

## Submission: International Gender Equality Strategy

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### 1. Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute thoughts and recommendations for consideration in the development of Australia's new *International Gender Equality Strategy*.

I pause at this point to remark how very fortunate we are to be citizens of a healthy democracy that actively seeks input from a diversity of Australians to help shape policy actions. Unfortunately, few nations, particularly in our own region, extend this form of genuine political participation to citizens: women least of all.

This submission has been prepared by me, Virginia Haussegger, in my capacity as a freelance journalist and independent media consultant. Other than my role as Deputy Chair of [PIJI](#), the *Public Interest Journalism Initiative*, a non-aligned, independent media think-tank focused on mapping news production across Australia, I have no affiliations or commercial interests of relevance to DFAT or this submission.

That said, my three decades in television journalism and media commentary, and most recently in international journalism training, has developed a strong, evidence-based appreciation and understanding of the power of news media in shaping social and cultural norms – most importantly, gender norms. That is the reason and focus of this submission.

### 2. Response to the Terms of Reference:

Whilst DFAT has provided 4 questions for consideration, this submission prioritises question 3: *How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?* My recommendations encompass question 4: *What should the government/DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?*

### 3. Key recommendation in summary:

News media's impact on social attitudes to gender equality cannot and must not be underestimated. Media practitioners – such as journalists, news executives, media proprietors - are primary influencers on how a community and ultimately a nation perceives and understands gender equality and the role of women.

This submission is underpinned by the irrefutable reality – news media is the most powerful tool of influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Acknowledging news media as a potential 'change agent', Australia's new International Gender Equality Strategy must incorporate significant efforts to train, empower and support international journalists in the practice of **Gender Responsive Journalism**.

#### 4. Gender Equality – overview:

It is alarmingly apparent to anyone with an interest in gender equity and women's empowerment that despite decades of strenuous effort, policy reform and political will, women continue to battle severe disadvantage in every aspect of their lives. Epidemic rates of violence, economic disparity, a lack of political participation and significant roadblocks to accessing power and resources continue to thwart and at times disable women's progress.

Some of the worst aspects of gendered disadvantage, particularly with regard to a lack of political power and extremely high rates of sexual and physical violence against women, fester in our own region, just a few hours flight from our coast. Despite that, the ugly truth of profound gender inequity – with all its geopolitical and security ramifications – passes largely unremarked in Australia.

Yet, as DFAT is acutely aware, the nexus between gender inequity and state fragility is well documented. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 way back in 2000, "a significant body of peer-reviewed research has provided evidence that gender equality and the status of women are together the most single reliable indicator for conflict prevention."<sup>1</sup>

We also know that, "The second decade of the twenty-first century has seen a prominent global backlash against feminist theory and politics."<sup>2</sup> In other words – it is getting harder, not easier, to embed notions of gender equity into public consciousness.

#### 5. Background: International Frameworks for Gender Equality and the role of Media

The role of the media in shaping and perpetuating gender stereotypes and framing public attitudes around gender equality has long been accepted as fact, but not well understood.

Efforts to use the power of media to socialise concepts of gender equity have been incorporated into key global instruments such as CEDAW, and more directly in the 1995 blueprint for gender equality, the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**.

Beijing PfA featured Media as one of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern, with **Section J. Women and the Media** outlining two strategic objectives: one directed at increasing women's participation in media reporting and leadership; the other focused on balancing the portrayal of women in the media. Interestingly, one of the key tactics to achieve the

<sup>1</sup> Allen, Louise; 'Australia's Implementation of women, peace and security: Promoting regional stability. Special Report, ASPI (Feb 2020),Pg 8 <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/australias-implementation-women-peace-and-security-promoting-regional-security> (accessed 18 Sept 2023)

<sup>2</sup> O'Sullivan, Míla & Krulišová, Kateřina; "This agenda will never be politically popular": Central Europe's anti-gender mobilization and the Czech Women, Peace and Security agenda (2020) International Feminist Journal of Politics, 22:4, 526-549, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616742.2020.1796519> (accessed 18 Sept 2023)

latter objective was “*gender sensitive training for media professionals, including media owners and managers*”.<sup>3</sup> It was a smart call, that went largely ignored!

Instead of training media practitioners and owners to understand the profound gender biases embedded in news values and daily news judgements, which dictate the choice and focus of media stories, efforts were instead focused on simply getting more women into media jobs. But once they were in, women had to quickly learn to ‘do news’ the way it had always been done according to masculine frames and male concepts of what mattered, and who and what rated as important.

A decade later, in 2005, *UNESCO’s Handbook for Journalism* complained that “mainstream media was incapable of adjusting its gender-blind focus.”<sup>4</sup> However, it wasn’t all grim. The same Handbook promised “change is coming”.<sup>5</sup>

While a bit twee in its optimism, there has nevertheless been some positive change, although with very patchy, or negligible, impact on shifting attitudes around gender equality.

## 6. Current media context:

The past two decades have seen a significant increase in the number of women employed in media around the globe, with some developed nations close to gender parity in junior news reporting roles. However, like Australia, in every country around the world media ownership, management and editorial control remains overwhelmingly male dominated.<sup>6</sup> This continues to impact news judgements and consequently the media frames used to position the role and status of women in society.

