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## Episode 5: Gulnara Abbasova

### Transcript

#### **Gulnara Abbasova**

[uplifting music plays] My hope is certainly that our future is one where all people, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, or, or other individual characteristics, have the safety and the security to reach their potential.

#### **Female Voiceover**

Welcome to Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender-Based Violence, the official podcast series of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. Please be aware that this podcast discusses topics related to domestic, family and sexual violence, which may be distressing for some listeners. Support is available. If you need assistance, please contact 1800RESPECT or reach out to your local support services. Thank you for joining us.

#### **Micaela Cronin**

Joining us for today's podcast is a true trailblazer. Gulnara Abbasova has created legacies that drive change, particularly in multicultural communities. Gulnara, thanks so much for joining me for this conversation about our hopes for the future today.

#### **Gulnara Abbasova**

Thanks for having me.

#### **Micaela Cronin**

First, I want to start this conversation by acknowledging that today I'm on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, where I live and work most of the time and pay my deep respects to their Elders past and present for their care of these lands and for their ongoing generosity and wisdom. My commitment is to work and live as an ally in this role, and always. Gulnara, I just wanna take a minute before we get started to introduce your incredibly impressive contribution in this space. Gulnara is someone who's been instrumental in shining a light on the unique challenges faced by migrant and refugee women in Australia, advocating for tailored responses and services to improve their safety, access and outcomes. Gulnara is currently the Head of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response at Settlement Services International.

#### **Micaela Cronin**

Additionally, she was a founding director of the Adira Centre, an initiative working across New South Wales to strengthen culturally responsive domestic and sexual violence prevention and response strategies. Her efforts have been focused on improving the experiences of migrant and refugee survivors in Australia's systems. Beyond her leadership in this area, Gulnara serves on several significant boards, including health practitioner regulation boards and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. She was also part of the National Advisory Group for the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, 2022 to 2023, the plan that guides our work at the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. Gulnara, thank you so much for being here today. We're really excited to hear about your vision for 2050.

#### **Gulnara Abbasova**

Thank you, and thank you for the generous introduction.

#### **Micaela Cronin**

Hmm. Thank you. So Gulnara, tell me what motivates you to strive for a better future.

#### **Gulnara Abbasova**



Oh, well, a number of things, of course. The first one is my story. As an Indigenous, uh, woman from my homeland overseas and as a migrant woman in Australia,

**Gulnara Abbasova**

and having witnessed and lived through a range of experiences, many positive and some challenging ones, both individually and as part of a shared collective experience with my community, including intergenerational trauma. My story, like most of us, you know, is, is one of those defining ways for what motivates us to do what we're doing.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Another thing is, of course, my commitment. And again, it's very much lived through. Commitment to justice, to equity, to human rights and to living a legacy. And look, finally, a sense of future and hope. I do think that we can, as a society and a community, change things for the better, and we owe it to our children. And, you know, in many Indigenous traditions, there is a belief that we need to think generations ahead when we make decisions today, and how they would benefit our descendants. And then, and that's really important for me. I have a 10-year-old son, and I certainly think about what kind of world he and children of today will live in years from now. And look, that sense of hope is, I think is, is an important driver that we should all share.

**Micaela Cronin**

It's really critical, isn't it, Gulnara, thinking about your son will be 35, um, in 2050? And it, it does really... All of those layers of what motivates you and motivates all of us to do this work come into what, what helps us think about how, how can we help shape that future. And you've spent a lot of your time and effort both doing that and thinking about it. So I'm curious about what your... You know, in, in building on that, if you think about... If what we know of our national commitment to end gender-based violence in one generation, that's what the national plan is all about, if that's successful, what would your vision for 2050, when your son is 35, what would that be?

