

SPEECH

ADMISSION CEREMONY – 21 OCTOBER 2005

On behalf of the Court which, on this Admission Ceremony comprises the Chief Justice, Justice Higgins, Justice Connolly and myself, we congratulate you and welcome each of you as admitted practitioners of this Court.

Today there are three ceremonial sessions to admit 64 new practitioners. In this ceremony there are 13 females and 7 males. Overall, in the three sessions, 42 females and 22 males will be admitted. Since I first began in the practice of the law, I have seen the number of females entering the legal profession grow quite substantially. For example, when I was admitted, there were 27 males and two females admitted. But, I must say, the ratio today at these sittings is really getting out of hand! Nevertheless, I find it very encouraging that the former imbalance between the sexes in the profession is being redressed and would wish that the now decisive majority make their presence felt in the profession overall.

Most of you have graduated from the Australian National University or the University of Canberra, but others at this sitting represent law graduates from Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. At this sitting, you have respectively completed your graduate diplomas in legal training at the Legal Workshop, College of Law or the University of Technology.

The practice of the law offers a diversity of employment including private practice, practice in commerce and industry or in the government service and you have our best wishes for your future endeavours in whatever field of law you should choose. However, by your admission, as officers of this Court, you carry the responsibility that your admission in this jurisdiction entails. Your admission here will entitle you to admission to practise throughout Australia, but the fundamental responsibilities that you are accepting today will be maintained over the course of your career in the law.

In these times, as you are aware, the legal profession and the judiciary are both under far more intense public scrutiny than in the past. It is proper that it be so, but it makes it imperative for your own protection that you have a grounding in, and a commitment to, the professional rules that will regulate your practise of law. Those professional rules governing your practice are based on standards of honesty, integrity and courtesy which the public, and the Court, and your fellow practitioners are entitled to expect.

For those of you who have determined to enter the practice of the law, whether as barristers or solicitors, a very positive aspect is that by entering this profession you gain the assistance of your fellow practitioners. You will be given not only comradeship but true support and assistance. This is one of the great traditions of the legal profession. You should always be open to, and ready to participate in that tradition.

To be a good lawyer you will spend your lifetime learning the law (just when you thought you knew it all). You will, however, be surprised how much and how soon people will

come to rely upon your skills, learning and integrity. You will soon have brought home to you your responsibilities to your client, to the court and to the profession itself.

Another important thing is the perspective from which you approach your chosen profession. It is a challenge to question and to not accept that which is received wisdom. You have the discipline and training for that challenge. You also have the training to find innovative ways to solve the problems with which your clients face.

It may not be necessary to do pro bono work or work in legal aid to be a force for achieving social justice, although I commend those ways of doing so. The legal profession prides itself on implementing the accepted principles of fairness, equality and human rights. You should embrace that. Lawyers like yourselves, carrying on your responsibilities under the law must do the utmost to understand the situation of those you deal with, and be always ready to equally uphold the rights of all. More so, if the cause is not particularly popular and whether it be asylum seekers or alleged terrorists and whether it be representing alleged paedophiles or even the Saddam Hussein's of this world. I urge you, if called upon, to accept the challenge of accepting instructions to represent all who need representation and to do so without fear or favour.

For those of you who will remain in the Territory to pursue a practising career, you will have the further task of considering the effect of the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004* which has commenced to operate in this Territory. This is an Act described as Australia's first ever Bill of Rights. Its purpose is to recognise fundamental civil and political rights in the

Territory and to ensure, that to the maximum extent possible, all Territory enactments are interpreted in a way that protects and respects those rights. I hope that those of you who will practise here embrace the challenges that will undoubtedly come with this legislative development. As I speak, there is a contemporary community debate about such principles and the proposed anti-terrorist legislation as well as the protection that can be given by the rule of law to measures that can have undesirable and draconian affects on ordinary citizens. This is part of the future that awaits you.

This is an important day for you and your family and friends. It represents your considerable achievement and it reflects the support that you have been given by those who care for you. They too can share in this event and be justifiably proud of you and their role. To all you new practitioners, the Court wishes you well in facing the challenges of the future.