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Agenda Item 6

#16
23 April 2008

Statement by Mr Gary Thomas, Chair National Indigenous Higher Education Network, Australia

Madam Chair

We thank you for the opportunity to speak to the forum. The National Indigenous Higher Education Network provides the following statement.

Indigenous Australian educational access, participation and completion rates continue to be significantly lower than the national average.

This is due to the appalling socio-economic status of Indigenous people and inconsistent access and service delivery across the country.

The rate of Indigenous employment within higher education is also lower in comparison to that of other Australians.

Regarding the training of professionals there is insufficient Indigenous Australian content within courses in Australian universities. This continues to affect the quality of service delivery to Indigenous Australians.

Australia is yet to acknowledge and accept that it has two knowledge systems, the Indigenous knowledge systems and the imposed Western knowledge systems. However, where Indigenous knowledge is recognised we must ensure Indigenous control, ownership and cultural integrity are protected and maintained. We also need to ensure that Indigenous peoples remain custodians of this knowledge and are not marginalised.

To retain Indigenous integrity and control, the national Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council is undertaking a scoping study for the establishment of a national Indigenous knowledges academy.

A human rights based approach to education is essential.

Recommendation 1 We request members of the forum note the concerns of the National Indigenous Higher Education Network and encourage Australia to address these issues.

Recommendation 2 In recognition that Indigenous Education is a global concern we request the UNPFII to call on the Human Rights Council to establish a Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Education.