

**UNITED NATIONS PROTOCOL, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ACTION**

*Statement by Member for Perth*

**MS WARNOCK** (Perth) [12.50 pm]: When the Howard Government announced recently that it would not sign a United Nations protocol relating to discrimination against women - a protocol that would allow the UN to hear individual complaints about discrimination - the Government's Sexual Discrimination Commissioner Susan Halliday spoke of a tidal wave of gender conservatism in this country. The United Nations Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson, a former President of Ireland, said she thought it would be tragic if a country like Australia responded in an over-defensive way because it had been criticised by a treaty body.

Of course, this follows the same Federal Government's decision to amend the Sex Discrimination Act to allow the States to ban lesbians and single women from gaining access to assisted reproductive technology. Women's groups and individual women in this country have good reason to be concerned about the backward looking views and actions of the present Federal Government. They may feel inclined, therefore, to commend federal Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley, for his appointment of very forward-looking women's champion, Dr Carmen Lawrence, as the new federal shadow Minister for the Status of Women.

There may be others who, in the words of the 1970s song, can see that sisters doing it for themselves is possibly an appropriate motto for these conservative times. In that spirit I warmly congratulate the National Council of Women and its new national president, Western Australian Judith Parker, for gaining the right to hold a big international women's conference in WA in 2003. These women will be doing it for women everywhere and at the same time promoting this State.