Report of the Australian Government Delegation to the 58th
Session of the United Nations

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

New York, 10–21 March 2014
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FOREWORD

As Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, I was pleased to lead the Australian Government delegation to the 58th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW58) in New York in March 2014.

This year’s session provided a platform for nations and civil society to reflect on how the Millennium Development Goals have advanced gender equality and women’s rights and to discuss the challenges that remain. As the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015, CSW58 was an opportunity for Australia to work with global leaders to ensure women’s and girls’ human rights remain a key priority for the post-2015 development agenda.

I am pleased that countries have renewed their commitment to eradicating global poverty, with emphasis placed on improving areas of public policy that are linked to systemic gender inequality.

The Commission has reaffirmed the vital role of women as agents of development and recognises that increasing women’s economic empowerment is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Commission also stressed the importance of countries’ continued efforts on eliminating discrimination against women and girls to transform inequitable social norms, including all forms of violence against women and girls and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.

Importantly, the Agreed Conclusions from CSW58 reinforce the need for gender equality, the empowerment of women, and the human rights of women and girls to be reflected as a stand-alone goal and for it to be integrated through targets and indicators into all goals of any new development agenda.

Australia’s international advocacy for gender equality will continue beyond CSW58 through the development of the post-2015 development agenda; bilateral efforts to reduce violence and improve
access to health and education for women in the Indo-Pacific; its commitment to working with G20 nations on increasing women’s workforce participation; and efforts to advance progress against existing APEC objectives for women’s economic empowerment in the Asia-Pacific.

The extent of the challenge to achieve greater empowerment and equality for women and girls domestically, regionally and internationally continues to be substantial. Australia is committed to working to address gender inequality in all its forms, not only to advance the human rights of women and girls, but to ensure meaningful progress in social and economic development across the world.

On behalf of the delegation I would like to thank the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for their assistance with preparations and advice for the delegation’s participation in CSW58. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Ambassador Gary Quinlan, and his staff for the support provided in New York.

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women
Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
Head of delegation
THE 58TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW58)

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (the Commission) is the principal global policy making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. Every year, representatives of United Nations (UN) Member States gather at the UN Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment worldwide.

As is usual each year, at CSW58 the Commission considered three key themes:

- a priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (the primary focus for the session, which is based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995);

- a review theme: access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work (a priority theme from a previous session); and

- an emerging issue: women’s access to productive resources (selected in response to trends, developments and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women, or equality between men and women).

Before CSW58, UN Women organised Expert Group Meetings on the themes under consideration. The views of experts from academia and civil society from around the world were sought on the themes. Reports from these meetings can be found at www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/official-documents.

During the annual sessions, the Commission holds roundtables for Ministers, State Secretaries and other senior representatives, providing a forum for high-level exchange of experiences and good practices. The Commission also holds interactive panel sessions on each of the themes considered. These panels allow experts, UN agencies and other organisations to present information related to each of the themes and for these to be discussed in a broad forum.

For further information on the Commission, please see Annex A.

UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, was created in July 2010.
THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DELEGATION TO CSW58

Jessie Street, a suffragette and human rights campaigner, was one of the Australian delegates at the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and played a part in the establishment of the Commission the following year. Since that time Australia has formally participated in annual sessions of the Commission through the work carried out by the Australian Government delegation.

Australian Government delegations to the Commission actively engage in negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions (formal outcomes of the Commission) and resolutions, host and speak at a range of events, and pursue Australia’s agenda in relation to advancing gender equality. Engagement in these proceedings enables Australia to:

- provide a principled voice on human rights, particularly the rights of women;
- showcase Australia’s gender equality initiatives internationally;
- engage with civil society to ensure better outcomes for women in Australia and globally; and
- strengthen and build relationships with like-minded countries and near neighbours.

The Australian Government delegation to CSW58 was led by Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women. Minister Cash delivered Australia’s Country Statement, which outlined the Government’s unwavering commitment to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. Minister Cash also met with leaders of key UN agencies and her counterparts from different countries to both consider the barriers to achieving gender equality, and discuss effective strategies to address these barriers.

One of the most valuable experiences for me was engaging with stakeholders on key areas of interest. While different countries experience varying degrees of gender inequality, we can learn from other nations who are tackling similar issues to those we face in Australia. Through speaking at an event on empowering young women to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and discussing the issue with senior UN officials, I gained a deeper understanding into how FGM affects individual women and the work being done globally to address this problem. These insights caused me to reflect on the immense value of the Australian Government’s continued work with communities, legal and health professionals to protect the rights of Australian women and girls affected by FGM.

Minister Cash

Minister Cash spoke at numerous CSW58 sessions, advocating strongly for a twin-track approach for the post-2015 development agenda. This approach involves gender equality, the empowerment of women
and the human rights of women and girls being reflected as a stand-alone goal, and this goal being
integrated through targets and indicators into all goals of any new development agenda. Minister Cash
used these sessions to send a clear message to the Commission and the international community that
Australia is prioritising gender equality across the global security, trade, and economic agendas and,
importantly, that ending violence against women and their children is a fundamental tenet of the
Australian Government.

An outline of the Minister’s engagements at and in the margins of CSW58 is available in Annex B.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Australian Government Delegation to CSW58</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</td>
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<td>• Her Excellency, Natasha Stott Despoja AM, Australia’s Ambassador for Women and Girls</td>
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<td>• His Excellency, Gary Quinlan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations</td>
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<td>• Dr Brooke Thomas, Chief of Staff to Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</td>
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<td>• Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner</td>
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<td>• Harinder Sidhu, First Assistant Secretary, Multilateral Policy Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
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<td>• Helen McDevitt, First Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Division, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
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<td>• Her Excellency, Philippa King, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations</td>
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<td>• Mairi Steele, Assistant Secretary, Office for Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
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<td>• Anastasia Carayanides, General Assembly Coordinator, Australian Mission to the United Nations</td>
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<td>• Tanisha Hewanpola, First Secretary, Australian Mission to the United Nations</td>
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<td>• Julie McKay, Executive Director, Australian National Committee for UN Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dr Susan Harris Rimmer, Director of Studies at the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian National University</td>
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Clockwise from top:

In March 2014 I participated in my first United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, as Australia’s Ambassador for Women and Girls.

