



First women's ambassador undaunted by challenges

The World Today Alexandra Kirk

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The Federal Government has announced the appointment of Australia's first global ambassador for women and girls.

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Penny Williams recently returned from a posting as High Commissioner to Malaysia and will now take up the job of helping to eliminate discrimination against women and girls around the world.

The appointment makes Australia one of only a small group of countries to have a women's ambassador.

Ms Williams will head overseas on Wednesday to an APEC summit on women and the economy with Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd and a high-level policy dialogue chaired by US secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

"The brief really is to give greater focus and coordination and efforts to promote the role of women and girls internationally," Ms Williams said.

"I see it as a championing of what we're doing already, promoting the sort of activities and programs that focus on women and girls, but also engaging at a diplomatic level with other governments and also with women themselves in the region.

AUDIO: [Federal Government names first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls](#) (The World Today)

"It has a global remit but a particular Asia-Pacific focus."

But the establishment of the ambassador's position has been described as "window-dressing" by former sex discrimination commissioner Pru Goward.

The New South Wales Women's Minister says it would be better to focus on delivering foreign aid to women and girls.

"We have a woman prime minister, we have a federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, and the creation of a special international roving ambassador for women and girls, I think, is an entirely unnecessary piece of window-dressing," she said.

Leadership roles

Ms Williams says tackling domestic violence and encouraging women to take up greater leadership roles remain the toughest challenges.

"When you look at the situation of women and girls across the world, there's some pretty devastating statistics that you can look at. I think our aid program is already making great inroads in areas to do with maternal health, for example, education of girls," she said.

"Domestic violence is a tough one, particularly in our region, where I think everyone is committed to its eradication and we hear statistics of even up to 60 per cent of women and girls being subject to domestic violence.

"There's also a focus on empowering women to take a greater leadership role. That's quite difficult, that's long term.

"It's day one in the job so I wouldn't want to say which of them absolutely is going to be the toughest. I realise they are all quite tough issues to crack, but I'll be working across government and with NGOs and certainly with our people in the aid program to make the absolute best effort."

Ms Williams says there is a direct line between eliminating domestic violence and quality outcomes for men and women in terms of their economic integration.

"The Asia-Pacific will be a real focus of this position. As soon as I come back from the APEC meeting my absolute priority is to make an early visit to the Pacific," she said.

"One of the elements of our aid program has been to assist in writing legislation [for countries in the region]. Those sorts of things that we can do, for example, on domestic violence, we do provide assistance in terms of setting up shelters to provide support for people.

"But a lot of this is also about getting legislation on the books, so having a technical cooperation program where we can actually assist in that way as well."

Topics: [women](#), [community-and-society](#), [australia](#)



Rite of passage

In the Aboriginal community entry into womanhood is marked by Indigenous traditions, but the debutante ball also has its place.



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