

**ADDRESS TO THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION
MULTIFAITH OBSERVANCE, ITHACA ROOM, BRISBANE
CITY HALL, SUNDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2009, 10.30 AM.**

We meet this morning, my friends, to remember the men and women who have given their lives in the service of Australia; to bless, in a multifaith way, the Order of Australia Association and its members; and to inspire those present to look to and work for the future with optimism.

It is especially appropriate that we meet here in Brisbane, the capital of this great State which this year celebrates its sesquicentenary. One hundred and fifty years is but a moment in the timeline of this ancient land. We gather on Turrbal country, here on the north side of the Brisbane River. For tens of thousands of years before British settlement the Turrbal people lived here and held meetings with their elders and spiritual leaders to reflect on the past, to honour worthy ancestors and to dream of a better future: in essence not so very different to this observance. We honour our Indigenous Australians.

As it happens, today is the National Day of Mourning for the Victorian bushfire disaster. And so, my friends, we especially honour those who have lost their lives in those recent cruel bushfires. Our hearts are with their families and loved ones whose lives are now filled with raw grief and are forever changed.

But today is not just a time for sad reflection. We joyfully celebrate the Australian spirit of courage, compassion and commitment, of resilience, reconciliation and resourcefulness, that has arisen phoenix-like from the eucalypt ashes. To those who have lost homes

and livelihoods in the floods of North Queensland, as well as the bushfires in Victoria, we pledge to help you rebuild.

The members of this Association have demonstrated that Australian spirit in ways rightly acknowledged by awards within the Order of Australia. Without the commitment of volunteers like you, Australian executive government would struggle to maintain the high standards of governance we have come to expect, and our civil society would be cripplingly diminished.

It is a privilege this morning to spend some quiet moments in Brisbane's exquisite art deco and neoclassical City Hall, listening to the harmony of the young women of Our Lady's College choir. It is a greater privilege to share those moments with truly good men and women from diverse backgrounds and faiths, friends all. The greatest privilege is to be part of your collective optimism and, inspired by absent friends, to join in your common hope of making the community, Australia and the world better, fairer and less imperfect.

My friends, please join me in the Association prayer.