I would like to start by adding my acknowledgement of Country. Can I also acknowledge Professor Rita Wilson, and other Monash staff, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here today. As the recently appointed Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs I will have responsibilities across three departments; Attorney-General’s, Immigration and Border Protection and Social Services.

With these various responsibilities, I would like to share some of my thoughts from 30 years’ experience in public life, which includes engaging with many of our communities at risk.

Domestic and family violence and sexual assault in our community, irrespective of cultural background, is unacceptable. It is everyone’s responsibility to reject and prevent it.

In my home city of Sydney only 2 days ago it was reported that yet another woman, 7 months pregnant, became the victim of a horrific incident of domestic violence.

As awful as these stories are, they are not entirely uncommon with 1 in 6 Australian women reporting instances of physical and sexual violence from a current or former partner.
We have interpreters here today who are dealing directly with these issues and have done so for many, many years. Translators and interpreters will continue to deal with people experiencing domestic violence, perhaps even increasingly so.

Government and the community are working to reduce domestic violence, but this will take time. There is some progress on the awareness front. What was once a taboo subject now makes the headlines and the evening news and rightly so.

With this new prominence can come an increase in the reporting of cases. As our women and children become more resilient, more willing to come forward, the caseload is likely to increase.

Translators and interpreters will be among those on the frontline in this battle.

As the daughter of migrants and somebody who has lived the bi-lingual and bi-cultural experience and given my close involvement in multicultural affairs for over 30 years, I have heard the stories.

For those of us who have been in this space, we know the problem. We have known the problem for a long time. It is now time to take decisive action. We need to empower women and help build resilience in families.

The Minister assisting the Prime Minister for Women embarked on a process to inform herself of CALD women’s experience of violence, by supporting 29 kitchen table conversations with CALD women from more than 40 ethnicities.

The conversations and the subsequent report of these conversations, *Hearing her Voice*, confirmed what many of us already knew about issues of domestic and family violence and sexual assault in CALD communities.

This included that issues around translating and interpreting can be a key challenge for CALD women in addressing and escaping violence.

These conversations also confirmed what we already know that CALD women share many issues and experiences in common with other Australian women in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault, such as finding affordable accommodation, achieving financial independence, finding employment, obtaining legal advice and finding appropriate childcare.
However, for CALD women these difficulties can be exacerbated by factors such as not being able to speak English, having no rental history, lower employment rates, lack of transport, and having few friends or family members in Australia who can provide support.

CALD women are also less likely to report violence, can experience more barriers in accessing support services, and are less likely to leave a family violence situation than other Australian women.

As I said, the *Hearing Her Voice* report only confirms yet again the stories that have been around for many, many years.

Similar observations were made at the national roundtable on reducing violence against CALD women and their children, held in Sydney last month.

This is a very challenging area, particularly for interpreters.

Interpreters have the unique ability to communicate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and bridge communication gaps to promote understanding and respect.

Interpreting services are crucial to CALD women experiencing violence. They enable the woman to make first contact with frontline services, to disclose violence and seek help. They have an ongoing part to play as women navigate a complex support service and legal system.

As you can all appreciate, interpreting for domestic violence victims is extremely sensitive. It is never acceptable to rely on victims’ children, relatives or perpetrators for interpreting.

Professional interpreters are bound by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators Code of Ethics.

This covers a number of requirements, such as impartiality – interpreters do not voice an opinion, solicited or unsolicited, on any matter during an assignment; and interpreters do not, in the course of their duties, assume other roles such as offering advocacy, guidance or advice.

Unfortunately though, a number of women who participated in the kitchen table discussions did make some negative comments about experiences with interpreters.
Some of the challenges raised by participants included interpreter availability, cost, a perceived lack of female interpreters, and issues of confidentiality, impartiality and cultural insensitivity.

Of particular concern were reports of interpreters inserting their opinions into a woman’s statement or arguing with the woman over what is appropriate to say.

Furthermore, women noted instances where interpreters have distorted statements so that incidents of violence in their community were not exposed.

