



# Australian Bahá'í Community

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## Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012

The Australian Bahá'í Community welcomes the introduction of the Workplace Gender Equality Act (WGE Act) as a useful tool for promoting and improving gender equality in employment and in the workplace in Australia.

Since its foundation almost a century ago, the Australian Bahá'í Community has worked to promote the equality of women and men through our educational programs and other activities at individual, institutional and community levels. In our view, the benefits of improving gender equality are not only individual and material, but extend to the whole of society. In a statement marking the International Year of Peace in 1986, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith observed:

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

Integral to any long-term approach to establishing gender equality is the measurement of progress towards stated goals and the use of monitoring tools and systems to gauge the impact of policies. As such, the development of meaningful indicators that can address root causes of inequality is essential. As the Government now embarks on the important task of developing reporting matters under the Gender Equality Indicators, we offer the following points for consideration.

The Australian Bahá'í Community supports the five key outcomes of the WGE Act:

- to improve women's workforce participation across Australia;
- to improve women's representation in leadership positions in workplaces and on governing bodies;
- to improve equal remuneration for work of equal value, between women and men;

- to increase flexible working for both women and men, particularly those with family or caring responsibilities; and
- to promote employee and employer engagement on gender equality.

In particular, we wish to highlight the importance of the final outcome: promoting employee and employer engagement in gender equality. Genuine social change is not a project that one group of people carry out for the benefit of another; nor can it be brought about by legal and policy reforms alone. It is a process to which we are all obliged to contribute. As we all share responsibility for supporting and implementing the changes required to create a society in which all members can develop to their full potential, the Bahá'í Community sees great potential in an approach to workplace gender equality that encourages non-adversarial consultation, in a spirit of learning in action, among those directly engaged in the workplace.

We believe it is critical that both men and women are involved in this process. Men should make a conscious effort to understand fully the principle of the equality of women and men and its expression in both private and public life. Men must be encouraged to speak out strongly against inequality, including in the workplace. Increasing men's understanding of the benefits that gender equality will bring to them, and to our world as a whole, is key to engaging more men in activities to achieve equality in the workplace and elsewhere.

Valid empirical information is an essential requirement for effective consultation. Accordingly, we feel it is essential that the employer reports provided under the WGE be made available to all parties within the workplace. Further, in developing the reporting matters, it will be valuable to consider what kind of information will be most useful to enable learning and the generation of knowledge at the level of the workplace, in addition to meeting the needs of government and the public at large.

Finally, the Australian Bahá'í Community believes the vision of true equality must go beyond making room for women to participate within existing workplace and social structures, as this will not suffice to end the entrenched patterns of discrimination against women. The empowerment of women requires profound changes in the minds and hearts of people and in the very structures of society. Such changes must be grounded in the conviction that the equality of women and men is not only a goal to be achieved, but a truth about human nature to be acknowledged and embraced. The soul has no gender. The very essence of what make us human is neither 'male' nor 'female.' Conceived in this way, equality goes beyond a tally of resources or a set of social norms. It reflects the nobility inherent in every human being

As we seek to achieve gender equality in the workplace, we must not lose sight of the broader, long-term goal: namely the creation of conditions in which women and men can work shoulder to shoulder in constructing a more just and equitable social order based on the oneness and equality of all humanity.

We wish the government well in the introduction of the WGE Act, and we will follow the progress of its implementation with interest.

Yours sincerely,

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