

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
BALL ROOM, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, MONDAY 4 OCTOBER 2021

Good evening. Don and I warmly welcome you to this Government House reception to mark the centenary of Soroptimist International.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

May I acknowledge among us:

- Rebecca Korpershoek, your SI Tasmania President;
- Wendy Evans, SI Australia President, and
- Katherine Gribble, Immediate Past President;
- Regional Presidents, Lyn Johnson, Janet Minchin, Joan Skelton and Jane Zimmerman; and
- SI Secretaries, Lyn Donaghue and Claire Porteus.

A centenary of an organisation of the calibre of Soroptimists International is worthy of celebration. Your international statistics are very impressive. Some 3000 clubs worldwide with well over 70, 000 members. I note also the Hobart and Launceston clubs marked their 70th anniversaries a few years ago.

At anniversaries, looking back to the early days can be instructive – and also amusing. I'd like to quote you a small item that appeared in the *Launceston Examiner* in October 1926, just five years after the founding of SI in California in October 1921. At a London Soroptimists Club meeting, Sir Charles Higham, a prominent Member of the UK Parliament, addressed the meeting and the *Examiner* quoted: "Women will dominate the business world in twenty years if men do not pull themselves together," said Sir Charles. "Women are better employees than men, though this was not true a generation ago. They are more

energetic, thorough, loyal, neat, and cheery. They do not shirk or talk. Eight per cent of my employees have displaced men.”¹ End of quote.

Today I have a kindred spirit with you through my own endeavours, particularly in the legal profession. I was the first Tasmanian woman appointed to a Federal judicial position. I made a point of encouraging promotion of women in the profession.

That came about in part because of my own experience. To give you just one example: a longstanding barrier to women’s equitable participation in the legal profession has been the conflict between work and family. In 1990, when I gave birth to my second daughter I was in private practice. I was given six weeks’ leave. It was actually sick leave. Birth was regarded as a sickness! It was expected that I return to work and on a full-time basis after a short period of part-time work. Thankfully, maternity leave has much improved now in the legal profession.

And now, I am Tasmania’s second female Governor. That’s two in a row, but out of 29, there’s a way to go!

In Hillary Clinton’s book, *What Happened*,² she details the sexism she encountered during her 2016 campaign and all her working life. I agree with her statement that “the moment for women’s equality is still happening, still is urgent and vital as ever.”³ This statement is apposite because, 48 years on, the US Supreme Court decision of *Roe v Wade*,⁴ protecting a woman’s liberty to choose to have an abortion, is being undermined by the State of Texas banning abortions six weeks into pregnancy.

I will continue to do what I can, while Governor, to bring attention to the importance of gender equality and of reducing family violence. In the family courts, a substantial proportion of parenting disputes involve violence and abuse against women and children. The prevalence of violence and abuse against women and children continues to be among the worst of our social problems. This has been compounded by the Covid lockdowns.

There is national recognition of the need for primary prevention of violence against women and children. *Change the Story*,⁵ provides an evidence-based

¹ *Examiner*, Saturday 16 October 1926 page 11.

² *What Happened* Hillary Rodham Clinton Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2017.

³ *Ibid* page 113

⁴ 410 U.S.113

⁵ Our Watch together with ANROWS, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, and Vic Health 2015.

framework for action in prevention, based on awareness of how gender inequality contributes to violence against women.⁶

In these areas, I note the direct overlap with SI's "The Road to Equality", being the SI President's appeal for the years 2019–2021. Specifically, you mention UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' statement that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world.⁷

Your Road to Equality also focused on the huge challenges of child marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, trafficking, migration and the rights of older women.

Your determination to achieve these improvements, globally, nationally and locally is most commendable. This reception is a very small way of thanking you all for your commitment and efforts.

So, Don and I and all the Government House staff say thank you to each and every one of you and all of your colleagues.

David ... [invites Jane Zimmerman to respond followed by Rebecca Korpershoek]

⁶ HE speech to the Australasian College of Legal Medicine, Saturday 11 September 2021.

⁷ <https://www.siaustralia.org.au/>, accessed 27 September 2021.