

# Women in International Security, Australia

## WIISA

**Guest Speaker - KIRSTY SWORD GUSMAO**

**5.30pm, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2004**  
**Baker & McKenzie offices, Sydney, Australia**

**Dr. Stephanie Fahey**  
**Director, Research Institute for Asia & the Pacific:**

I wish to welcome you to a significant event with a distinguished guest.

This is the first event to be hosted by a new program run by the Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific and I would like to invite all of you to become members.

Formally named Women in International Security (Australia), or WIISA, the initiative provides a voice and network for those involved in international security and associated industries. The program is open to everyone, whilst actively seeking to increase the participation of women in this male-dominated arena.

WIISA addresses the lack of female participation within this crucial domain. This is not limited to equal appointments to the limited positions available. It extends to opinions covered by media and perspectives offered in discussions and negotiations regarding Australia's internal and international security issues.

WIISA does not exist to complain, nor does it exist to create further tension between the sexes!

WIISA has three specific aims –

Firstly, members from all levels and backgrounds are invited to join. Members from government, politics, academia, industry or an NGO will benefit from the information and skills exchange of this network.

Experienced men and women are sought to join WIISA as mentors for those in their early years in the profession, or attempting to gain employment. Mentorship is a crucial factor in WIISA's aims and will foster a strong collaborative approach.

Members will also be entitled to free entry to events such as tonight's dialogue, which will provide the opportunity to hear high profile guests and meet other members.

Please approach myself or Bridget from RIAP after the event if you are interested in becoming a member.

Secondly, we aim to create a BALANCED view within the international security arena in Australia.

The inclusion of a critical mass of women within international security dialogue and debates has been implemented with outstanding results in conflict areas such as the Middle East and in United Nations negotiations. This is due to the demonstration that female perspectives make a difference to the issues discussed, the questions asked, and the policies implemented.

A first step along the path to achieve this will be through the WIISA Media Directory which will include all member's details (with permission) to be distributed nationally. Journalists will then have the option of contacting appropriate women for comment.

Thirdly, WIISA will promote the achievements of women at home and internationally. The work of women in this field often goes unnoticed as it is not at the front line or in the spotlight. Commonly, women have a more broadly conceived understanding of security threats and therefore address such issues as economic security, environmental security, demographic change and people movement, international crime and health security. Clearly these security issues are becoming more central to the new security agenda and therefore the role for women is more crucial.

The attainment of human rights is directly linked to a country's security status. It is often women who are fighting for essential rights such as economic freedom, and access to health services and education in countries throughout the world.

This leads me to our distinguished guest.

Kirsty Sword Gusmao is the First Lady of East Timor. As you are aware, her courage and strength have seen her through historical events in her new home. The scope of her biography reaches far beyond the time allowed to introduce her. Can I recommend her autobiography titled "A Woman of Independence" published in 2003 by Pan Macmillan Australia.

Most significantly for tonight's event, Kirsty is the Founding Director of the Alola Foundation.

The Alola Foundation exists to boost the quality of life and living standards of the women of East Timor. Alola provides women with essential support - providing mechanisms for economic empowerment, education and maternal and child health.

Tonight Kirsty will discuss international security from the perspective of her experiences in East Timor.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Kirsty Sword Gusmao.

**Kirsty Sword Gusmao**

**First Lady of East Timor; Founding Director, Alola Foundation**

Thank you very much and good evening.

I am in a very unique position as an actor in the rebuilding of a nation. I am without a formal role or job description, but I do what First Lady's do everywhere – support the President, who is also my husband, work hard and advocate for the needs of women, children and their communities. The irony is that although I am without a job this work is expected of me, as it is, indeed, of all women. I recognise this of course but how can I not respond?

My nation is the world's newest, but it also old in history and culture. One of the poorest with one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. The under five mortality rate is 12%, in other words 12% of children in Timor die before they reach the age of five. Illiteracy rates are extremely high across the board but for women they are over 80%. Poverty and malnutrition is widespread. Our annual budget is roughly \$100 million dollars.

