

MEDIA RELEASE



MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Hon Julie Bishop MP

16 December 2013

AUSTRALIA'S AMBASSADOR FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop is delighted to announce the appointment of Ms Natasha Stott Despoja AM as Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls.

Gender empowerment is a priority for the Australian Government's overseas development program. Ms Stott Despoja's appointment reflects the Government's wish to be at the forefront of efforts to promote the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Women make up the majority of the world's poor and comprise two-thirds of the world's illiterate. Fewer than one in five parliamentarians globally are women and one third of women will experience physical violence in their lifetimes.

As the former leader of a political party and a Senator for 13 years, Ms Stott Despoja is well qualified to lead Australia's international efforts to increase representation of women in leadership roles. Her focus will be to promote women's economic empowerment as well as participate in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; end violence against women and girls; and improve access to health and education services.

Underscoring the Pacific region as a focus of the Ambassador's role, Ms Stott Despoja will depart today with Ms Bishop, who is leading a bipartisan delegation to the Pacific to promote women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Ms Stott Despoja was Senator for South Australia (1995-2008) and Leader and Deputy Leader of the Australian Democrats. She was the youngest woman to enter the Australian Parliament. As a legislator, Ms Stott Despoja introduced Private Members' Bills on paid maternity leave and was a spokesperson on women and family issues.

Ms Stott Despoja is the founding Chair of the newly established Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children. She is an Ambassador for Ovarian Cancer Australia; Deputy Chair of beyondblue; a board member of the South Australian Museum; and the Museum of Australian Democracy.

In 2011, Ms Stott Despoja was made Member of the Order of Australia for her service to the Australian Parliament, education and as role model for women.

Ms Stott Despoja will succeed Ms Penny Williams, who was appointed Australia's inaugural Ambassador in September 2011.

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