

Ceremony for the Admission of Lawyers
Speech delivered by Chief Justice Terence Higgins
on 15 December 2006 at 10am (Group 1)

Ladies and gentlemen, congratulations to each of you who are now admitted as lawyers of the ACT Supreme Court before my brethren, Justices Crispin and Connolly, and myself. Be proud of this achievement. From today you are entitled to obtain a practicing certificate allowing you to offer your professional skills to the community as a lawyer. It pays to reflect upon what this means.

There is no one word to describe what it means to be a lawyer. The traditional view of a lawyer is of someone who is paid to represent the interests of a client. There are several errors with this view, not the least of which being that not all clients pay their bills. I will point out two further errors

Firstly: in representing the interests of your client you are bound by the law, professional rules of conduct and by common sense. If you are in doubt about these, do not feel afraid to turn to your colleagues or to the Law Society. They are there to help you.

Secondly, advocacy is only one aspect of what a lawyer does. Your various roles will, among others, include being a problem-solver, a freedom fighter, a project manager, an investigator, a counsellor and an advisor. You will be asked to do so, in part, because you are a member of a profession that by reputation is comprised of

independent free-thinkers with specialist legal knowledge. In time, these are each roles that you should embrace.

At its most rewarding, legal practice will provide you with challenging and interesting work, and be the source of strong and fulfilling relationships. Just as, I hope, your legal studies did. The law has permeated so deeply into every aspect of public life that there is no limit to the amount of interesting work out there to discover.

This is not to say that your careers will be your only source of joy and challenge. Far from it. The festive season is a timely reminder of the joys and challenges of our relationships with our families, loved ones and friends. I am sure that you are already thinking of them all. And whether you have remembered to buy them cards or gifts.

But I also encourage you to cast your mind further. The Christmas message is about love for all people without prejudice. The importance of this message is worth remembering. An upcoming milestone highlights the importance of the Christmas message.

Next year will be the 40th anniversary of the Constitution being amended so as to remove express discrimination against Aboriginal people. Some might question whether this amendment resulted in the living standards for indigenous Australians being brought to par with all other Australians. Some might also question whether *Mabo* and those subsequent cases also did so? The answer may well be, “Not yet.”

It is possible to point to endless literature that has been produced on the topic of indigenous welfare. In recent times it has focused on a measurably lower quality of life, domestic violence, gangs and petrol-sniffing, particularly in rural areas. By comparison, there is relatively little mainstream literature about the richness and history of Aboriginal culture. One wonders whether the economic measures taken to improve indigenous welfare can succeed without the ostensible and genuine goodwill of the Australian people

This is but one of many social justice battles that lawyers are being called upon to fight. With your admission today, you have my and this court's personal blessing to do so.

As you approach the holiday season, still buzzing with joy from your recent admission, I ask you to think of people fighting for a different cause. That is, the brave men and women of our armed forces, who have literally fought and risked their lives to eradicate the risk of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. You can only imagine how disappointed they were to learn that North Korea had been developing its own WMDs all along.

Again I congratulate you on being admitted as lawyers of this honourable court. Of the 93 people being admitted today, 67 are female. It has for many years been the trend that women have outnumbered men in admissions ceremonies. Hopefully this will translate to a far higher proportion of women in legal practice, including on the bench, in the future. Have a safe and merry festive season, and my best wishes for wherever your future takes you.