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Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative

On behalf of the Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

By Ravi Krishnamurthy, President, AMAN

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1. Introduction

I welcome the establishment of this Inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative, as announced in the House of Representatives Media Release, *New inquiry into gender equality as a national security and economic security imperative* (Parliament of Australia). This initiative signals a vital and long-overdue recognition that gender equality is not only a moral and human rights obligation, but also a foundational pillar of national resilience, economic prosperity, and global stability.

I make this submission on behalf of the Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN), a national organisation representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, older Australians, and people with disabilities. AMAN's work is grounded in lived experience, community leadership, and practical advocacy across health, social policy, disaster resilience, mental health, ageing, and inclusion.

My own leadership journey — spanning public policy submissions, multicultural advocacy, grassroots community development, and advisory roles across government and civil society — has shown me that gender equality is not an abstract principle. It is a daily determinant of safety, opportunity, dignity, and national strength. When women and girls thrive, families stabilise, economies grow, and societies become more peaceful, cohesive, and innovative.

This submission responds directly to the Terms of Reference and reflects both AMAN's community insights and my strategic perspective on how Australia can embed gender equality into its national security, economic security, and foreign policy architecture.

2. Gender Equality as a National and Economic Security Imperative

Gender equality is not a “social issue” that sits apart from national security. It is a force multiplier for peace, stability, productivity, and democratic resilience.

From a national security lens, societies with higher gender equality experience lower levels of conflict, stronger institutions, and more durable peace agreements. Women's inclusion in decision-making correlates with reduced political violence and more legitimate governance. Exclusion, by contrast, fuels fragility, extremism, and social fracture.

From an economic security lens, gender equality directly drives growth, innovation, and fiscal sustainability. Closing workforce participation gaps, pay inequities, and leadership barriers unlocks

vast underutilised talent — particularly among migrant women, older women, and women with disability.

For CALD communities, gender inequality compounds structural disadvantage. Barriers to language access, employment pathways, recognition of overseas qualifications, and culturally safe services mean that many women remain economically excluded despite extraordinary resilience and capability.

Australia's future prosperity and strategic influence will depend on whether we fully mobilise the potential of all our people — not just some.

3. Evidence Linking Gender Equality to Growth, Food Security, and Labour Markets

The global evidence base is clear and compelling:

- Higher female labour force participation correlates with stronger GDP growth, higher household incomes, and improved fiscal balance.
- Gender-equal access to education, land, finance, and agricultural inputs significantly improves food security, productivity, and climate resilience.
- Women's economic participation enhances intergenerational outcomes in health, education, and social mobility.

Yet in Australia, persistent gender pay gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, and structural barriers for CALD women and women with disability continue to suppress our economic potential.

AMAN has seen first-hand how migrant women, refugee women, and older women remain locked out of stable employment due to rigid credentialing systems, unconscious bias, and inadequate childcare and language support.

Economic security cannot be achieved while half the population remains systematically under-leveraged.

4. The Security Implications of Undermining Gender Equality

Undermining gender equality weakens national and international security in profound ways:

- It exacerbates poverty, displacement, and instability during humanitarian crises.
- It intensifies vulnerability during climate disasters, where women and girls face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and exclusion from relief and recovery efforts.
- It undermines democratic trust and social cohesion.

In fragile states, attacks on women's rights are often early indicators of broader democratic backsliding and geopolitical instability.

Australia cannot claim credible leadership in the Indo-Pacific or on the global stage if gender equality is treated as optional or peripheral.

5. Locally-Led Leadership and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Locally-led leadership is not a rhetorical ideal — it is a strategic necessity.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda succeeds when women are not merely consulted, but empowered as decision-makers, mediators, responders, and architects of peace.

From AMAN's experience, the most sustainable change comes from:

- Community-embedded women leaders.
- Culturally informed decision-making.
- Grassroots partnerships that build trust and legitimacy.

Australia should expand support for locally-led women's organisations in the Indo-Pacific and within CALD communities domestically. This includes long-term funding, leadership development, and genuine co-design — not short-term project grants that undermine continuity.

6. Australia's Role and Responsibilities

The Australian Government has made commendable commitments to gender equality and the WPS Agenda. However, ambition must now be matched with systemic integration and measurable accountability.

Gender equality must be embedded across:

- Foreign policy and development assistance.
- Defence strategy and security cooperation.
- Trade, labour mobility, and climate diplomacy.
- Humanitarian response and disaster preparedness.

It must not remain siloed within a single department or policy unit.

Australia has a unique opportunity to lead regionally by modelling a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to gender equality as strategic infrastructure.

7. Forward-Thinking Strategies and Innovative Proposals

To elevate Australia's leadership and impact, I propose the following:

1. Establish a National Gender Equality and Security Council

A cross-sector advisory body linking national security, economic policy, foreign affairs, defence, and community leadership — including CALD representation — to ensure coherent strategy and accountability.

2. Embed Gender Impact Assessments into All Security and Foreign Policy Decisions

Every major defence, trade, climate, and development initiative should undergo a mandatory gender equality impact assessment.

3. Invest in a CALD Women's Economic Security Accelerator

A targeted national program to unlock employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership pathways for migrant and refugee women, including skills recognition reform and culturally safe workforce transitions.

4. Scale Locally-Led Leadership Models in the Indo-Pacific

Shift from transactional aid to long-term partnerships with women-led organisations, with flexible funding and co-governance structures.

5. Integrate Gender Equality into Climate Security Planning

Ensure all disaster preparedness, response, and recovery frameworks include women's leadership and protection mechanisms.

6. Build a National Gender Data and Foresight Unit

Strengthen evidence-based policy through real-time data, intersectional analysis, and future scenario modelling linking gender equality to national security risks and economic resilience.

8. Why AMAN and My Leadership Matter

AMAN operates at the intersection of policy, community trust, and lived experience. We work with people who are too often invisible in national strategies — CALD women, older Australians, people with disability, and grassroots leaders.

My own work across parliamentary inquiries, community development, national advocacy, and systems innovation reflects a consistent commitment to bridging policy ambition with practical implementation.

I bring:

- Deep community credibility.
- Strategic policy insight.
- A track record of impactful submissions and reform advocacy.
- A vision of inclusive national resilience grounded in human dignity.

Gender equality is not a “special interest” to me. It is central to how I understand national strength, social cohesion, and Australia's global responsibility.

9. Conclusion

This Inquiry is not merely an opportunity to refine policy language. It is a moment to reimagine gender equality as core national infrastructure — as essential to Australia's future as roads, defence systems, and economic institutions.

On behalf of AMAN, I urge the Committee to embrace a bold, integrated, and future-focused approach that:

- Positions gender equality as strategic necessity.
- Centres locally-led leadership.

- Embeds accountability across all arms of government.
- Recognises the unique contributions of CALD women and communities.

Australia's credibility, prosperity, and security depend on what we do next.

I stand ready — personally and through AMAN — to partner with government, civil society, and international actors to translate this vision into lasting, measurable outcomes.

Respectfully submitted,

Ravi Krishnamurthy JP

President

Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)