This is misleading and can harm women seeking assistance or compromise evidence in a criminal offence. Some interpreters reportedly tried to influence women and encourage them to stay in a violent relationship. This is an abhorrent outcome.

There were also cases where interpreters were known to the victim and perpetrator. This raises significant concerns around conflict of interest and their ability to exercise objectivity.

One woman was quoted as saying “some interpreters don’t interpret – rather they try to solve the family problem and they’re not qualified for that.”

Indeed they are not. I am sure interpreters here today will agree on the need to take a stand against this kind of professional misconduct, and encourage your colleagues to do the same.

Section 9.2 of the AUSIT Code of Ethics talks about professional solidarity says “Interpreters and translators support and further the interests of the profession and their colleagues and offer each other assistance”.

It is imperative that interpreters are aware of what constitutes appropriate and professional behaviour and show a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics in family violence situations.

To those interpreters who conduct themselves professionally and sensitively during these extremely delicate interactions, I applaud your commitment and professionalism.

Interpreters often go from one emotionally demanding job to the next, therefore it is important to make time for forums where they can debrief, recover and recharge.

I encourage the interpreting sector to work together to create these important opportunities to better support interpreters who support others at critical times.
The Australian Government, through the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, has been working with State and Territory governments and civil society to achieve a long-term reduction in domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Under the National Plan, the Australian Government is providing $100 million over four years for complementary measures to support women who have experienced or are at risk of domestic violence.

These initiatives focus on primary prevention, understanding diverse experiences of violence, integrated systems, perpetrator interventions and building evidence.

The Council of Australian Governments has agreed to take urgent and collective action to address violence against women in 2015, including a $30 million national awareness campaign.

I am particularly pleased that the Second Action Plan of the National Plan commits to working with CALD communities to reduce violence and support women and their children.

It recognises that women from CALD backgrounds may face many challenges in addressing violence and may experience it in diverse forms.

This can be more difficult due to a new language, culture and laws.

In some cultures and languages, there is no direct translation or agreed definition of domestic violence or concept of sexual assault within a marriage.

Knowing that the concepts themselves are not readily understandable by non-English speakers, the role of interpreters in the domestic violence context becomes even more critical.

We need to understand the cultural overlays if we are going to properly deal with the issues in our CALD communities. This is a responsibility of not just the Government, but of civil society.

We must remind ourselves that for CALD women experiencing domestic violence it is not just about the children and the women. It is about family, it is about heritage, it is about culture, it is about tradition. It is about those bonds that bind those women so much more tightly.

These are the things that you as interpreters in different languages understand in the domestic violence space. You are acutely aware of it.
Basically, I have lived my life across what is bi-cultural bi-lingual Australia and so I understand the importance of these concepts.

I also understand the ties these women have to their families, their traditions. They are very, very strong. Therefore we need to understand that to find the appropriate solutions to the problems.

In a society where 45% of us were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was, CALD communities should be considered mainstream. Policies and programs should be developed in the context of how they affect all Australians, regardless of language or ethnicity. Regrettably, this is not the case.

As I indicated at the domestic violence conference last month in Sydney, CALD issues are still siloed. All too often CALD problems are band-aided. The simple solution seems to be, “well, we translate a few pamphlets, put a CALD person on our board. That should tick the CALD box.”

Whatever the issue is, the CALD component kind of gets tacked on at the end, a bit of an after-thought, a sort of footnote. We have to move beyond this tokenistic approach.

Rest assured, as someone with my background, I am very, very much committed to this as part of the Government.

Dealing with domestic violence in CALD communities is challenging, but it is a challenge we must all accept. Government as I said has a role, as does civil society.

Interpreters are uniquely placed to deal directly with families who are experiencing that violence. Interpreting and translating services are crucial to CALD women experiencing that violence.

They enable women to make that vital first contact with frontline services, to talk about the violence that they are experiencing and finally to make that step to seek help.

Can I wish all the best for this forum as you traverse this very sensitive terrain.

The rewards however, resilient women, families and communities, are worth all our collective efforts.
It is now my very great pleasure to open the Domestic Violence and Interpreting National Forum.

Thank you.

[Ends]