



**Australian High Commission
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls launches new program to support women in local government

Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, Ms Natasha Stott Despoja AM, today launched an Australian-funded program to support the new quota for female representation in local government.

"Supporting women in leadership is a priority for Australia, in our foreign policy and overseas aid program", said Ambassador Stott Despoja during her first formal visit to Sri Lanka.

"Women bring particular perspectives, priorities and strengths drawn from their life experiences, which are often different from men's. Women leaders are likely to respond to women's policy priorities."

Ambassador Stott Despoja, a former parliamentarian, was joined at the launch by Ms Rosy Senanayake and the Hon Dr Sudarshini Fernandopulle MP. All commented that the introduction of the quota presents an important opportunity to address the low representation of women at all levels of government in Sri Lanka.

Over the next 12 months, in partnership with the Electoral Commission, Ministry of Provincial Council and Local Government, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and the Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance, the program will develop a targeted public awareness campaign on the importance of including women as elected leaders.

The program will also provide training to newly elected women following local government elections, support the work of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus and partner with political parties to address barriers for women candidates.

"Building understanding within political parties about the quota and creating a network of male party leaders to champion women candidates will also be a key element of the program" said Australian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Bryce Hutchesson. "It is important that more men, especially those in positions of power and influence, help advance this work."