JOINT STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF

The Pacific Caucus; and
The Indigenous Peoples Organisation Network of Australia

Thank you Madam Chair.

This intervention is made on behalf of a number of Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Region present at this Forum.

Recommendations:

1. The UN PFII should recommend to the UN Human Rights Council the creation of a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Climate Change & Human Rights focusing on Climate Justice.

2. The UN PFII should recommend the UN Human Rights Council members call for a special session to deal with Climate Change.

3. The UN PFII should recommend an official UN Day on Climate Justice to be commemorated on October 1 and explore the elaboration & creation of a Decade.

4. The UN PFII should sponsor a series of expert workshops on Climate Change & Human Rights: On the Frontlines of Cultural Survival.

5. The UN PFII should recommend to the newly created Expert Mechanism on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples to continue and update the collection of the questionnaire created by the former UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and build on the studies by many Indigenous experts throughout the Pacific region.
6. The UNPFII should recommend immediate action to provide infrastructure to safeguard people living in low lying islands in the Pacific.

I will briefly explain the reason behind each recommendation and the necessity to ensure these measures are enacted so we can create tools and techniques to ensure the indigenous peoples of the Arctic and Pacific are not forgotten while striving for cultural survival and struggling to realize the right of self-determination in the face of climate change.

The UNPFII should recommend to the UN Human Rights Council the creation of a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Climate Change & Human Rights.

The creation of a new UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change & Human Rights would be an important international mechanism for indigenous peoples in the Arctic and Pacific as well as the five other regions. The UN SR on CC & HR would be able to visit first hand to see the peoples facing the impacts of climate change and its impact to deny the realization of human rights. The UN SR on CC & HR would be able to do two missions each year to speak with indigenous peoples, NGOs, National Human Rights Institutions and governments attempting to survive climate change.

For the first missions, it is suggested the UN SR on CC & HR would visit a Pacific Island State and an Arctic state. The SR could then share his/her findings in the Pacific of traditional crops suffering from salinization and water levels rising at alarming levels and in the Arctic of disappearance of traditional hunting practices due to extinction of animals and indigenous villages falling into the sea or being moved inland.

The immediate creation of this special mechanism would allow the UN Human Rights Council to keep informed of what indigenous peoples are facing today and the rest of humanity will face in the near future.

This is important as one major criticism of the newly created UN HR Council is the elimination of special rapporteurs. This would should show when there are imminent issues the HR Council will take bold action. The SR on CC and HR will assist the HR Council in dealing with its new agenda item on climate change.

The UN Human Rights Council should call for a special session to deal with Climate Change.

The UN Human Rights Council has been willing to hold special sessions to focus on important issues of the day dealing with human rights. Already in is first two years, the Human Rights Council has called more special sessions than in the nearly previous six decades of the UN Commission on Human Rights. The special session will bring together the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council to focus on this important
issue. The special session can also add to the important meetings of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change final meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The UN PFII should recommend an official UN Day on Climate Justice to be commemorated on October 1.

The commemoration of an UN Day on Climate Justice would be a catalyst to wake up the world to what people have to live with due to climate change on a daily basis and what some of the looming challenges that will make it even more difficult on an ever increasing level.

The idea behind October 1 is it the national day of independence of Tuvalu when it became a member of the family of nations. While it is now free, what will its future be if its land base disappears? The disappearance of a country will be a unique issue the world will have to deal with. More importantly, the issue of climate justice is crucial as more countries will have to face such challenges to their very survival.

Tuvalu became independent in 1978 and is a member of the United Nations. What will happen when it sinks? Will we lower the flag from the pole outside of the UN? Will it lose its independence and its seat at the UN on top of its homeland in the Pacific?

It is an indisputable fact that indigenous peoples fundamental freedoms will be denied due to the disappearance of the entire homeland for environmental reasons. The human rights violation will be indirect from across oceans yet no less destructive in fact even more dire with entire disappearance of one’s sacred homeland and actual extinction. This will honor the nation of Tuvalu as the first nation to deal with but not the final one. If we do not take stock every year of this important issue, more and more states will face similar conditions as Tuvalu.

The UN PFII should sponsor a series of expert workshops on Climate Change & Human Rights: On the Frontlines of Cultural Survival.

A series of expert workshops on Climate Change & Human Rights will be an important addition to the dialogue and most important an attempt to fill a gap in the international legal system to address this imminent issue.

One important component of the workshops would be to be hosted in communities already facing the impacts of climate change. It is vital for the expert workshops to be hosted in the communities. By living with communities throughout the meeting, the experts can add to their research while seeing firsthand what people are forced to deal with. We suggest six expert workshops to be held with the location to switch every year between the Pacific and Arctic regions. We suggest also that meetings actually take place in Tuvalu during king tides of February and during usual winter in Greenland. These are just two examples but will allow the experts to see firsthand what is happening to people and why the matter is so urgent.
The UN PFII should recommend to the newly created Expert Mechanism on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples to continue and update the collection of the questionnaire created by the former UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples.

In 2003, the Pacific Caucus raised the issue for the first time at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples. Following the issue being raised, Francoise Hampson, a member of the UN WGIP, suggested it be placed permanently on the annual agenda and authored a report. Under the heading The Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples in States and Territories Threatened with Extinction for Environmental Reasons, indigenous peoples continued to bring their issues forward and Hampson drafted an extended report and eventually a questionnaire. We believe the questionnaire is a valuable tool to assess the impacts of climate change for each member state of the United Nations. The questionnaire will provide important information to receive an updated assessment of the latest impacts of climate change on indigenous peoples. The questionnaire is already drafted and could be updated and resent to states to provide the latest information.

It is well known that Indigenous people are and will be most affected by climate change, yet we have contributed least to its impacts. It is time for this to change and the most appropriate vehicle for change is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our rights as set out in the Declaration must be upheld in all decision-making and activities related to climate change. Indigenous peoples must be part of the debate and we must take a greater role in the solutions.

The UNPFII should recommend immediate action to provide infrastructure to safeguard people living in low lying islands in the Pacific.

Climate change immediately threatens the survival of Indigenous Communities living on low lying islands around the globe. High tide surges, storm swells, and the pace of sea level rise have already devastated crops, homes, infrastructure, and traditional ways of life. Abandonment of island homelands is already taking place, and entire populations are seeking asylum in countries with higher ground.

Thank you