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Parliamentary action for social development and justice

Madam President, fellow delegates,

Firstly, I would like to thank the Uzbekistan Parliament for hosting this 150th Assembly in your beautiful country. I am also grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this important issue on behalf of the Australian Parliament.

Social contract

The responsibility of any government and indeed any parliament is to create conditions that ensure the long-term prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens.

In Australia, we pride ourselves on the promise of a 'fair go' which is the belief that effort on the part of the individual and their fair, equitable treatment will deliver success rather than the person's status, birth or background.

Our social contract in relation to healthcare, for example, is grounded on a shared responsibility between government and citizens whereby government provides a universal health system, called Medicare, and citizens contribute through taxes and adhere to health regulations.

One of the most important ways of ensuring economic fairness and addressing inequality is through taxation. In Australia, we tax individuals under a progressive system whereby the tax rate increases as a person's income rises. The system is designed to ensure that those who earn more contribute their fair share to fund essential public services including Medicare.

During this Parliament, I had the privilege of serving as Deputy Chair on an inquiry into the state of Australia's work and care sector. The committee heard that many Australians, and in particular women, were balancing work with caring responsibilities, including the challenges of transitioning between work and care through different life stages. After conducting 11 days of public hearings and receiving 125 public submissions, the committee made several significant recommendations to improve working conditions including the introduction of 26 weeks of paid parental leave and the 'right to disconnect' from work to so that workers have the capacity to disconnect from their job outside of contracted hours.

These recommendations have since been legislated by government and serve as a testament to the power of parliamentary committees in understanding the human experience and seeking meaningful change to the ways we work and contribute to society.

Gender pay gap

Gender equality is fundamental to social development and justice. Any social contract should have equality at its heart and a key aspect of such equality is equal pay. In Australia, equal pay for equal work has been law since 1969.

However, challenges remain. We still have a gender pay gap in the average earnings of men and women. Last year, however, Australia's gender pay gap reached its lowest in our history at 11.5 per cent.

In 2023, Parliament introduced legislation with bipartisan support to require individual employers to publish information on gender pay gaps and introduce new gender equality standard to bridge the gap. Making employers accountable and transparent in their practices has encouraged this cultural shift.

We know that there is still work to be done but we also know what works. Flexible work policies as well as paid parental leave and efforts to make wages in women-dominated sectors, such as aged care and early childhood education, competitive are key. After all, closing the gender pay gap not only reflects our ethos of an equal and fair society, but is important for Australia's economic future.

I thank the Assembly.