

HUMAN RIGHTS DINNER

13 JUNE 2014

VOTE OF THANKS TO MS HINA JILANI

Thank you for your inspiring address. We are simply in awe of your courage, persistence and optimism. It is quite shocking to hear you describe your life as a human rights defender, and the sheer horror of living in a violent – and, in key respects, lawless – society.

There are various ways in which we might respond to what you have said. We might reflect on how modest are the human rights challenges we face in this country, compared to those you and your colleagues face. And we might ask ourselves what we could possibly do to help you. On both counts, we might feel powerless and ineffectual.

I want to suggest that we should respond in a quite different way and that, in fact, your address can reinvigorate our commitment to human rights. There are, I think, three aspects to this.

First, you have reminded us that domestic violence is a human rights issue. Although the attacks on women which you describe are grounded in a form of religious fanaticism which has no relevant equivalent here, we must confront the fact that women are dying at the hands of their domestic partners, with terrible frequency, throughout Australia.

Secondly, you remind us of just how precious are the human rights protections and safeguards which you – and we – seek to defend, and how vulnerable they are to fanaticism of any kind, political as well as religious. In recent years in Australia, we have seen fundamental rights carelessly trampled on. We must remain vigilant.

Thirdly, our coming together tonight enables us to affirm the universality of the rights you are fighting for. Listening to you, we realise – and can now say to you – that we are fighting for the same universal values. We hope you will think of us as part of your network of human rights defenders, and that this will give you some comfort as you continue your brave and dangerous work.