Australia has been a keen participant in the Commission over many years and under successive governments. Our involvement each year builds on this longstanding commitment and reflects a strong tradition of government-civil society partnership to promote gender equality.

This year was no exception. Led by Minister Michaelia Cash, Australia’s delegation to CSW58 included the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, government officials and—representing civil society—academic Dr Susan Harris Rimmer and Executive Director of Australia’s UN Women National Committee, Julie McKay. The contribution of the civil society delegates to the successful negotiation of Australia’s priorities was outstanding.

CSW58, with its focus on progress towards gender equality through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the promotion of women and girls’ rights in the post-2015 development agenda, was an especially significant one for Australia and our development partners.

Gender equality is placed centrally in our aid programme and women’s economic empowerment is a priority in Australia’s economic diplomacy and in my international advocacy. CSW58 was an important forum in which to negotiate for strong international commitment to these interests, to showcase Australia’s programs and to build closer cooperation with our regional partners, especially in the Pacific.
To this end, Australia participated actively in a broad array of the hundreds of side events. Like other members of Australia’s Government delegation, I played a formal role in a number of these events, presenting on Australia’s approaches to the post-2015 development agenda, Women, Peace and Security, violence against women and women in leadership.

Traditionally, Australia co-hosts a side event with its Pacific development partners and this is a vital element of our cooperation at the Commission to promote shared regional concerns. This year, the event assessed progress on MDG 3 (on gender equality) in the Pacific, an issue of particular significance to Australia with our strong investment in gender equality through the 10 year Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative.

The side events set the context for the business end of the Commission: protracted and often difficult negotiations around an outcome document. In support of the formal negotiations, the Minister and I participated in an extensive programme of bilateral meetings with heads of other delegations and representatives of UN agencies to explain and encourage support for Australia’s approach.

These leaders (women such as Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, Helen Clark, Administrator of the UN Development Programme and Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict) were impressive. However, it is the daily struggles and extraordinary resilience of women around the globe which underpin the Commission, inspire its work and motivate its pledge to multilateral action.

The eleventh hour adoption of Agreed Conclusions at CSW58, with strong language on a range of issues of importance to Australia (women’s economic empowerment, violence against women and the promotion of gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda), reflected both the calibre of Australia’s negotiating team and Australia’s unwavering commitment to be a compelling voice for women on the world stage.

I am encouraged that in recent times the Australian Government has ensured the tabling of a Statement to Federal Parliament on the outcomes of CSW58. Australia has much to be proud of in its efforts to help change women’s and girls’ lives for the better.

Australia was also represented in a number of events by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick. The Commissioner spoke at the NGO Forum Consultation Day and engaged strongly with non-government organisations, participating in a number of parallel events organised by the National Women’s Alliances. These interactions are vital to ensuring that Australia’s response to gender equality remains at the forefront of international best practice. The interactions also provided an opportunity for Australia to campaign on critical matters relating to gender equality and to showcase to the international community Australia’s progress to achieve gender equality domestically.
As Australia’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner (SDC), I was privileged to be a member of the Australian Government delegation for the first week of CSW58.

In advance of attending CSW58, I submitted two briefings (Women’s economic security: Recognising and valuing unpaid caring work and Independent participation rights for National Human Rights Institutions at CSW) to Minister Cash and the Office for Women on the priority theme to inform the Australian Government’s negotiating framework and proposed language for CSW58.

The Australian Government delegation had a strong and positive presence at CSW58, having organised high quality side events on key gender equality issues, which profiled the leading practices in Australia, as well as raised pertinent issues in the international context. I welcomed the opportunity to present at five events co-hosted by the Australian Government or Australian non-government organisations.

The presence of Minister Cash and the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, Ms Natasha Stott Despoja, made a significant impact on bilateral and regional negotiations that fed into the multilateral negotiations. Their presence and contributions also had a high impact in profiling Australia’s leading work on gender equality, most notably in addressing different forms of violence against women, women’s economic security, and women’s leadership.

I would also like to acknowledge the strong presence of Australian non-government organisations who were actively involved in promoting women’s human rights issues and positively contributing to the negotiations.

Australia’s Country Statement to CSW58, delivered by Minister Cash on 11 March 2014, was welcomed as a strong statement of support on addressing gender equality and violence against women (including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage) and on the promotion and protection of women and girls’ human rights in the post-2015 development agenda.

The Australian Government also played a positive role in negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions. The final Agreed Conclusions for CSW58 have been welcomed as a strong commitment by governments to reaffirm women’s human rights and gender equality issues and their integration in poverty alleviation and development frameworks.

Importantly, the Agreed Conclusions called for gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights of women and girls to be reflected as a stand-alone goal and to be integrated through targets and indicators into all goals of any new development agenda in the post-2015 negotiations.
In particular, it was pleasing to see the Agreed Conclusions note the positive role and contribution of national human rights institutions for the achievement of gender equality and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. It was also pleasing to see positive language reflecting the issues of women’s economic security, particularly relating to unpaid caring work.

I would like to thank the Australian Government for the opportunity to attend CSW58 as part of the Australian Government delegation. It was an honour to be part of such a valuable and effective delegation.

Australia included two non-government representatives on the Australian Government delegation to CSW58: Dr Susan Harris Rimmer, Director of Studies at the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian National University; and Ms Julie McKay, Executive Director, Australian National Committee for UN Women. This reflects the Australian Government’s ongoing commitment to engage civil society.

Non-government representatives are included on the delegation to provide advice to Government on matters relating to their particular areas of expertise, and to act as liaison points between government and civil society. Briefings were held each evening to update Australian delegates with the progress made at the official proceedings. Additionally, they had close engagement with non-government representatives on other official delegations.

Minister Cash, Minister Price (Northern Territory), Ambassador Stott Despoja, and Sex Discrimination Commissioner Broderick with Australian non-government representatives at the
Experiencing the Commission as part of the Government delegation was a privilege for both of us.

