



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 8 March 2006

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### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.37 am): I am delighted to second this motion. Women have fought hard to win their places in parliament. Over the past 100 years they have fought discrimination, ignorance, hostility and abuse—and many still do. On a world average, women make up only 16.4 per cent of the members of parliament—a total of 7,195 women. In Australian parliaments, women make up a total of 24.7 per cent—37 seats represented by women out of 150 seats in total. Australia is ranked 29th in the world in relation to the number of women in parliament. New Zealand is ranked 15th in the world in relation to the number of women in parliament with 32.2 per cent of seats in parliament represented by women. Women still have a long way to go in Australia and the world. Australia is yet to elect a female Prime Minister.

Our first woman elected to parliament was Irene Longman in 1929. There is a portrait of her in our state parliament that was commissioned last year. However, in the 60 years since, only 10 more women have been elected. From 1989 to 2005, 39 women have been elected to the Queensland state parliament, which is 33.7 per cent of the seats in parliament being represented by women.

A change in attitude towards women, better education and a long-term acceptance that women make a valuable contribution to society is now mainstream thinking. There have certainly been major factors involved in increasing the number of women in parliament, but there is still a long way to go.

We have also seen very high participation by women at the local government level. I do not want to ignore this aspect of female representation, because local government plays a very significant role in our communities. There can be a tendency—certainly from some in the academic field—to forget that the role of women in communities and in local government is at the very grassroots of shaping our communities. The active representation of women at that level has been quite significant.

As I mentioned earlier, this year is the 20th anniversary of the first woman member in the cabinet and the 10th anniversary of the introduction of paid maternity leave in the Queensland Public Service—something which was achieved under a coalition government. That was spearheaded by our first female Treasurer, Joan Sheldon, who was also the then minister for women's policy. That was a significant introduction of a benefit to families here in this state that the coalition is proud to have initiated and implemented in its first budget.

But there is still much to be done if women are to have a clear and strong voice. Not only does there need to be equality of representation; there also needs to be recognition that there are special issues. We in the First World need to look to our neighbours and others in the Third World and realise that the issues that they face can be quite dire—issues of poverty, poor healthcare and lack of education are quite severe. Certainly the AIDS epidemic in Africa and other parts of the world has hit hard, and it is women who are often left in the critical caring role and economically disadvantaged as the family unit is ravaged by such diseases.

There are still a lot of issues in our immediate region about which we need to raise public awareness in our regional parliaments—certainly the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific area. I put to this parliament that I believe we can take a more active role as state members, and certainly as women members of this House, to champion the issues of our neighbours and support not only elected

members but also community groups and look for better ways to form support networks in those regions at the local level.

While there are many issues in the Third World, we have immediate neighbours who have issues. If we look at what we have gained and how we have benefited, I believe that we can reach out and support our neighbours as they seek to bring about not only greater equality for women but also higher standards of living for their family and better standards of education and general services for their community. I know that that is a way forward for peace in our region, particularly through education and greater economic empowerment of women, who are often at the forefront of supporting their family's needs.