



Ukrainian Ambassador Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Senator Penny Wong and Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations co-chairperson, Kateryna Argyrou. Picture: Brett Hartwig

Wong lauds Ukraine in fight against evil

Paul Starick

Australia's most senior female leader, Penny Wong, has delivered a powerful message to girls and women during an Adelaide speech decrying Russia's "illegal and immoral war" in Ukraine.

The Foreign Affairs Minister told a Ukrainian community forum on Wednesday that Russia's invasion of its neighbour was a constant reminder that smaller nations cannot stand by while larger countries violate another's territory.

Responding to questions from Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations co-chairperson Kateryna Argyrou about empowering female leaders in Ukraine, a candid Senator Wong confessed she initially had been reluctant to talk about her gender or cultural background after being elected to parliament in 2001.



Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong and Kateryna Argyrou at the Ukrainian Community Centre. Picture: Brett Hartwig

"I remember giving a speech at a university and afterwards a whole group of young, primarily Asian, women came up and I was so excited.

"I understood that it's not actually about you, it's all about them. It can change how people see their own possibilities," she said.

"Whether it's Ukrainian women and girls, or women or girls in the Pacific or in South-east Asia, we want gender

equality to be intrinsic to development ... to want them to be able to aspire to more and to be more.

"That's not just a matter of human rights. It's a very pragmatic position too because all of the evidence shows that societies where you get stronger outcomes on gender equality, you get better economic outcomes."

Ms Argyrou praised the South Australian commun-

ity's "heavyweight" response to supporting Ukraine and said the conflict was "deeply personal" for her because her family remained in the war-torn nation.

"Up until a month ago, I had six of my family members on the frontline in Ukraine defending various parts of Ukraine ... As of today, I only have four of my family members on the frontline because two of them have been heavily wounded," she said.

"The personal stories that I hear, not only from my family that they're fighting for and defending - my parents are in Kyiv - ... the daily air raid sirens, the stress and uncertainty. It's palpable. When I talk to them, it's absolutely traumatic."

Senator Wong said Russia's invasion in February, 2022, served "as a constant reminder of what is at stake". She did not

refer to China's ambitions for Taiwan but used closing remarks to emphasise the principle of national integrity in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Russian disinformation, as you know, spreads far and wide. It is a very important priority for me in my meetings in our region. In those meetings, I continue to remind my counterparts, even those who sometimes say things to me that sound a bit like (Russian Foreign Minister Sergey) Mr Lavrov," she said.

"If we, small and medium countries, do not stand up for the principle that a large country cannot abrogate the territorial integrity of another, then none of us are safe.

"That principle has kept the world safe since World War II. Fundamentally, that was one of the key sentiments of the settlement of the Second World War.