

But they are essential to life.

They are a practical and powerful expression of our humanity.

And nurses like Kerry, Amanda, Nola and Elizabeth personify this human character, this human spirit—in action.

They care.

They change lives.

They save lives.

And they help make what can often be a harsh and unfair world that little bit better.

So congratulations.

It takes a special person to heed the call, to go forth and help, when the personal risks can be so great.

But it is that selflessness that defines our medal recipients.

I am sure Florence Nightingale herself would be looking on with an approving eye.

Thank you.