



United Nations  
Economic and Social Council  
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
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**Item 4(e): Culture**  
**Intervention by Les Malezer, Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action**

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Thank you, Mr Chairman

Unfortunately, there was not time for me to give an oral presentation of my intervention under the Education item. Therefore I take this opportunity to express appreciation to those States that have submitted reports to this session of the Permanent Forum. These are the States of Finland, Columbia, the Russian Federation, Norway and New Zealand. Many other States are yet to provide their responses the recommendations of the Permanent Forum.

In this regard the Permanent Forum is making recommendations or suggestions directed to the States, and it is reasonable that the Permanent Forum be able to work in that way.

**In our previous statement on Education, we proposed the recommendation that UNESCO must ensure it has sufficient resources to address the needs of Indigenous peoples, and that States who are members of UNESCO must also ensure that outcome. We repeat that recommendation in relation to 'Culture'.**

UNESCO has given some indication the many projects that it is undertaking around the world involving Indigenous Peoples. However we see a distinction between a 'global program for Indigenous Peoples and a number or variety of international 'projects'.

It has been our experience in our brief dealings with UNESCO that very little resources are available for the wide mandates of 'education, culture and science'. Any demands that we might make on the resources of UNESCO must be made with the knowledge that the budget may not be sufficient. The member States of UNESCO should be well aware of UN concern for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the manifest disadvantages borne by Indigenous Peoples in common throughout the world, and the

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United Nations' charters, treaties and resolutions compelling States' actions. However it is of great concern to us that the UNESCO Assembly does not give priority to programs for Indigenous Peoples.

**We support and repeat the recommendations of the Pacific Caucus.**

The UNESCO program for endangered languages must be escalated to save the languages of Indigenous Peoples. In Australia, there are 248 Aboriginal languages. Yet the Australian Government recognises only one language – English.

The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples proposes that Indigenous children have the right to be taught in their own languages, yet the Australian Government has opposed that right on the basis that the government cannot afford the costs. We are pleased to hear international agencies present the view that, to be taught in our Indigenous language is a 'right'. We certainly believe that it is our right.

Of the 248 Aboriginal languages in Australia less than 40 languages are working languages. Only a handful of these languages are used in bilingual education programs.

The Australian program for 'Reconciliation' between the non-Indigenous population and the Indigenous population, has been ignored by the government, and all official recommendations for reconciliation remain unfulfilled.

The government, which still remains in breach of the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination over Aboriginal Land Rights, proposes that it will only support programs for 'practical reconciliation' – housing, employment, education and health. None of these programs are meant to promote self-determination, land rights, development or cultural survival.

They are meant to assimilate our people and are meant to give a clear signal to Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that our identity as the Indigenous Peoples of Australia is not recognised. Even at this Permanent Forum session the government has displayed contempt for Indigenous Peoples by being the purveyor of Aboriginal culture whilst denying the Indigenous Peoples that right.

We have amongst our delegations here, two elders, four representatives of national bodies and an international lawyer specialising intellectual property rights, yet the acting Ambassador from Australia refused to respectfully acknowledge them, while promoting the Indigenous persons in the government delegation.

We repeat the assertion that Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples do not want to assimilate and that the Australian Government must end its official position of racial discrimination. We call upon the Australian Government to guarantee the cultural survival of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia.

The Australian Government, in the United Nations systems, attempts to hijack the Draft Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples, to participate in all the Indigenous Peoples' forums, and to directly represent the Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, but it will not contribute funds to any Indigenous projects such as the International Decade, the Voluntary Funds or Indigenous programs in the United Nations or international agencies such as WHO, WIPO or UNESCO, to name a few.