There were essentially two halves of CSW58. The first half involved attending many events and workshops, hearing the stories of women and of programs and systems that were supporting them across the world. It is difficult to explain the value of attending these events to someone who has not attended one of the Commission’s sessions, but the chance to explore what works, what doesn’t and how it impacts women’s lives, sharing the experience of women from around the world is unique.

Our Minister and Ambassador made an immediate impression. Each time they spoke at an event, people were encouraged and strengthened by their enthusiasm and passion for gender equality. We felt proud hearing Australia make strong statements about key issues affecting women and girls in our region. The symbolism of having a Minister deliver the Country Statement is important, both to other member states, but also to civil society. We had many conversations with other non-government organisations, envious that our Minister had attended and participated so actively in the Commission.

During the first week, we attended events on topics ranging from Women, Peace and Security, to women’s leadership and financing for development. We were also able to have a number of meetings with individual non-government organisations to hear their concerns and hopes for the Agreed Conclusions. One of the best experiences we had was meeting with the Pacific Delegates attending CSW58 and strategising together about the Agreed Conclusions. After our initial meeting, we held two subsequent meetings which were very useful and focused on specific language in the Agreed Conclusions.
Week two focused entirely on the negotiation of the Agreed Conclusions and the resolutions. Whether at 10am or 3:30am, Australia’s First Secretary, Tanisha Hewanpola, was a force to be reckoned with. Tanisha’s understanding of the issues and the precedent was impressive and we are very grateful to her for sharing her knowledge and expertise. Our role that week varied from sharing information, to researching precedent and liaising with and seeking advice from international non-government organisations. It was fascinating to see which issues were widely accepted and which created significant concerns for some Member States. The Agreed Conclusions were hard fought and reflect what we believe is a strong commitment from Member States to both a stand-alone goal for gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda and cross-cutting targets and indicators in other goals. Over the next 12 to 24 months, it will be critical to ensure that language around women’s sexual and reproductive rights is strengthened and that commitment to eliminating harmful traditional practices is maintained.

Through an active Facebook Group ‘Australian NGOs at CSW 58’ we were able to communicate with many of the non-government delegates who were attending CSW58, as well as seek feedback and advice from non-government organisations back home. This was really useful and we would recommend this strategy to future non-government delegates. Our meetings each evening to brief the non-government delegates on what activities the Government had been involved in, key representations and, as the fortnight progressed, the language negotiations were both useful and restorative. Whether sitting in a boardroom, or on floors in corridors, the meetings were a great way for us to test ideas and seek input from others.

Throughout CSW58, we reflected on being proud to be part of a sector which is so dedicated to seeing progress towards gender equality. For some this dedication involves spending endless hours lobbying and researching in the corridors of the UN, for some this was sharing information and research from Australia and for others it was posting supportive messages on social media and plying us with coffee and chocolate. All of these contributions were well received.

We would like to thank the Government for the opportunity to attend CSW58 on the Government delegation and we hope that this will be continued in years to come.
Non-government delegates (left to right): Dr Susan Harris Rimmer, Ms Julie McKay.
THE CSW58 PROGRAMME

CSW58 was opened by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, who reiterated his commitment to gender equality, women’s leadership, and the empowerment of women and girls, noting that these objectives are central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Secretary-General also called on delegates to ensure the voices of women and girls are heard and acknowledged in defining a post-2015 development agenda.

During CSW58, each country presented a Country Statement to the Commission. These Statements outline a country’s priorities for the Commission session and share examples of good practice relating to the priority theme. Australia’s statement is included in Annex C. Other Country Statements can be found at papersmart.unmeetings.org/en/ecosoc/csw/csw58/statements/.

In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (ECOSOC Resolution 2009/15), CSW58 included high level plenary sessions, including roundtables and panels, to examine priority issues relating to the themes for discussion. The official programme for CSW58 can be found at www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/official-meetings.

Minister Cash participated in one of the two High Level Roundtables on the CSW58 priority theme. This provided the Minister with the opportunity to discuss Australia’s experiences in supporting the MDGs, particularly through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development and the Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction programmes.

Australia also participated in the panel discussions on the priority theme, review theme and emerging theme. These panels were useful mechanisms for policy discussion and debate on how initiatives can be applied in different contexts. Papers from these panels and moderator’s summaries of some of the panel discussions can be found at www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/official-meetings#panel1.

Bilateral Meetings and Engagements

Bilateral engagements provided the Australian Government delegation with the opportunity to advance Australia’s priorities in relation to the Agreed Conclusions and to pursue Australia’s agenda in relation to promoting women’s and girls’ human rights.

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1 To see all Country Statements, select “No Date” in the first drop down box and “Country Statements” in the second drop down box.
I was both inspired and humbled by my meeting with Ms Zainab Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. It was motivating to see how her personal experience and the experiences of those she has met through her work have encouraged her to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence, particularly in her current role with the United Nations.

Minister Cash met with the head of a number of UN agencies and many of her counterparts to consider the barriers to achieving gender equality through implementing the MDGs and to discuss strategies for ensuring gender equality remains a key priority as we shape the post-2015 development agenda.

Minister Cash held high level meetings with:

- Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women;
- Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA);
- Ms Helen Clark, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
- Ms Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- Dr Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights; and
- Ms Jeni Klugman, Director of Gender and Development, World Bank Group.

Minister Cash held bilateral meetings with representatives of Canada, China, Denmark, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkey and the United States of America.

At these meetings Minister Cash focused on articulating Australia’s support for a twin-track approach for the post-2015 development agenda. This approach involves including a stand-alone goal on gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights of women and girls, and for this goal to be integrated, through targets and indicators, into all goals of any new development agenda. Minister Cash also used bilateral meetings to compare and contrast policy settings in other countries on issues important to gender quality such as domestic violence, forced and early marriage, women’s workforce participation, paid parental leave, education, childcare and women in leadership. A number of countries expressed interest in Australia’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, which is seen by many to represent international best practice.
Clockwise from top left:

1. Meeting with Ms Zainab Hawa Bangura, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

2. Meeting with the Hon Jo Goodhew MP, New Zealand’s Minister for Women’s Affairs.

3. Meeting with Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women.
4. Meeting with the Hon Tolofuaivalelei Falemoe Leilataua (Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa) and H.E. Mr Aunese Makoi Simati (Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the United Nations).

