Open Letter

To our political leaders, political and media commentators, journalists and opinion formers in print, visual and audio media:

We take this step in expressing our concerns regarding the emergence of a troubling public and political discourse that is reflective of a broader, serious public health and social issue- violence against women. Violent hate speech directed at women political leaders reveals a concerning acceptance of abusive tactics in public life.

We accept that

* our democracy permits and supports robust and healthy debate on the issues that are important and that
* at times the debate, comments, opinion pieces, and political statements may contain passionate, descriptive and evocative language.

However, we do not accept that the language used should ever express sentiments which are reflective of violence against women.

Over the past twelve months at least we have heard or read about comments and statements in a variety of media directed at Julia Gillard the first female Prime Minister of Australia that deeply concerns us. Influential commentators and leaders have suggested placing her in a bag and drowning her at sea (Alan Jones June 2011, July 2011), kicking her to death (Grahame Morris Feb 2012) and having a “target on her head” (Tony Abbott March 2011), “burn the witch” placards (Carbon Tax Rally March 2011) and the persistent use of the language “liar” and “bitch”.

Comments such as these may well be described as “off the cuff”, “the rough and tumble of politics” however, we find these comments disturbing and troubling.

Violence against women is not a trivial matter. In Australia 1 in 4 women will experience some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime*,* and cost the Australian economy approximately $13.6 billion per year. On average 76 women are killed annually in Australia at the hands of their current or former partners.

Federal and State Governments have committed significant energy and funding to programs, community education campaigns, first line responses such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline; legislative reforms and frameworks in efforts to effectively reduce and respond to domestic violence.

We cannot lightly dismiss the particular language that is symptomatic of the language of violence against women. We are concerned and troubled that this language has on the most part gone unchallenged and accepted as part and parcel of the political landscape.

We reject that notion.

We are concerned and troubled about the message that the use of this language and the failure to properly challenge it may communicate to women who are currently enduring similar verbal assault; and we are deeply concerned and troubled about the message the use of this language and the failure to properly challenge it may communicate to men who use similar language towards their partners.

We challenge you- our political leaders, political and media commentators, journalists and opinion formers in print, visual and audio media to refuse to engage in using the language that reflects violence towards women when criticising, questioning and debating in the political context.

We expect robust, dynamic and informed conversations by our leaders in politics and the community.

We do not expect our leaders in politics and the community to draw on a discourse which diminishes the woman or women it targets or the men and women who may use it.

This letter has been developed in consultation with feminist activists and is supported by:

Coalition for a Feminist Agenda

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 and

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**Signatories to the Open Letter**

**ORGANISATIONS**

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| * Working Women’s Centre SA Inc
* Women’s Legal Services NSW
* Australian Women's Health Network
* White Ribbon Foundation
* Women’s Electoral Lobby NSW
* No To Violence Male Family Violence -Prevention Association Inc
* Men’s Referral Service Inc.
* Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Vic)
* Queensland Women’s Health Network
* Coalition of Women’s Domestic Violence Services of SA
* National Council of Single Mothers & their Children
* Macleod Accommodation Support Service
* Cairns Women's Network
* ProChoice Cairns
* Red Pavilion
* Cairns Matters
* NSW Women’s Refuge Movement
* Australian Lesbian Health Coalition
* Women's Centre Cairns
* Yarredi Services, Port Lincoln
* Southern Adelaide Domestic Violence Service
* Ninko Kurtangga Patpangga (By Your Side in the South)]
* Women's Health & Safety Primary

HealthCare Services SA * Lennox Heads Women's Group
* Scott & Beaumont
* Townsville Feminist Collective
* The Women's Studies Resource Centre SA Inc
* Domestic Violence Legal Worker Network (WA)
* Ruth’s Women’s Shelter
* The Board of NSW Rape Crisis Centre
 | * Child Health and Development Centre (Qld)
* Single Mum Australia
* Family Planning Queensland
* Central Domestic Violence Service (SA)
* Council of Single Mothers and Their Children Inc. Victoria
* Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria)
* North Queensland Combined Women's Services
* North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service
* James Cook University Centre for Women's Studies
* Coalition for a Feminist Agenda
* Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc
* National Abuse Free Contact Campaign
* Victorian Women's Trust
* NSW Domestic Violence Coalition
* Collective Shout
* The Junk Wave
* KC Fortune Services
* IWD Women's Honour Roll Committee, Hepburn, Victoria
* Victims of Crime Assistance League Inc NSW
* Spinifex Press
* Women’s Law Centre (WA)
* Artemis Legal
* Women’s Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services (WA)
* Justice for Children Australia
* Australian Women Against Violence Alliance
* Top End Women’s Legal Service Inc
* Women’s Legal Services Australia
* JCU Student’s Associations
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**INDIVIDUALS**

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