So when I say I don't have a job description, these facts provide one for me. My work is clear – given the country's statistics, you won't be surprised to know that my First Lady role is not financially supported. It has no budget. The little support I have generously comes from friends like you and countries like Thailand – themselves not wealthy, but certainly more so than Timor Leste.

But what I do have is a commitment to empowering women. What I do have is influence. And also a voice. And I use all three to give voice to tens of thousands of women who do not have one, to get them heard and heard at the seat of decision making. In a world currently seized with the issue of security I

don't see many women speaking or involved in such debates. We have wars raging around us, and it is still the men making the war, and ironically making the peace.

We need to become part of this debate, and despite all of the commitments to inclusion of women in such processes we are, effectively, missing in action. Through this project, WIISA, which I hope to emulate in Timor Leste, we can become part of the action. We know about security as women have so very little of it. We want human security in our public and private lives, and we have to be far more vocal to make sure we get it.

I know you will be interested to hear about women, peace and security in Timor Leste, or East Timor, as it is affectionately known. We have lived through the worst and survived, and I am honoured to be the Fist Lady. It is a truly humbling experience. I pay tribute to them, to the women of my new homeland, and hope I can honour them by helping to make their lives a bit more secure.

My theme for today's presentation is a necessity then – Women, War, Peace. We can't make peace unless we deal with war. This title has resonance for the women of Timor Leste and significance to me, and to all women. In 2002 independent experts Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, commissioned by UNIFEM Executive Director Noeleen Heyzer, published a most telling and instructive report of this title. Their brief was to assess the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace building. In so doing, they travelled to 14 countries – East Timor was one of them.

Their findings were both not surprising, yet deeply alarming. They said they were "appalled by reports of flagrant violation against women, by those with a duty to protect them." I have to say that one of my Alola Foundation Director, Helena was a member of the independent experts Advisory Group. Helena is Timor Leste's UNIFEM's Country Director.

One expert that is most telling and encapsulates well the shared experience of women is the following one:

"The extreme violence that women suffer during conflict does not arise solely out of the conditions of war. It is directly related to the violence which exists in women's lives during peace time."

This is the hub of the issue regarding women and security. We can talk about it in the current context, of a world seized with this issue. But we have to understand that women's lives are insecure in times of war certainly, and tragically, in times of peace.

So any response to women and security must recognise the experience of women. What is most instructive about the report though, is that it has 22 recommendations. Further, today I will recommend a course of action for us to take regarding their implementation.

I know am to talk about Security Council Resolution 1325. Why this Resolution? Simply because it gives a real commitment to women's participation in peace building, reconstruction and nation building. Therefore for the first time, recognising women's political right to be included in the process of nation building. To be at the table, as well as serving it, as women do everywhere. Most of us here have read it, or can do so readily, and in focusing on this report I am focusing on how to implement Security Council Resolution 1325.

UNIFEM and the experts have laid the groundwork. The preamble to the 22 key recommendations says

"Towards the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 the independent experts call for:"

I will read just two of those recommendations.

#16 reads - The Security Council to formulate a plan for the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources.

Sixty years after being assigned the task, the Security Council should implement Article 26 of the United Nations Charter, taking into account the Women's Peace Petition which calls for the world's nations to redirect at least 5% of national military expenditures to help education and employment programs each year over the next five years.

#17 reads – The UN Development Program, UNDP, as a leading agency in the field of security sector reform to ensure that women's protection and participation is central to the design and reform of security sector institutions and policies. Especially in police, military and rule of law components. UNDP should integrate a gender perspective into country programs.

If these recommendations are implemented then Security Council Resolution 1325 will come to life.

The report is divided up into ten chapters and they say a lot, again, about women's experience. The titles of those chapters are

- Violence against women
- Women forced to flee
- War and health of women
- HIV/AIDS
- Women and peace operations
- Organising for Peace
- Justice, media power, prevention and reconstruction

There is so much to say and to tell about women in Timor Leste, but these ten areas used as the template for reporting on the experience of women can lead to defining women's lives in Timor Leste, and indeed everywhere.