CSW58 Side Events

In addition to the formal Commission programme, countries and UN Agencies hold side events that focus on specific issues relating to the priority themes and gender equality more broadly. Australia organised two side events at CSW58 and co-sponsored seven others.


At the event, Minister Cash and the United Kingdom’s then Minister for Women and Equality, the Right Hon Maria Miller, spoke on the importance of countries’ roles in strengthening the international framework for women’s participation in conflict. The event also included a panel discussion featuring individual women representatives from Syria, Colombia and South Sudan, who are working to bring peace in their respective countries. These representatives also spoke of the common experiences and challenges they have in ensuring women’s participation in peace talks.

The Australian Side Event—MDG 3 in the Pacific: Now and Beyond—provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The speakers, including ministerial representatives from across the Pacific, covered a broad range of issues including women in leadership, women’s economic empowerment, access to education, the special case of small island nations, peace and security, and the empowerment of women with disabilities. Speakers noted that progress has been slow and inconsistent to date, making it critically important that the focus be directed on the particular development challenges facing women, and the gaps between the MDG targets and the realities for most women and girls in the Pacific. The event also highlighted the resilience and adaptability of women in the face of change. For example, one speaker spoke of how women in the Marshall Islands are now using plastic bags in their traditional crafts instead of palm fronds, which have become difficult to find as a result of the natural disasters that have affected that country.

Australia also co-sponsored and participated in a range of side events organised by other nations and organisations that were consistent with Australia’s domestic and international priorities. These included:

- To 2015 and Beyond: putting girls’ education at the heart of the agenda (10 March);
• Increasing Women’s Contribution to Peace and Security (10 March);

• Women Empowerment Principles - Equality means business: a multi-stakeholder dialogue on implications for the development agenda (11 March);

• Women’s economic opportunities: Unpaid care work and beyond (11 March);

• Reducing Violence Against Women - the missing Millennium Development Goal (11 March);

• Empowering Young People to End Female Genital Mutilations: the role of governments and civil society (11 March); and

• The Equal Futures Partnership: Addressing the impact of gender-based violence on women’s economic and political participation (13 March).

Further information on these events and other side events held at CSW58 can be found at: [www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/side-events](http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/side-events).

Attendees of the Women’s Participation in Peace Processes event hosted by the governments of Australia and the United Kingdom and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

Events such as these provided inspiration and encouragement to those working to address gender inequality. They also challenged participants—those from government, the United Nations, businesses and civil society—to take action and rethink how they might more effectively confront problems relating to
gender equality at the local, national, regional and international levels.

**Priority Theme for CSW58**

Each year the Commission examines a ‘priority theme’ based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). The priority theme for CSW58 was *challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls*. The substance of this theme recognises that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are central to achieving the MDGs and the success of the post-2015 development agenda.

**Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

The BPFA is an international plan for achieving gender equality for women that was agreed at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in September 1995. Its aim is to remove obstacles for women’s active participation in all areas of public and private life and establish shared responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the community to build a sustainable, just and developed society.

The panel at The Equal Futures Partnership: Addressing the impact of gender-based violence on women’s economic and political participation Side Event hosted by the governments of Denmark and the United States and UN Women.

The BPFA is a statement of the global recognition of women’s unequal status and provides guidelines for
actions on the part of governments, the UN System, national human rights institutions and civil society.

At its 49th Session (2005), the 10th anniversary of the BPFA, the Commission adopted a declaration emphasising that the full and effective implementation of the BPFA is essential to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs.

**Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

Australia is one of 189 countries that adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and committed to the MDGs. The eight MDGs form a shared world vision for reducing poverty. The central goal is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people living on less than US$1.25 a day.

### Beijing Platform for Action’s 12 Critical Areas of Concern

1. The burden of poverty on women  
2. Education and training  
3. Health care and related services  
4. Violence against women  
5. Effects of armed conflict  
6. Productive activities and access to resources (economic security)  
7. Power and decision-making (leadership)  
8. Institutional mechanisms  
9. Human rights  
10. Stereotyping of women, especially in the media  
11. Natural resources and the environment  
12. Discrimination against and violation of the rights of girls

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<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
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| 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | A. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1.25 a day  
B. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for |
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<th>Goal</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Target</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Achieve universal primary education</td>
<td>A. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Promote gender equality and empower women</td>
<td>A. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015</td>
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<td>Reduce child mortality</td>
<td>A. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Improve maternal health</td>
<td>A. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio</td>
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<td>B. Achieve universal access to reproductive health</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases</td>
<td>A. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</td>
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<td>B. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it</td>
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<td>C. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Ensure environmental sustainability</td>
<td>A. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</td>
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<td>B. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss</td>
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<td>C. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</td>
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<td>D. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Develop a global partnership for development</td>
<td>A. Develop further an open, rule-based predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</td>
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<td>Goal</td>
<td>Targets</td>
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<td>B. Address the special needs of least developed countries</td>
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<td>C. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States</td>
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<td>D. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</td>
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<td>F. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications</td>
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</table>

The Australian Government is committed to supporting progress on the MDGs, particularly in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Globally, there has been substantial progress toward reaching the MDGs however, much work remains to be done. Gender inequality persists in many countries. Women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work, economic assets and participation in government, and violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all goals. For example:

- globally, one in three women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner;²
- this figure is as high as two in three women in some Pacific countries;³
- only two out of 130 countries surveyed by the UN have achieved gender parity across all levels of education;⁴ and
- women farmers produce more than half the world’s food, but have far less access to land and resources than male farmers.⁵

Recognising the need for continued action, world leaders—including Australia’s Foreign Minister, the Hon Julie Bishop MP—met at the United Nations in 2013 and renewed their commitment to achieving the

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³ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Solomon Islands family health and safety study, 2009
Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Kiribati health and support study, 2010
Vanuatu Women’s Centre, Vanuatu and national survey on women’s lives and family relationships, 2011
⁴ United Nations, Millennium Development Goal 3 Fact Sheet, 2013
⁵ Worldwatch Institute, Female Farmers Overcome Barriers to Feed Africa, 2011
MDGs. They agreed to increase efforts on improving those MDGs at greatest risk of being unmet, including universal access to reproductive health and maternal health.

