

# Statement by Ms Gillian Bird, Australia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations

## CSW61 Multi-Stakeholder Forum: Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work

Date: 30 January 2017, CR3

### Panel 1: Strengthening normative and legal frameworks for full employment and decent work for all women

**Moderator: Ms. Šejla Đurbuzović (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vice-Chair of CSW Bureau)**

Thank you Ms. Đurbuzović. I am very pleased to be here today to discuss this important issue, particularly with such a broad range of stakeholders.

As we all know, gender equality requires the full and equal realisation of women's human rights, including the right to work. Despite substantial progress, if we continue at the current pace, it will take 173 years to reach economic equality. The 61<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women provides us with an opportunity to accelerate the progress for women's economic empowerment and to redress inequality by strengthening normative and legal frameworks.

I welcome the Report of the Secretary General on *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work*. While an important contribution, let me highlight a couple of other issues which we believe are critical to this topic, not included in the report.

First, many women face multiple barriers to the enjoyment of economic empowerment. Inclusive growth strategies must acknowledge and address the intersecting and multiple ways in which women experience discrimination, harassment and violence.

Second, access to sexual and reproductive health services also need to continue to inform our strategies in support of women's economic participation.

Turning to the normative and legal frameworks.

**The starting point is the removal of legislative discrimination.** Australia has a range of legislative measures that prohibit discrimination and reduce barriers to employment:

- the *Sex Discrimination Act* [1984] prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital or relationship status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Discrimination on the grounds of family responsibilities in the area of employment is also prohibited, as is sexual harassment.
- the *Fair Work Act* [2009] provides a range of entitlements and protections that assist employees, to balance their work and family responsibilities.

To ensure women are protected from unfair treatment on the basis of sex, the Australian Human Rights Commission, an independent statutory body, investigates complaints of discrimination, harassment and bullying on the grounds of sex.

**Second, legislation must be supported by adequate government infrastructure.**

Australia has established an Office for Women which, importantly, sits within the Prime Minister's Department. The Office for Women works across government to deliver policies and programmes to promote gender equality, with particular focus on strengthening women's economic security and ensuring women and children are free from violence.

The Australian *Workplace Gender Equality Agency*, created by the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* [2012], is charged with promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces. The Agency recruits and promotes CEO Pay Equity Ambassadors – of which there are now 93 – to raise awareness and understanding of pay equity and assists employers conduct internal analyses that inform pay equity strategies.

**And third, legislative and normative frameworks for full employment and decent work need to reflect economies of the future.** Work is changing. Both the green economy and digital technology offer opportunity and risk for women's economic empowerment.

Full employment for women in a digital economy is dependent on women and girls as equal participants in and benefactors of, digital technological innovation. Efforts to accelerate women's participation in these fields must start with the removal of the structural barriers to their participation.

Through the 2030 Agenda, the international community placed the full and equal realisation of women's and girls' rights at the heart of the sustainable development framework. Let us work together during CSW and beyond to continue to progress the economic empowerment of women. An investment in women, is an investment for all.