Importantly they do not limit their experience and their resilience to survive. So much of this experience is formulate, not absolute, shown in the fact that we are organising ourselves, working to prevent further violence and working to reconstruct our nation, gives us hope for the future. I have to remind myself that as tough as things sometimes are, we are at least free from occupation, free from intimidation and fear. Having achieved this, we can achieve anything.

Women in Timor Leste have seen it all. They have been occupied for centuries. Firstly it was Portugal, with whom today we share a deep connection and language, and therefore culture. Then Indonesian military occupation, and we are still struggling to come to terms with the violence of this time, and forging a new relationship. And then liberation, with various forms of leadership. Firstly, the National Council of Timorese Resistance, UNIMET, INTERFET, and now our own government, the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste.

So how have women fared under all these forms of government or governance? I have to say, not well, but they are making some inroads. Our first elections saw 22 women out of 88 members elected to the Constituent Assembly. But we have yet to make an impact on policy – and I often have women members of parliament express to me their concern about how they are locked out by their male colleagues in the parliament.

Noeleen Heyzer of UNIFEM speaking at the United Nations Security Council Special Session on the role of women in maintaining international peace and security on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2000 before the General Assembly said

“Of the 61 Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General serving in peace at war functions not a single one is a woman.”

I haven't checked but I wonder how many there are today. I guarantee it won't have changes very much.

She also said that unless a country's constitutional, legal, judicial and electoral frameworks deal with gender equality, then no matter what happens after conflict, no matter how peaceful a transition, the entire country will never have a fair chance of development.

I couldn't agree more.

On the same day she made this address at this most important session -

“To the Honourable Members of the Security Council

First of all my expressions of solidarity to our sisters who are partaking in this very special occasion. It saddens us that they are not to be beside you today. We have been advised that East Timorese women do not have a voice in today's session and indeed have been effectively silenced, as the Honourable Members of the Security Council were not able to reach the required consensus as to East Timor's participation.

“From the invasion of 1975, Timorese women have contributed to all aspects of the resistance in the mountains. Timorese women were at once mothers, responsible for basic household duties and taking care of children. We assisted voluntarily the armed resistance of East Timor in the preparation of food and other natural resources for combat rations, in the making of backpacks from palm leaves for carrying munitions and washing the clothes, as well as being fighters ourselves.

Women functioned as a security watch in the free zones, taking combat rations in the free zones to be transported to the operational zones. As well as taking munitions out of the operational zones into the free zones. Women also developed literacy campaigns and cultural interchanges in the free zones.”

They did lots more, but these excerpts give an account of their experience at one of the most historic occasions of the UN and gives a glimpse of life under military occupation.

So where are we today and what do we need to do?

We need to survive and basic survival is still a challenge. We need to be economically independent as a nation, as then as women. Firstly we need a national budget that will boost our governance capacity to respond to the special needs of women and children. At present it is barely able to meet the most basic needs of the general populace.

You will have been listening to the current debate about the maritime boundaries separating our two countries. As I speak there are talks going on in Dili involving Dili and Canberra. Depending on the outcomes of those talks, East Timor might gain access to the resources which are rightly ours.

The government then would be able to respond to the huge needs of our people and respond to them on our own terms as a prosperous and dignified nation. Not as a poor, aid-dependent one. I know a lot of you present have a long-standing interest in East Timor, its women and children. I invite all of you to visit wonderful Timor Leste to find out more about the issues that I and the Alola Foundation are grappling with, and to strengthen your commitment to working with us.

In closing I come back to the recommendations of the independent experts assessment commissioned by UNIFEM on Women, War, Peace.

I urge that we take action on these recommendations. I further suggest that as a follow up to this meeting this evening, a regional conference on the issue of women in international security be hosted by me in Dili. I trust that I can count on you for your collaboration in that effort.

Thank you very much.