**Review Theme for CSW58**

In accordance with its multi-year programme of work, participating countries reviewed progress in the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions from CSW55 (2011). That year, Access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work, was the priority theme.

The Commission reviews previous Agreed Conclusions as part of its work plan, usually three to four years after a theme is considered as a priority theme. This review encourages dialogue on progress made in the implementation of Agreed Conclusions with a view to highlighting trends in the actions taken and importantly, to identify the remaining gaps and challenges.

This year the panel sessions focused in particular on women’s and girls’ participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, and the transition of women from education to full employment in these areas. Women’s and girls’ access to and participation levels in STEM education and employment are of particular relevance to CSW58, given its focus on gender equality in development.

Panel participants noted that employment opportunities in STEM-related fields were increasing. It will also be important to ensure that women have access to continued education and training to upgrade their skills for STEM-related employment to ensure they can move into emerging sectors and benefit from technological growth and development.

Panel participants also emphasised the need for new legislative and policy measures to redesign the workplace and make it “fit the people” rather than make “people fit the workplace”. This was of particular relevance to improving economic security for women domestically. It was noted that this approach requires long-term and inclusive approaches to career development where employees can avail themselves of parental leave and flexible work schedules without affecting their careers.

The Issues Paper and Moderator’s Summary from these sessions can be found at: www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/official-meetings.

**Emerging Issue for CSW58**

The emerging issue for CSW58 was women’s access to productive resources.

Internationally, women continue to lack access to productive resources, including land access, machinery, agricultural necessities such as fertilizer, and credit. Improving women’s access to productive
resources will improve their lives, household welfare and contribute to economic growth. The Food and Agriculture Organisation has estimated that agricultural output would increase by as much as 2.5 to 4 per cent if female farmers had access to the same productive resources as male farmers.6

Australia recognises that one of the best ways to promote economic growth and achieve stronger communities and societies is to empower women and girls. Ensuring women’s access to productive resources is essential to this objective. In Bangladesh, the Australian Government supports BRAC’s Targeting the Ultra Poor, a ground-breaking programme promoting and protecting the livelihoods of extremely poor women. The programme has reached more than one million rural households since 2002 and has achieved a 95 per cent success rate in lifting women out of extreme poverty.

Across Asia and the Pacific, Australia has drawn on private sector experience to improve women’s access to employment, training, financial services and technology through the Enterprise Challenge Fund. The Fund has provided grants to businesses to help create jobs and income-earning opportunities. It has also supported businesses to improve access to markets and extend financial services, technology and agricultural products to poor people. Since 2007, over 22,000 women have benefited from grants provided to businesses by the Enterprise Challenge Fund.

The Commission convened an interactive panel to examine the emerging issue of women’s access to productive resources, highlighting that women’s access to and control over productive resources is now broadly recognised as a precondition for sustainable development. Presentations by panellists focused on expanding women’s access to land and productive resources through a human rights-based approach. The panel also deliberated on key issues such as unequal distribution of unpaid care work; access to infrastructure, finance and credit; the importance of women’s financial inclusion in development; the impact of access to land and natural resources on indigenous women (especially in the context of achieving sustainable and resilient cities); and the imperative for mobilising international resources, support and cooperation.

The panel emphasised the critical role of a global partnership for development in realising future development goals with clear accountability mechanisms and expressed the need for a global and multi-sectoral framework, with active participation from civil society and the private sector. The panel considered that the flow of resources for development, including policies and programmes aimed at increasing women’s access to productive resources and addressing the impact of unpaid care work, could be achieved through greater international cooperation and active sharing of knowledge and experiences to improve human rights. The panel noted that sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators are essential to inform sound policies.

6 Food and Agriculture Organisation, The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture, closing the gender gap for development, 2011
The Issues Paper on this topic and the Moderator’s summary for the panel event on this topic can be found at: www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/official-meetings#panel3.
OUTCOMES OF CSW58

The principal output of the Commission is the Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme set for each year. The Agreed Conclusions include an analysis of the priority theme of concern and recommendations for governments, inter-governmental bodies and other institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to be implemented at the international, national, regional and local levels. The CSW58 Agreed Conclusions will be an important tool for further advocacy work and in ongoing discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.

The final report of the Commission, which includes both the Agreed Conclusions and any resolutions adopted, is submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for endorsement. The report of the Commission is expected to be considered at the June ECOSOC Coordination and Management (12-13 June).

Agreed Conclusions

The Agreed Conclusions to CSW58 were adopted on Saturday, 22 March 2014. A copy of the unedited version, yet to be endorsed by ECOSOC, can be found at www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014/session-outcomes.

The CSW58 Agreed Conclusions provide an overarching analysis of progress made against the MDGs. They also make specific recommendations in relation to each of the eight goals, noting where significant progress has been made and the key challenges that remain, in addition the Agreed Conclusions also provide a considered rationale describing why achieving these goals is important in the context of improving gender equality and the economic empowerment of women.

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7 At the time of publication, the Commission’s final report was not yet available. Once finalised, the Report will be made available on the UN Women website
8 At the time of publication, the Agreed Conclusions were available only as an Advanced unedited version, which is included in this report at Annex B
The CSW58 Agreed Conclusions express concern that many of the MDGs remain unmet and that whilst progress has been made in some areas there are many areas which impact on the vulnerability of women where progress is not being adequately addressed or measured. Concern is also expressed that overall progress for women and girls across all the MDGs remains slow and uneven.

