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24 April 2006

**AEGT  
GIFTED & TALENTED EDUCATION  
CONFERENCE 2006 PROGRAMME  
NATIONAL PATRON'S FOREWORD**

**The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG  
Justice of the High Court of Australia**

I congratulate the organisers of this conference. I applaud the programme that has been arranged. I hope that it furthers national discussion about the special educational needs of gifted students.

Every child is precious and has unique gifts and talents. Every child has the fundamental human right to an education shaped for its needs as a human being and a citizen of the future. But some children, through chance, genetics and encouragement demonstrate the need for special education to tap their creative potential and advance their special gifts. It is a matter of tailoring education to the child's needs. Doing so helps such children to flourish. This is important for a nation and for the world.

There are many ways in which such goals can be achieved. But the basic idea is grounded in true equal opportunity. Other countries are pursuing such goals. We, in Australia, must not be left behind.

I had special opportunities in my public school education in New South Wales. Far from making me elitist, it encouraged my respect for all and appreciation of the varieties of talent and citizenship.

I encourage full exploration of these themes. Talent that is undetected or unencouraged may be lost forever. That is why special educational needs must be carefully nurtured and generously funded. Everyone ultimately receives the dividend for such investment.

**The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG**

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