

# **International Women's Day 2023**

## **College Assembly Speech**

**By Mikaela Calcagno, Natalia Santarpia and Gabriel Giuntoli**

On Wednesday, the 8th of March, Rosebank acknowledged 2023's International Women's Day, and celebrated women across history, as well as the struggles women still face in the modern world.

Australia's first International Women's Day was held in 1928 in Sydney. Organised by the Militant Women's Movement, the day was endured by women calling for equal pay, equal work, an 8-hour working day for shop girls and paid leave. Now held annually on March 8th, International Women's Day aims to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women worldwide. It is a time also to reflect on progress and to acknowledge the courage and determination of the women who changed history. But it also marks a uniting call to action to not only accelerate gender equality but embrace this year's theme of equity. This means recognising that each person has different circumstances, and ensuring both men and women are allocated the exact resources and opportunities needed for everyone to reach an equal outcome.

As young people, we are able to experience rights and opportunities in Australia prohibited from women in previous generations. Many women have only been able to vote since 1902, and in 1962, Indigenous women saw that right as well. We have only had women in the Australian parliament since 1921 and the Federal Parliament since 1943. Mikaela and I have only had the opportunity to come up here and speak up for other women, their value, and the importance of equity for all genders because of the sacrifices, battles, and blood, sweat and tears of Australian generations past. But, this isn't a universal right - and though we understand Australian women still face significant problems in the contemporary world, the freedoms we do hold are not held by all women internationally.

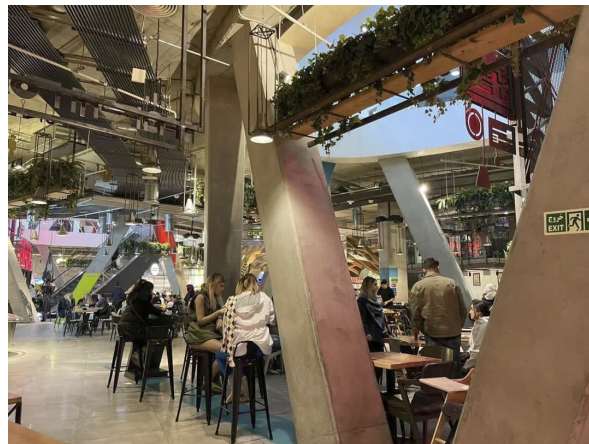
In 2023, the Middle East is one of the hardest places in the world to be a woman. Women in Afghanistan are being erased from public spaces by the Taliban - they cannot leave the house without a male guardian, be treated by a male doctor, go to the gym or play sports. More extremely, they cannot work, go to school and are forced to wear veils in public. The Taliban's

erasure of women is not only reality, but has reached absurdity in their oppression of women - even female mannequins have to have their heads covered or decapitated. When does this punishment for existing end?

Meanwhile, the women in Iran are voiceless by force. Iranian women are forbidden from expressing themselves. Any sign of this through their words and actions or even their clothes, and is threatened with persecution, punishment, and even death.

Women can be arrested simply because the “morality police” consider the way they wear their hijab is not “proper.” They can be fined or hauled into detention or prison to be “educated,” beaten, and harassed, if they are deemed to have protested against the dress code. Radical behaviour such as gassing young girls in Iran has recently become internationally reported, to discourage them going to school.

For the past few months, images of women burning their hijabs and chopping off their hair in protest, following the wrongful death of Mahsa Amini, have been shared all over social media. Others perform resistance by simply going out to live their lives without the hijab.



On the screen is a common sight for us in Australia. Women and men relaxing together in a shopping centre, dining and taking breaks from their shopping. It is a sight we overlook daily, forgetting to appreciate our freedoms to do something as mundane as shopping. Because this photo is actually of a food court in a luxury mall in north Tehran, Iran, where women are protesting by not wearing their hijabs - an act punishable by death. All of these women and their allies are fighting,

knowing the risk to their lives. We cannot forget about their sacrifices, occurring as we speak here today.

It is important to not mistake this issue as a religious division - as a Catholic school, it can be easy for us to separate ourselves from these problems and blame it on Islam, or the Middle East. The problem is not with religion or region. The problem is with dictatorial rule, effective tyranny and an extreme oppression of women who continue to be victimised because they have been viewed as lesser, as disposable. Islam is not the issue - women should be able to wear the hijab, niqab, burka, chador, khimar, shayla, and more, as an expression of faith or not, and it should only ever be their own decision. Iranian and Afghan culture is not the issue - it is the Taliban which has taken over their governments, and has masked their suppression of women under Muslim beliefs. Basic human rights violations are a disgrace to humanity as a whole. These issues to some may seem distant, but every second they are affecting the lives of people like us. We urge you to be aware, and we hope you can extend a helping hand to these women in need. Women deserve the freedom to choose how to dress, and how to express their religious faith, without it being forced upon them.

To the Taliban, this cause appears radical, but it is these women's strong stance and voice of commitment that can enact the change required for progress to occur. We too can commit to their cause through donations to verified charities, or by spreading awareness like we've hoped and aimed to do here at Rosebank. Whether you see yourself as a feminist, a humanist, a capitalist, a communist or anywhere in between, just know that the more people concerned and involved, the greater chance of success. No matter who you are or where you stand, it is your involvement that helps the odds for these women.

**In a country where both men and women are able to, why is no one being these women's voices? Why aren't we listening to them?**

**We have a voice so, please, let's use it.**