



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612, Ph 212 – 351 660 Fax 212 – 351 660 www.australia-unsct.gov.au

14th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

21 April 2015

Agenda Item 3(c): Youth, Self-harm and suicide

Joint statement between the Australian Human Rights Commission and Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, delivered by Mr Mike Fordham, Assistant Secretary, Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Madam Chair

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past, present and future. The Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Government are very concerned about the high rates of suicide and self-harm for Indigenous Australians particularly for Indigenous children and Indigenous youth.

Despite constituting less than three per cent of the population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people represent 26.4 per cent of all suicide deaths by children and young people under 18 years. The gross overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people is one of the disturbing findings of the Australian Human Rights Commission's examination of suicide and self-harm in Australia.

The National Children's Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission conducted an examination into intentional self-harm, with or without suicidal intent, in children and young people under 18 years in 2014. The issues of overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people, barriers to help-seeking and poor uptake of support services were explored in some detail in specialist roundtables, which were co-chaired with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.

The major recommendation made in the Commissioners' Report was the need for focused national research that would inform the development of an effective suite of interventions for children and young people, from universal resilience building through to clinical treatments. The findings of the report also concluded the significant overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people requires a comprehensive whole of government response. Additionally, the research investigating particular risks to Indigenous youth and children should be undertaken to understand the impact of different risk factors, how they are interrelated, and whether some are more predominant than others. It is also important for research to examine the effects and impacts of different protective factors on their wellbeing. The National Children's Commissioner will report on the actions taken by the Australian Government in response to her recommendations in her 2015 Statutory Report.

Reducing the high rates of suicide among Indigenous Australians is a public health priority for the Australian Government. The Australian Government is committed to working with Indigenous

people, through a new engagement with Indigenous communities, to deliver real and positive change. We are consulting with Indigenous people and experts on practical ways to prevent suicide and improve the mental health of Indigenous peoples. This work will inform the renewal of our National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing.

The Australian Government is also focused on developing and learning from best practice. The Government has funded the University of Western Australia to evaluate the effectiveness of existing suicide prevention strategies for Indigenous Australians, with a report due on the 31st August 2015. The National Children's Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission sits on the National Advisory Committee for this project.

Australia supports programmes that build community capacity to engage in suicide prevention activity, improve access to services and support those at risk of suicide and bereaved by suicide. The development of culturally appropriate and locally responsive empowerment, healing and leadership, enables communities to regain resilience and support the healing of community members, including high-risk groups and youths.

Australia is committed to supporting the empowerment of Indigenous peoples to take action and restore the social and emotional wellbeing of communities.

Thank you Chair

under embargo