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Look, my hope is certainly that our future is one where all people, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, or, or other individual characteristics, have the safety and the security to reach their potential or to be the best versions of themselves, whatever that means to them. And a future where we all share the collective responsibility for the community that we're part of and its future. And it is really my hope for... Uh, well, as you say, my son, but also, of course, for all children and, uh, for, for our society as a whole. And look, and... So, reflecting on my story, in many ways, I was very lucky growing up with very strong role models in my family, in my immediate family, for, um, gender equality, both men and women. Men and women in my immediate family respected and valued each other and were not restricted by gender norms. You know, as an example, my two grandmothers, both born over a hundred years ago, were qualified accountants. And I, and I grew up, um, in that, uh, environment. And then a- a- as I was growing up and seeing other families and opening myself up more to, to, I guess, the world, it became apparent to me that it wasn't everyone's experience and everyone's reality, and that things were different for a whole lot of people. And I suppose my, my hope is that we achieve a future where that is a reality for, for everyone, uh, where we have those respectful relationships, where- when we don't have restrictions around gender norms or expectations, where everyone is the best version of themselves, whatever that means to them.

**Micaela Cronin**

It's really interesting, your comment about the, one of the things that will be different is that sense of collective responsibility for creating that.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Yeah.



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**Micaela Cronin**

That sense of how, how can we give those opportunities for security and safety. But also, it's very impressive, um, having two grandmothers who are qualified-

**Gulnara Abbasova**

[laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

... accountants. That's a really interesting... 'Cause that is a, that would have been unusual at that time.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

It was. And I, I... And look, certainly high expectations for me. Yes [laughs]-

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah, yeah-

**Gulnara Abbasova**

... mostly.

**Micaela Cronin**

... I can imagine. It's interesting that stuff, isn't it, about what we grow up as, what's normal, and then as you grow and you realise that it's not necessarily normal for everybody else.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Absolutely.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Yes, that was very much a realisation for me.

**Micaela Cronin**

Hmm. So, let's imagine that your vision for 2050 is realised, and you get to go forward for a few days to experience that and to explore it. What would, what would you be looking for? What questions would you be wanting to ask? What would you want to see?

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Look, of course I would wanna know how things changed at a- at an interpersonal level. These things are about relationships and the human connection that is really so critical. Respectful relationships, um, again, uh, gender norms and expectations. But beyond that, look, I would really want to know how our systems and institutions all those years from now truly understand and meaningfully reflect and respond to the diversity of experiences across our community. How they self-reflect on their role in ending gender-based violence, um, for all in the community equitably, uh, without exclusion. Systems and institutions are incredibly important and, and really have to be part of this. And so... And these would be challenging self-reflections, you know, acknowledging the role that our, our systems and people who are, of course, part of them play in perpetuating violence or other intersecting forms of, you know, structural disadvantage, um, including disc- discrimination. But these difficult, challenging self-reflections are also a sign of maturity. And so from my perspective, having been working in this area for quite some time and really focusing on how we shift the big conversation that we're, we're having at the moment, really trying to understand where our systems and, and how they respond, uh, to this challenge, would be, would be certainly something that I would want, would want to do.

**Micaela Cronin**

Hmm. It would be fascinating to be able to see that, wouldn't it? Because I think that interplay between



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**Micaela Cronin**

the need for systems change at the same time as systems are made up of people, so... A- and as you say, the maturity of the self-reflection required to make those significant shifts that we know would need to happen to make that vision realised. So, if you had the ability to make any change, from your perspective, and we know that there would be many... More than one thing, but from the one thing, from your perspective, that you could change to get us on that pathway, what would it be?

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Hmm. Oh, so many things. But look, I, I often reflect on the importance of language. Um, the language that we use to convey our understanding of gender-based violence or our understanding of our hope for the future, our vision of ending gender-based violence. Language is incredibly important. Um, and it's not just semantics, uh, from my perspective. 'Cause the nature and the scale of the problem is such that it requires that shared whole of society commitment, responsibility that w- we, you know, we talked about t- to, to solving it. And therefore, a shared understanding of that problem is really important. And this is where language, I think, is really critical. And I don't necessarily think that we have that shared language quite yet. W- where we know we have a diversity of experiences. We know we have a very, um, diverse, uh, population, of course, and histories and, uh, people who bring a, a whole lot of different perspectives with them. And, and I, and I think r- really moving towards developing that shared language around the problem and the solution, so we can have that whole of society, uh, uh, truly whole of society action towards that change, is something that I would really want us to, to move towards now, uh, to be able to get to where we want to be in 2050.