Concern is noted that while significant progress has been made in relation to MDG 2 (achieve universal primary education) and MDG 4 (reduce child mortality), there are other areas that require urgent attention. Under MDG 2, progress has been made in net primary school enrolments and towards eliminating gender disparity in enrolments at primary schools. However, there has been less focus on school completion, educational quality and learning outcomes and in these specific areas there continues to be gender disparity. Similarly, while child mortality (MDG 4) has reduced globally, child deaths are concentrated in the poorest regions where there is a higher incidence of female under-five mortality rates due to discriminatory practices.

Concern is also noted that progress has been particularly slow in relation to MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women). Evidence indicates that women still face a lack of economic empowerment, have unequal access to full and productive employment and decent work, do not have equal pay for equal work, and bear an unequal burden in relation to unpaid care. Further, discriminatory
attitudes, norms, and stereotypes continue to persist.

**Progress on Australia’s Priority Objectives**

Australia’s priorities for CSW58 negotiations centred on a number of key issues. Of primary concern was ensuring that the Commission would call for gender equality to be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. In addition, Australia advocated for a robust focus relating to violence against women, women’s economic security and workforce participation, women’s political participation, sexual and reproductive health, and recognition of the increased vulnerability and marginalisation of particular groups of women.

A notable success was that Australia’s proposed formulation for referring to gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda, “gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s and girls’ human rights”, was adopted as the standard formulation throughout the Agreed Conclusions. This recognises the different dimensions of gender equality and acknowledges the agency of women in supporting development.

**Violence against women**

Given the persistence of gender-based violence on a global basis, Australia advocated for inclusion of forceful language on gender-based violence. Building on the outcomes of CSW57, which focused on violence against women, the CSW58 Agreed Conclusions strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls. This includes a call to eliminate harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage, ‘honour’ crimes and trafficking of persons, particularly women and girls.

Securing references to the Women, Peace and Security agenda was demanding given the strong objection of several states. However, consistent with Australia’s diligent work on the UN Security Council to progress this agenda, Australia negotiated persuasively and achieved support to ensure this key issue was included in the final text. As a consequence of Australia’s advocacy the final text includes references to all the related Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and relevant resolutions relating to children and armed conflict. An additional paragraph on women’s participation in peace processes, mediation efforts, conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, peace building and recovery was also included.

**Women’s economic security and workforce participation**

Ensuring that women are financially secure and are able to participate in the workforce is critical to improving outcomes for women. Greater workforce participation reduces the difference in outcomes for men and women and is an essential part of ensuring global economic growth and poverty reduction. Australia is pleased that compelling references, including new language, on women’s economic security and workforce participation were included in the Agreed Conclusions. The Agreed Conclusions
addressed a range of issues including economic autonomy and independence; access, control and ownership of assets, and natural and productive resources (for example land, energy and fuel); and rights to credit capital and finance. Increasing access to these resources can have a profound impact for women. The Food and Agriculture Organisation has estimated that if women had the same access to agricultural resources and services as men, they would produce 20 to 30 per cent more food\(^9\), greatly improving food security.

As the Australian Human Rights Commission has observed, unpaid caring responsibilities can have a significant impact on workforce participation.\(^{10}\) The CSW58 Agreed Conclusions recognise women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work for the first time and call for the valuing, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work, including equality in the sharing of responsibilities and chores between men and women. The increased awareness of this issue should result in a positive impact on women’s workforce participation.

Agreement was also reached to include references to a range of macro-economic issues including trade, market access, food and energy price volatility, overseas development aid, debt and austerity measures. Promoting gender equality in these areas will enhance economic efficiency and optimise the contribution that women can make to economic growth and poverty reduction.

**Sexual and reproductive health**

Whilst there continues to be significant debate amongst the international community on sexual and reproductive health issues, including the need to address HIV and AIDS, the Agreed Conclusions expressed concern about the magnitude of the unmet need for all sexual and reproductive health care services.

The Agreed Conclusions also recognise the rights of women and girls to have control over their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health free from coercion, discrimination and violence. This important principle is consistent with Australia’s National Women’s Health Policy 2010, which identifies sexual and reproductive health as one of four priority health issues that represent the major challenges associated with death and burden of disease for women.

Importantly, the Agreed Conclusions include language recognising the importance of comprehensive evidence based education for human sexuality, including for all adolescents and youth. In addition to promoting sexual and reproductive health, education that helps young people identify inappropriate sexual or violent behavior and shape their expectations and capacity to build and sustain respectful relationships plays a key role in equipping young people to develop more equal and positive relationships.

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Multiple disadvantage

The Agreed Conclusions included recognition of the fact that some women experience increased vulnerability and marginalisation due to the compounding impacts of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality. Additionally, the Agreed Conclusions included stand-alone paragraphs addressing women and girls with disabilities and Indigenous women.

Other key issues

Other key issues of importance to Australia addressed in the Agreed Conclusions include:

• child, early and forced marriage;
• protection, support and empowerment of child-headed households, in particular those headed by girls;
• recognising the specific needs of women and girls affected by natural disasters;
• social protection, particularly for women and girls;
• the burden and threat of non-communicable diseases and the different effect that these diseases can have on women and men;
• promotion of education, including secondary and tertiary education, and ensuring girls' safety whilst commuting to, and while at, school;
• cooperation with and increasing support for civil society organisations;
• recognition of the role of women human rights defenders;
• ensuring men and boys are fully engaged in addressing gender inequality; and
• addressing discriminatory social norms.

Resolutions

In addition to the Agreed Conclusions, the Commission can adopt resolutions on women’s rights issues not related to the priority theme. These resolutions represent issues relating to particular populations of women in specific contexts.

New Commission resolutions are generally proposed by individual countries often following a specific event that highlights the need for specific attention to the gender aspects of an issue. For example, the resolution on *Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters*, was proposed by Japan one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake, to enable Japan to promote deeper international understanding of the gender dimensions of natural disasters, humanitarian responses and to promote more gender-sensitive disaster risk management.

Once agreed, Commission resolutions are often brought forward on a regular basis to ensure that the international community continues to give attention to these issues (for example, the resolution on *Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS* is usually raised every second year).
Four resolutions, including one draft resolution, were adopted at CSW58:

- a draft resolution on the Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women;
- a resolution on Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts;
- a resolution on Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters; and
- a resolution on Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS.


**CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT**

Engaging with civil society on key issues relating to gender equality, both domestically and internationally, is a key priority for the Australian Government. The Government is committed to working with non-government stakeholders to draw on their expertise, insights and to ensure that a broad range of knowledge and experiences inform its policy positions.

More broadly, the Australian Government, primarily through the Office for Women based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, engages with civil society in the lead up to the Commission each year. As part of this engagement, the Office for Women invites input from the non-government sector on key issues relevant to the session’s themes and also disseminates information to assist non-government organisation involvement in the Commission, including raising awareness domestically of gender equality issues after the sessions have concluded.

This year, for CSW58, the Office for Women ran an open submissions process for non-government organisations to provide input on relevant issues. Fifteen submissions were received and fed into the development of Australia’s priorities for CSW58.

The Office for Women disseminates information regarding Commission processes and upcoming events to its stakeholders. Additions to the mailing list can be made by contacting the Office for Women at [womensbranchinternational@pmc.gov.au](mailto:womensbranchinternational@pmc.gov.au).

This year, over 50 representatives from a range of organisations from Australia’s non-government sector attended CSW58. In recognition of the extent of their involvement in CSW58 and parallel events, Australian non-government organisations featured in every daily update on CSW58 provided by UN Women to non-government organisations participating in the Commission. Their active participation in events, lobbying and social media presence added weight to the views expressed by Minister Cash that Australia is committed to achieving gender equality.
CSW58 is unique in the United Nations’ meeting calendar for its strong participation of civil society groups. 6,000 representatives from 860 civil society organisations were registered for CSW58. More than 300 parallel events were hosted by the non-government community close to the UN premises providing an opportunity to share experiences and to showcase regional and local initiatives to address gender inequality.

Following the conclusion of CSW58, the National Women’s Alliances held a Forum on 7 May to share their experiences with the non-government sector. Minister Cash attended the Forum on behalf of the Government and delivered the opening remarks.

Australian Non-government Delegate Reception: Ambassador Gary Quinlan speaks to the diverse group of Australian Non-government representatives participating in CSW58 and parallel events.
BEYOND CSW58

Post-2015 Development Agenda

The post-2015 development agenda will be the successor to the MDGs, which are due to expire in 2015. The processes for agreeing the final agenda began in 2013.

The main negotiating forum for the post-2015 development agenda is the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), which has 30 seats. Australia shares one of these seats with the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The OWG has been mandated to present to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) a set of goals by September 2014 for consideration as part of the final agenda.

Separately, the report of the UN Secretary-General’s High Level Panel (HLP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda was released on 30 May 2013. Both the OWG and the HLP reports, amongst other inputs, will be used to inform an amalgamated report which the UN Secretary-General is expected to present by the end of 2014 as a prelude to commencing a final inter-governmental process. This process will culminate in a Summit in 2015 to agree the final agenda.

An ongoing commitment to ensure the human rights of women and girls

Taking place at a strategic time during this process, CSW58 and the Agreed Conclusions will directly inform the post-2015 development agenda.

Negotiations of the Agreed Conclusions during CSW58 indicate that there continues to be significant debate amongst the international community about particular issues relating to gender equality. These issues include reproductive health rights, addressing HIV and AIDS, recognition of the various forms of families and traditional practices that may be harmful.

The continuing dialogue on issues relating to gender equality recognises that violence against women continues to persist in all countries, including Australia, and that this violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s and girls’ ability to enjoy their rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men.

In this context, the Australian Government will continue to support and advocate for the rights of women and girls to be fully respected and promoted domestically and internationally.

In mid-2014 the Government will release the Second Action Plan under the National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. The Second Action Plan will provide an opportunity to take stock, reflect on gaps, develop new actions and strengthen implementation, with an ongoing focus on critical priorities such as primary prevention of violence against women and their children.
Australia’s Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja AM, will lead the Australian delegation to the next key international forum on gender equality—the APEC Women and the Economy Forum. This is part of Ambassador Stott Despoja’s broad role to promote Australian Government policies and activity regarding gender equality and the social, political and economic empowerment of women and girls, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.
ANNEX A – INFORMATION ON THE COMMISSION

Background

The Commission is a functional commission of ECOSOC, which is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women.

The Commission takes place annually to evaluate progress on gender equality and to identify critical and emerging issues and challenges. Importantly, each year the Commission aims to establish a set of agreed global standards and formulate recommendations for governments, inter-governmental organisations (including the UN system) and civil society to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide.

More information on the functions and history of the Commission can be found at www.unwomen.org/en/csw.

Commission membership

The Commission has 45 member countries. Members are elected for four-year terms based on equitable geographical distribution (13 members from Africa; 11 from Asia; nine from Latin America and the Caribbean; eight from Western Europe and other States; and four from Eastern Europe).

Australia’s involvement in the Commission

Australia was one of the 15 founding members of the Commission and has served as a member five times. Australia last served from 1993 to 1996.

Although Australia is not currently a member, its participation at the Commission each year enables Australia to contribute to international negotiation on key issues affecting women and discussion on policy goals. The Australian Government sends a delegation to the Commission each year and is particularly active in negotiating Agreed Conclusions in accordance with Australia’s policy positions.

Government delegations can include non-government representatives and non-government representatives have been included as part of the delegation to the Commission annually since 1999. In 2010 Australia commenced providing funding to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to support participation in the Commission by representatives from the Pacific Island countries.
ANNEX B – MINISTER CASH’S PROGRAMME

Official Commission engagements

Minister Cash attended the **Opening Session of the Commission**.