It is important to understand how deeply entrenched these frames are in the news media psyche and how stubbornly they remain a guiding template for contemporary storytelling. I could recount numerous recent examples from Australian media to illustrate this point, but time and space doesn’t allow that indulgence. However, evidence of sluggish progress in shifting the dial on public attitudes to gender equality is repeatedly found in national and global gender equality surveys. As former Director of a gender research centre, based at the University of Canberra (the [50/50 by 2030 Foundation](#)), I conducted the first [national survey of gender equality attitudes](#), which revealed a disturbingly high proportion of young men hold traditional (conservative) views around the role and capabilities of women, and view gender equality as something that impinges on their freedoms and disadvantages them in the workplace. Similarly, global surveys continue to reinforce declining and/or negative attitudes to gender equality. The [2023 GIWL survey](#) alarmingly found half those surveyed, across 32 countries, say “things have gone far enough in promoting women’s equality” and that men are being discriminated against.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid Section J, Action 243 (c)

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd, Fiona & Howard, Ross (2005); *Gender, conflict and journalism: a handbook for South Asia*; UNESCO Digital Library <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000143925> (accessed 18 Sept 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid Pg 20

<sup>6</sup> Byerly, Carolyn M. (2011); *Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media*; International Women’s Media Foundation, Washington, <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf> (accessed 18 Sept 2023)

## 7. Gender Responsive Journalism: what is it and how does it work?

In answer to the question. *'How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?'*, I believe it is fundamental Australia's new strategy incorporates a sophisticated understanding of the powerful role played by news media in shaping and perpetuating national attitudes to gender equality. Australia's response should include a commitment to train, empower and support international journalists in the practice of ***Gender Responsive Journalism***.

Gender Responsive Journalism (GRJ) is not a theory, it is a 'practice'. It is a way of doing journalism. It stems from a human rights framework and embodies both an ethical and practical way of using the tools of journalism to eradicate gender bias. It is a method of re-shaping public discourse and social attitudes by consciously framing news and public storytelling to accommodate a diverse range of intersectional considerations.

My own definition of GRJ, developed through training international journalists, is as follows:

*'Gender Responsive Journalism is a practice: a framework of assessment, evaluation and response to news gathering and news production, that is informed by gender awareness in the promotion of gender equality and human rights for all. Gender Responsive Journalism ensures that gender perspectives and the goals of gender equality are central to news values.'*

## 8. Gender Responsive Journalism training:

Although well-grounded in international frameworks and media theory, Gender Responsive Journalism is still in a nascent stage of development and application. I am not aware of any nation actively promoting this approach, although there is a groundswell of interest within the UN in the development of training modules.

I was recently commissioned by the United Nation PNG to present a workshop on Gender Responsive Journalism at a two-day Media Training conference for PNG Journalists and Editorial Professionals in Port Moresby. Given the current lack of GRJ training modules and tools this was a challenging task, further complicated by increasing regulatory control and government crackdowns on PNG media.

Over previous years I have presented workshops for Pakistani journalists in Karachi on the subject of reporting violence against women, and facilitated roundtable discussions on gender diversity in media with Indonesian senior Editors, as well as addressed Fijian women journalists in Suva on gender discrimination in media. These myriad engagements with international media continue to highlight the challenges all journalists battle in the face of gender inequity both within their own industry, and as an umbrella framework over how news is reported in their countries.

In drafting a new International Strategy for Gender Equality, Australia has a ripe opportunity

to become a world leading exponent of Gender Responsive Journalism, by deploying it as a powerful tool in the global battle to eradicate gender inequity and shift social norms.

If done well, gender responsive journalism has the potential to not only improve public attitudes and understanding around gender equality, but in the long term it may also reap commercial benefits for media organisations by growing audiences and expanding consumer reach.

## 9. Recommendations:

Acknowledging news media as a potential 'change agent', Australia's new International Gender Equality Strategy must incorporate significant efforts to train, empower and support international journalists in the practice of **Gender Responsive Journalism**.

- Acknowledge the power of news media as a potential 'change agent' in shaping gender norms and influencing social attitudes to gender equality
- Commission an issues paper on Gender Responsive Journalism – its genesis and potential application
- Fund the development of GRJ training modules for international media, including customised methods of evaluation and review
- Develop and execute an international pilot program
- Build GRJ programs to scale
- Host or commission an online portal for global networking and collaboration on GRJ initiatives
- Provide capacity building measures for GRJ mentorship programs

## 10. About Virginia Haussegger

**Virginia Haussegger** AM is an award-winning journalist and gender equity advocate. Her extensive media career spans 30 years, in which Virginia has reported from around the globe for Channel 9, the Seven Network and the ABC. She has anchored primetime national news and current affairs programs in 5 states, including 15 years presenting ABC TV News in Canberra.

Widely published across Australian media, Virginia is a regular contributor to *The Canberra Times*; the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, and a leading media educator. She is Deputy Chair of the media think-tank [PIJI](#), the Public Interest Journalism Initiative.

Virginia is an ANZSOG Fellow and sessional Lecturer in the Public Policy Program at the University of Canberra, where she is an Adjunct Professor. In 2019 Virginia was named [ACT Australian of The Year](#), in recognition of her community leadership and women's rights advocacy.

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