

# Farewell + Closing Remarks F+E Con 2024

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[ 00:00:00 ] Well, I hope you feel like you have been reflected and your concerns have been reflected on the stage during the conference. There's only one more thing to do, and that is to introduce to you the Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher to join us on the stage to give us some closing remarks. A big thank you to staff at the Human Rights Commission, staff here at the High for looking after us, to all the volunteers, to delegates, speakers, moderators, the commissioners. Thank you so much for being in the room. It is one of the most beautiful rooms of professionals. I think you'll agree that we've been in for a long time, tackling some huge issues. So, I'm going to leave the stage for the very last time until we see each other again.

[ 00:00:43 ] Borda, good evening. Thanks, Narelda. That was wonderful. Thanks to our panel, and thanks to all of you. And like Rosalind, in Shakespeare's play, As You Like It, after whom I am named, I get the epilogue. I've had plenty of time to speak in this conference, and my words are captured fulsomely in the Free and Equal final report. So, in this final section, my epilogue, I want to reflect your words, what I've heard throughout this wonderful conference, and some of the themes that resonated so much with me. I'll talk about some of the themes, and some of them are very relevant, and I want to talk about some of the themes that resonated so strongly with me throughout this magnificent time that we've shared together.

[ 00:01:33 ] Michael Kirby provided that prophetic, profound, and magnificent contribution, both last night and today. And he said, sometimes you need deep principles as tools. Parliament is good at fixing problems of majorities. But it's the minorities, the voiceless, the invisible that need us to see them and to give them a voice. And that theme of the invisibility, the voiceless, combined with the silencing that can happen through not seeing, or using groupism or whatever other devices that we use in our world to provide some sense of safety or whatever it is. But the consequences for people are immense if they are not seen, if they are not heard. Jennifer Robinson, another Australian woman of whom we should be very proud, said we should be rightly proud of the role that Australians have played, particularly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[ 00:02:54 ] And to see a Human Rights Act as modest but foundational. And Rob Hulls, I loved hearing from Rob, who spoke of the importance of the Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities as providing the foundation for cultural change in Victoria. And he spoke of the impact of that statute, and how it can be something as simple as a person in aged care having a shower curtain. That's where human rights matter. It's the individual stories, the impact on the individual, whether it's the impact of racism, ageism, or whatever other impact. Because the experience of a lack of dignity that comes through a breach of human rights is always a personal one. And what Rob left with us was that it was the cultural change that was provided by having that Charter of Rights and Responsibilities that was more important than anything.

[ 00:04:10 ] So what does it give us? Valfell, the indomitable Valfell in her 90s, said it gives accountability. Vanessa Turnbull Roberts said, where people are part of the process, we get better

outcomes. And in the Children's Rights team discussion, we had a contribution from the perspective of children. When we talk to children, the insights shift from talking about bad kids to social policy that is about helping kids. So what next? We need to have conversations with those who disagree. We need, as Robert Fitzgerald, our Age Discrimination Commissioner, said, to move beyond the slogans. And indeed, to pick up something that Noreen Young said or reflected that slogans in the absence of data are the things we need to challenge. And for me, to reject the poppycock. So where does that leave us?

[ 00:05:35 ] It leaves us with an opportunity. We have a generational opportunity before us right now. We need, as George Williams encouraged us to think, we need a systemic fix to a systemic problem. Or, as he said, an umbrella, not to pretend we have one when we don't. As Rob Hull said, the scene has been set and now is the time. I was particularly struck by something that Hannah Devaney said. She said that she said that the little people need the big people to take up the fight. And what she saw as the Human Rights Act, the tools of which Michael Kirby spoke, it gives the tools for the little people to have the big people take up the fight. So on behalf of the Australian people, I want to thank you and thank you and thank you for joining us today.

[ 00:07:10 ] And we look forward to walking together with you to create a brighter future for our children and our children's children. For everyone who has been with us today, and for everyone who has been with us today. Everywhere, every day. And as I said in the opening, so that we can honestly say to our children's children: 'The glad tomorrow.' Thank you for sharing the day with the Australian Human Rights Commission, for supporting our work and taking up the challenge to make our voice heard, to give voice to the voiceless, and to make the invisible visible. Thank you.