



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

**SIR ZELMAN COWEN CENTRE GRADUATION CEREMONY: MUSLIM WOMEN'S LEGAL
TRAINING PROGRAM AND LEGAL WORKSHOPS FOR IMAMS**

Wednesday 16 November 2016

The Honourable Nicola Roxon, Chair, Sir Zelman Cowen Centre

Mr Mohamed Mohideen, President of the Islamic Council of Victoria

Professor Kathy Laster, Director, Sir Zelman Cowen Centre

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders with us this morning.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Government House today for this important graduation ceremony.

The Sir Zelman Cowen Centre's Legal Workshops for Imams, and Muslim Women's Training, are wonderful examples of the work that is so dear to us, in collaborating to bring people together, providing education, and promoting social inclusion and unity.

These programs are the first of their kind in Australia. And so, today, as well as congratulating and celebrating the graduates, we applaud the organisations that came together to create the course work, including the Scanlon Foundation, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Women's Legal Service Victoria, and the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre.

As many of you know well, the Legal Workshops for Imams have been designed to familiarise Imams with areas of law directly related to the quasi-judicial roles that they hold on the Islamic arbitration body, the *Mejlis*, including consumer law, family law and arbitration and dispute resolution.

I am pleased to hear of the warm welcome and applause you received from the State Parliament in both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, when you visited there.

I am also very pleased to hear that the judges of the Family Court embraced your visit, sharing information with you, and showing their eagerness to increase the Court's knowledge of the principles of Islamic marriage and divorce. I know after 18 years as a judge in that Court just how valuable that exchange would be.

Now, the Muslim Women's Training Program has of course been designed to educate and train community leaders who in turn can share their learning and skills with their community members.

This program, with a focus on family law and family violence, has not only brought forward-thinking leaders together, but it has provided them with the tools and the skills to impact positively within their communities.

How fortunate for this group of women to gather and learn together, particularly from outstanding leaders like the Honourable Nicola Roxon, who can impart so much from her experience at the highest level – as a former Minister of our Federal Parliament.

These two innovative programs are truly inspiring, and although Nicola Roxon is very persuasive, I needed little persuading to agree to host this ceremony this morning. These programs particularly resonate with me, given my own experience, not only in the Family Court, but also in the Children's and Magistrates' Courts, across 40 years.

I acknowledge the vision of the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre, and all those groups I mentioned earlier, in working together to create these courses. And we acknowledge the courage of all those who volunteered for these inaugural programs, and congratulate you on your successful completion and graduation.

Everyone involved has contributed to the social unity and harmony that are fundamental to the wellbeing of all Victorians. Thank you.

It is now my pleasure to invite the Honourable Nicola Roxon, Chair of the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre, to address us.