Minister Cash delivered a statement or made interventions at the following Commission plenary sessions:

- **General Discussion** - Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly
- **High-level Roundtable** - Experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with support data, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made in regard to the priority theme: *Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls*

Side Events and Events at the Margins

Minister Cash presented at the following side events:

- **To 2015 and Beyond: putting girls’ education at the heart of the agenda** - hosted by Global Education First
- **Empowering Young People to End Female Genital Mutilations: the role of governments and civil society** - hosted by the governments of Burkina Faso and Italy, UN Women, UNICEF and UNFPA
- **Launch Event - Australian Chapter of the Women in Public Service Project**
- **MDG 3 in the Pacific - Now and Beyond: key achievements and challenges in progressing gender equality and women’s empowerment** - hosted by the governments of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Australia, Kiribati, New Zealand, Samoa, the Solomon Islands and Tonga
- **Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: how can the international community support women’s leadership in conflict resolution?** - hosted by the governments of Australia and the United Kingdom, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
- **The Equal Futures Partnership: addressing the impact of gender-based violence on women’s economic and political participation** - hosted by the Danish and United States delegations to CSW58

Minister Cash also participated in the following events:

- **Australian Non-government Delegate Reception** - Reception hosted by the Australian
Ambassador to the United Nations in New York for all Australians participating in CSW58 and parallel events

- **Reception to celebrate women’s political participation** - Reception hosted by the governments of New Zealand, Liberia and Brazil

- **Japanese Reception on the occasion of the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women** - Reception hosted by the government of Japan

- **Women’s Economic Opportunities: unpaid care and beyond** - Breakfast event hosted by the Australian Government and the World Bank

- **Pacific Roundtable Event** - Roundtable for Pacific Ministers hosted by the Hon Jo Goodhew, New Zealand Minister for Women’s Affairs

- **European Union Reception on the occasion of the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women** - Reception hosted by the European Union and UN Women

- **World YWCA Breakfast**

- **Catalyst** - Meeting and visit to the Catalyst, a global non-profit organisation with a mission to expand opportunities for women and business
Mr Chair,

It is an honour to address the Commission at its 58th Session where we are gathered to consider our achievements and challenges in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for women and girls and where we can take the opportunity to reflect on how we should address these issues in a post-2015 development agenda.

The world has made significant progress toward reaching the MDGs. This is an achievement of which we can all be proud. Having gender equality as a stand-alone goal has galvanised international support for gender equality and women’s empowerment. We know that achieving equality between men and women is central to economic empowerment and sustainable human development.

But while progress has been made, particularly towards achieving gender parity in primary education under MDG 3, the overall outcomes for women have been insufficient and uneven. More work is needed.

Gender inequality persists in every country around the world. Every day, women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work, economic assets and participation in government. Only two out of 130 countries surveyed by the UN have achieved gender parity across all levels of education. Women farmers produce more than half the world’s food, but have far less access to land and resources than male farmers. Violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all development goals. We need to press ahead to reach MDG 3; and we must make sure that gender equality is a cornerstone of the post-2015 development agenda and advances the human rights of women and girls in all countries.

Australia’s recent appointment of a new Ambassador for Women and Girls reflects our commitment to be at the forefront of efforts to promote the empowerment of women and girls.

We are working bilaterally with a number of countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region in supporting
women leaders, helping to end violence against women, promote economic empowerment and enable women and girls to access health services and an education.

We are also prioritising gender equality across the global security, trade and economic agendas.

One of the major impediments to the advancement of women and to achieving sustainable development, is the prolific nature of violence against women. We know that violence against women and girls stops progress. Globally, one in three women who have been in a relationship has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. Stopping violence against women is a necessary precursor to advancing development. Australia is not immune.

Australia has no tolerance for violence against women and girls. It is a universal issue that affects women of all backgrounds, races, cultures and economic circumstances and can be exacerbated by multiple forms of disadvantage, including disability, indigenous status and sexual orientation and gender identity. Domestically and internationally—including through our aid programme and advocacy—Australia is actively contributing towards a world where women and girls can thrive and where their safety is assured.

To address the devastating personal, social and economic costs of violence against women, the Australian Government is working across government, and with civil society, to implement our National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. Under the National Plan, Australia has established a Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children and the National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women. The Foundation is successfully building awareness and the National Centre of Excellence is doing great work in building the evidence-base, including on primary prevention.

Violence of course takes many insidious forms. Australia is resolute in its view that there can be no excuse for violence against women and girls—historical, cultural, religious or legislative. We must do all we can to eradicate practices that condone the subjugation of women.

That is why Australia has joined international action against harmful traditional practices including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Resolutions in both the Human Rights Council and General Assembly have focused attention on the consequences of these crimes and called on States to take action.

Australia is committed to this.

We commend the strong African leadership and the real momentum for change in eliminating female genital mutilation. As Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, I have identified the elimination of female genital mutilation in Australia as a priority.
Female genital mutilation is illegal in Australia and it is also illegal in some Australian States and Territories to take a person overseas with the intention of having female genital mutilation performed on them. We have conducted a review of Australia’s legislative framework and are considering strengthening it to ensure Australian women and girls are protected to the greatest extent possible.

But legislation alone cannot change embedded cultural practices. We have commenced a dialogue with civil society through our national women’s alliances, building on the National Summit on female genital mutilation held in April 2013.

We are funding a range of civil society projects on female genital mutilation that focus on raising community awareness, professional training for health professionals and building an evidence and research base on the practice of female genital mutilation in Australia.

Similarly, on child, early and forced marriage, in February 2013, the Australian Parliament passed legislation to recognise forced marriage as a serious form of exploitation and a crime. The offence is aggravated if the victim is under the age of eighteen.

We are actively working with stakeholders to improve community awareness on child, early and forced marriage issues. We are developing a series of educative and awareness-raising materials on early and forced marriage, in close collaboration with non-government organisations.

This work is important. We all must work together to eliminate violence against women and harmful traditional practices both domestically and internationally. Without this, we cannot expect meaningful progress in other spheres of development.

Australia is committed to designing a post-2015 development agenda that focuses global efforts on economic growth and poverty reduction. But for meaningful progress in other spheres of development we must recognise that one of the most effective ways to drive economic growth and build stronger societies is to empower women and girls, and to work together to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Gender equality and the promotion and protection of women and girls’ human rights must be a priority in the new development agenda, both as a stand-alone goal and mainstreamed across other goals.

Achieving a strong, progressive outcome that prioritises gender equality and women’s empowerment is critical. Australia’s commitment to this vision is unwavering.

Thank you.