



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Andrew Metcalfe
Secretary, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

FECCA White Ribbon Day Event

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Canberra

Ladies and gentlemen,

‘Every woman has the right to live and work in an environment that is respectful and free from abuse, violence and fear.

Everyday. Always.’

This quote was provided by one of my department’s staff in Sydney when we talked about White Ribbon Day last year.

Indeed, for me, it sums up White Ribbon Day.

As you are aware, White Ribbon Day is the day men - supported by women - wear a white ribbon as a pledge of commitment that they do not condone, will not commit, and will not remain silent about the issue of violence against women and children.

This day is recognised around the world as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children.

Most men are not violent and treat women and girls with respect.

In their respective spheres of influence, these men need to lead the way and help create a culture where violence is unacceptable at any level.

Sadly, however, the rates of violence against women in Australia are deplorable.

It is a sobering thought that 57 percent of Australian women will experience an incident of physical or sexual violence by a man in their lifetime.

Putting this in to context, in my workplace at the Department of Immigration and Citizenship our staff numbers of 7000 people comprise 62 percent women.

From a statistical perspective, indications are that the issue of violence sadly will have touched a considerable number of my own staff members.

Violence occurs where there is a culture of acceptance. Tragically, domestic violence is seen by some as a private issue and sexual harassment is seen by some as harmless fun. Also, we often do not respond appropriately to the demeaning jokes of others.

This White Ribbon Day I will be calling on all the men in my department to wear a White Ribbon and to join with me in deploring violence against women: for the sake of all of the women in our lives.

As an organisation I am extremely proud of the very positive work we do with the *Woman at Risk Programme*.

Through this programme, we contribute to the protection of women and girls at risk. This programme also recognises the priority given by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the protection of refugee women in particularly vulnerable situations.

The programme is for female applicants, and their dependents, if they are subject to persecution or are of concern to the UNHCR; are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender.

Since the programme was introduced in 1989 to the end of October this year, 8 281 Woman at Risk visas have been granted.

Today I would also like to congratulate FECCA for taking a leadership role on White Ribbon Day by raising the importance of this issue throughout Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The only way we can truly address the issue of violence against women and girls, is if ALL parts of Australian society acknowledge the rights of women and girls to live without fear.

By encouraging its members to wear the White Ribbon and to truly uphold its sentiment, FECCA is making a major contribution towards nurturing harmony and the peaceful, tolerant society that FECCA members and their communities have welcomed in their lives in Australia.

In conclusion, as a White Ribbon Ambassador, I ask all men, regardless of your faith or background, to join with me in deploring violence against women – our mothers, our daughters, our partners, our sisters, our friends and our work colleagues.

We owe this to the women we love; we care for; we work with: we owe it to **all** women.

Thank you.