



Ambassador John Berry – Eleanor Roosevelt Remarks

**Ambassador Berry's Remarks
For the 70th Anniversary of
First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's Visit to Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – December 4, 2013)

I'd like to offer a very warm welcome to:

Her Excellency the Honorable Quentin Bryce, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, and His Excellency Mr. Michael Bryce;

The Dean and members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of Parliament;

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen;

I'm very pleased to welcome you today as we celebrate the visit of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to Canberra.

I would especially like to welcome Ms. Kerrie Tim, whose mother met the First Lady in 1943. We're very happy Ms. Tim could be here today.

While no one thinks twice about First Ladies making solo trips now, Mrs. Roosevelt's goodwill tour across the Pacific was groundbreaking. There were strong objections to her idea – both from the President and the military. Traveling in a war zone, visiting troops in the field, and inspecting Red Cross installations weren't the sorts of things that women did.

Of course, before Eleanor Roosevelt, First Ladies didn't play high profile public roles in their husbands' administrations, either. In fact, ignoring the idea that "women don't do that sort of thing" pretty much sums up Eleanor Roosevelt's life.

And that quality is epitomized by her trip to this region at a time when the war still raged across the Pacific. It took tremendous courage to make that journey. The tide of the war had turned, but the Pacific was still a very dangerous place. Mrs. Roosevelt traveled more than 25,000 miles and spoke to an estimated 400,000 U.S. service members on 17 different islands, including French Polynesia and Guadalcanal, and in Australia and New Zealand. She was a huge hit among the soldiers and even won over her harshest critic, Admiral William F. Halsey. He later said that she, "accomplished more good than any other person or any group of civilians who had passed through [his] area."



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What Eleanor Roosevelt saw on her trip made her determined to ensure that the peace that followed the war was more than just an interlude. She felt this even more deeply after her visit to Guadalcanal. She wrote that “the real memorial to show the love we bore for those who lie here, must be built where we live by the way in which we make our lives count. We must build up the kind of world for which these men died.”

And for the rest of her life, Eleanor Roosevelt worked hard to build that world. She was dedicated to the cause of peace, to human rights, and to equality. As the first Chair of the UN Human Rights Commission, she was instrumental in developing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Because of her work, many of the rights enshrined in that document are an integral part of international law. We have made great progress since the Declaration was written, but there is still a long way to go. Every day we work hard to ensure that Eleanor Roosevelt’s dream of a better world will become a reality.

Eleanor Roosevelt was a woman for whom the words “you can’t” and “you shouldn’t” had very little meaning. Today, in part due to her legacy, women leaders from both sides of the Pacific are shaping the U.S.-Australia alliance.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome here today so many other women who carry on Mrs. Roosevelt’s tradition of ignoring preconceived ideas about what women should and shouldn’t do.

I am particularly honored to welcome the Governor General of Australia, Ms. Quentin Bryce. She, too, is a role model, not just for the women and girls following in her footsteps, but also for people who aspire to be public servants, educators, mentors, and leaders. Ms. Bryce is a strong defender of the rights of women and girls around the world. She has worked for human rights and equality since early in her career. And last, but not least, she is the first woman to serve as Governor General of Australia.

Ms. Bryce represents Australia and the Queen with dignity, grace, intelligence, and humor. We are honored she was able to join us here today.

In this Centenary year, the United States is proud that we were the first country to have built our Embassy here in Canberra. Construction of the embassy began at a time when almost all non-defense building had stopped. Australia was at its most vulnerable. However, the construction of the Embassy demonstrated our commitment to Australia. It underlined our deep-seated belief that we would win the war together.



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While she was in Australia, Eleanor Roosevelt planted an American oak on the grounds of the Embassy. Over the years, saplings from its acorns have been planted as far away as Perth. And they represent how much our alliance has grown over the past 70 years.

Today, the Governor General will plant a Red Box Gum. It is a symbolic bookend – arboreally anchoring our alliance for the next 70 years. Her tree will also remind us of our long friendship and our duty to work together to serve the cause of peace in the Asia-Pacific and around the world.

And now it gives me great pleasure to introduce Her Excellency the Honorable Quentin Bryce.