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**Title:**

Opening address to National Conference of War Widows' Guild

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OPENING ADDRESS TO NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WAR WIDOWS' GUILD, BY THE  
PREMIER, DON DUNSTAN. 8.10.75.

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Mrs. Mayo, Mr. Kingsland, Ladies :

Thank you for asking me to open your bi-ennial National Conference and for giving me the chance to express my Government's appreciation of the Guild's work.

Of course, the most heart-felt thanks would probably come from the women you have helped and whose cases you have taken up to ensure better treatment, but I feel it is important that you realise that the South Australian Government also values your work.

Voluntary aid organisations such as the Guild, which have a specialised interest and, more importantly, specialised knowledge of a particular problem, will always be a vital part of any community welfare system.

And despite the claims which our opponents are making increasingly frequently, my Government's commitment to improved social welfare facilities recognises the crucial role of groups such as your own.

No government assistance scheme - no matter how well intentioned or comprehensive - will ever be as flexible or as responsive to changing needs as we would like. Apart from any other reason, it would be administered by human beings as fallible as the rest of us. The nature of any large government organisation means that it is very difficult for a State scheme to develop the same insight and empathy of groups of concerned individuals who are striving to improve the status of people in particular areas of need.

The Government must provide the facilities for alleviating need and rectifying problems, but so often the first point of awareness that the needs or problems exist is a voluntary organisation such as yours.

In South Australia, we have built our community welfare programme - and I feel quite safe in saying it is the best in Australia - on the basis of community involvement and community awareness. We want voluntary groups to work with us, to show us ways of improving our assistance and, if necessary to tell us if we are going wrong. I hope that doesn't happen very often, but it is a very serious function of community involvement.

If I have made this point strongly, it is because I feel very strongly about the need for people to be involved in any system of community welfare. And I have much stronger feelings about the attempts to portray our assistance programmes as being designed to downgrade the role of voluntary groups or to impose some faceless, unresponsive bureaucracy on those in need.

This financial year, my Government will spend almost \$13 million on direct assistance to people, an increase of \$4 million over 1974-75. The payments we make have been increased to keep pace with inflation and increased Federal pensions, and of course, there is more to community welfare than direct assistance.

This financial year, the total community welfare budget is almost \$27 million, which includes capital costs and the employment of social workers and support staff to counsel people in need.

The Department of Community Welfare has been decentralised and made more responsive to community needs, especially the need for people requiring help to retain their dignity and identity.

We do not have a perfect system - far from it. But my Government is aiming for such an ideal, although at the moment it is an increasingly elusive goal because of the combined efforts of inflation and unemployment.

The effects of those two ills will not be unknown to the Guild, and no doubt much of your discussion in the next three days will inevitably touch on the effects of rising prices on people with a fixed income such as a widows' pension.

Increasing inflation and simultaneously rising unemployment put great strains on the community's ability to provide assistance to the more and more people who require help. Governments can do much, and with the involvement and enthusiasm of the community - through dedicated organisations such as your Guild - we can do even more.

Thank You.

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