**Micaela Cronin**

Tell me, tell me a bit, a bit more about that, Gulnara. What, what, what kind of things? Give me some concrete examples of what you would like to see change.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Look, I suppose it's, part of it is about us u-understanding that we're not starting from the same level of understanding of the problem.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm, yep.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Um, we, um, we certainly have, um, you know, the national plan and, um, and, and various strategies and approaches to tackling this, this issue. And, uh, there, there's been a great deal of work progressed across all levels of, you know, government and community and, um, other sectors. But I, I, I do, I do wonder sometimes whether we have a shared language around domestic, family and sexual violence. Share-shared understanding as a whole of Australian society what that means. And not, not just what the problem is, but also what are some of the ways that we can prevent it and address it and respond to it effectively. An- and, and that's, that's really, from my perspective, that's about making sure that we include everyone in this conversation. That we acknowledge the different sort of starting points for the diversity of our population. That we recognise the different experiences and that we work towards developing that unified language around this, so it can actually get us to, to that ambitious and really critical goal, um, of ending violence. Yes, and look, as I said, it, it's not just semantic from my point of view. It, it really is about being able to, been able to, to, to speak to each other about this in, in, in one language. And, you know, quite often in, in, in our, in my work, my, my team engages with communities, um, on the ground and, um, ha-has these challenging difficult conversations about gender-based violence, about domestic and family and sexual violence. And trying to look at what are some of the opportunities to work with communities, to support communities in bringing about this positive change, you know, for themselves long term. And we do often find that, that w- we are speaking sometimes different languages. Although, I, and I don't mean different community languages, I-

**Micaela Cronin**



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Oh, no.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

I mean different narratives around this. We do see the different levels of understanding of what we're talking about, and sometimes, you know, very, um, very different, uh, ways of seeing the problem and the solutions. And, and so I, I suppose from my point of view, it, it is important if we are to achieve this absolutely critical goal, start bringing everyone together around the shared narrative around what it, what it is and what it means, or what it could look like.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah. Gulnara, I think that that's a very insightful commentary about where we need to start. Because as I listen to you, I'm thinking one of the aspects I would agree with you in terms of the lack of kind of shared understanding and narrative. And I, and I agree it's not semantics. One of the aspects of it is that there is a lot of assumptions made that we do have that. And that when people are speaking, they are speaking for everybody, when actually there isn't enough recognition of diversity, as, as you've said.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Mm, absolutely. And, and what do we need to do in terms of education and engagement and really looking at understanding where the different, you know, cohorts of our community are at? Uh, uh, and what do we need to be able to bridge, bridge that?

**Micaela Cronin**

Well, Gulnara, you certainly make a very big contribution in this country to helping us move forward in that regard. And I have been in many forums with you where you are a trailblacer for shining a light on what needs to happen about that, building that shared consensus and understanding. So thank you for all of your work, Gulnara.

**Gulnara Abbasova**

Oh, thank you. That's very kind and very generous of you. Thank you. [laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

And thank you for joining me today, and I look forward to our continued work together to build towards this vision for 2050. [instrumental music]

**Female Voiceover**

Thank you for listening to Voices Towards 2050, Ending Gender-Based Violence. Subscribe and join us for future conversations as we work together to achieve a future free from domestic, family and sexual violence. To learn more about the Commission, visit our website at [dfsdc.gov.au](https://dfsdc.gov.au). If you need support, contact 1800RESPECT or call 1800-737-732. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, you can call 13YARN or 139276. The views expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or the Commission. [instrumental music] [End transcript]