

World Council of Churches (WCC)

Intervention presented to the UNPFII

New York

18th May 2005



In due respect to the Haudenoshonee, the traditional custodians of this land, and in recognition of all our Elders past and present.

Madam Chairperson, my name is Lynette Riley-Mundine of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi Nations of Australia. I take the floor to present this report on behalf of the World Council of Churches. WCC also support the statements and recommendations presented by the Pacific Peoples Caucus.

Madam Chairperson, the recommendations contained in this report are in due consideration to the issues under the topic of:

Goal Two of the Millennium Development Goals – Achieve Universal Primary Education

I draw to the attention of this forum the issues relating to Indigenous Education, point of reference being the Aboriginal people of Australia. I raise the following concerns and use two major sources, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Report released in December 2004, which assessed students' achievements in literacy; and the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education, released in December 2004, which mapped the current status of Aboriginal students within the state of NSW, Australia, a copy of which can be found on www.det.nsw.edu.au.

Both reports highlight the issues surrounding education for Aboriginal people in Australia and also in providing some lessons on the "real" issues at the point of educational delivery. Being that, educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians is in dire crisis and that the impact of lower educational achievements creates an ongoing impact on other areas contributing to the Human Rights agenda for Aboriginal Australians.

The PISA Report is essence highlighted:

- i. That in a country, such as, Australia which saw students achieving literacy results that placed them well above the OECD standard as one of the top four performing countries. Yet Aboriginal students, in Australia with purportedly the same degree of access to educational delivery, did not achieve the OECD standard and were indeed placed alongside less developed countries;
- ii. The second point which was a small point in the report, but a revelation for educational delivery for Aboriginal people was that non-Indigenous achievement was clearly linked to raised socio-economic status. The same could not be clearly identified for Aboriginal students. Indeed, improved socio-economic circumstances could not be linked to improved performance.

What was not stated but was clear to Aboriginal educationalists was that culture in delivery is a major factor and if ignored, will be to the detriment of educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education:

Supported the results of the PISA report, but went further. The Review was done with the total involvement of the Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales (NSW), Australia and unlike previous reports which aimed to turn a very negative picture into a glowing report which could give the incorrect impression that all was well for Aboriginal people in Australia; this Report aimed to provide a clear account of the current status of education for the Aboriginal peoples.

This report for the first time saw the NSW Department of Education provide data that had previously, been unable to be collected and to in essence tell the “real” story. To allow a real way forward so that real and appropriate strategies can be put in place. A commendable effort.

Whilst I won't go into the whole report I will highlight a few major findings, found in Chapter 1:

- Within the mainstream education system and using the BST (Basic Skills Test) in Years 3, 5 and 7; we know a gap exists, but what does this gap mean in real terms of educational outcomes. The report showed that for Aboriginal students by Year 3 they are behind by 18 months of learning; by Year 5 in excess of 20 months of learning; and by Year 7, by at least 36 months of learning;
- Aboriginal students are clearly “dropping” out of school by Year 5, with absenteeism being twice as high as for non-Indigenous students;
- Aboriginal student suspension rates in Kindergarten – Year 2 is for Aboriginal girls 7 – 9 times higher than for non-Indigenous students and for boys 4 – 6 times higher than for non-Indigenous students. The rates of suspension grow much higher the older our students get;
- The retention rates to Year 12 are only one third that of non-Indigenous students, with only 3 in 10 Aboriginal students making it to Year 12. The report was further able to gather data on performance levels at Year 12, which would indicate for Aboriginal students, limited levels of educational achievement and therefore limited future options;
- Aboriginal student's enrolments in TAFE (Technical and Further Education) have increased by 25% in the last five years. Over one third of these enrolments are in the Access Division – courses which provide basic literacy and numeracy skills;
- With only 39% of Aboriginal people being employed, compared with 55% of the total population and with limited educational outcomes, this does not indicate a positive trend for increased employment opportunities in the near future;
- The total number of Aboriginal students undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships was 2822 out of 137,654; this represents 2% of Aboriginal students gaining skills which are aligned to employment.

The Report tracked Aboriginal students across the progression of their life course (Chapter 3) and the role education might play for them, and in doing so arrived at nine theme areas (found in Chapter 4) which require action, and resulted in 71 Recommendations being made. The themes were:

- Strengthening policy, planning and implementation – this means implementing a strategic plan rather than current ad hoc approaches and programs.
- Extend quality teaching and learning – stereotyping of Aboriginal student potential achievements were evident; teachers need to be taught how to teach Aboriginal students; and the curriculum requirements better.
- Fortify identities of Aboriginal students – recognition and strengthening cultural identity is vital.

- Engage Aboriginal students – use of better teaching practices with Aboriginal students.
- Application of Aboriginal cultural knowledge – incorporation of cultural teachings for Aboriginal students.
- Collaborating in partnership – Aboriginal people must be real partners at all levels and have sustained dialogue and ownership of decisions made which effect their students outcomes.
- Building community capacity building – many of the programs delivered are based on the deficit model and have been aimed at students in the lower bands of achievement, we need programs which strengthen borderline and talented and giftedness in students
- Challenging racism – Racism is evident at every level within the education system and as such, needs to have supportive, active programs to counteract.
- Advancing leadership and accountability – strong leadership, understanding and awareness by school and TAFE executive led to improved delivery and outcomes for Aboriginal students; and every level within the department has to be held accountable for the role they need to play in employment, training, curriculum development and delivery to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The lessons learnt could be reflected in the following:

1. *Recommend* that the Permanent Forum work with the UNDP (the lead agency on the Millennium Development Goals) and the Special Rapporteurs on Indigenous Peoples and Education with Indigenous educators both within governments and in traditional settings to establish Guidelines with basic principles for achieving high educational outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, which will be used by States;
2. *Recommend* that the Millennium Development Goals not only use Year 5 as a benchmark for assessing educational achievement, but that a matrix of acceptable achievements be developed with Indigenous people, which will be used by States;
3. *Recommend* that the Permanent Forum work with the UNDP (the lead agency on the Millennium Development Goals) and the Special Rapporteurs on Indigenous Peoples and Education with Indigenous educators both within governments and in traditional settings to establish monitoring and reporting guidelines against which States would be required to present reports to allow accountability and transparency to be demonstrated, in the interests of achieving and maintaining sustainable high educational outcomes for Indigenous Peoples;
4. *Recommend* that the Permanent Forum recommend that States, UNESCO and the Special Rapporteur on Refugees work collectively to design programs for the development of anti-racism teaching which can be provided to staff and students within educational institutions.

Madam Chairperson, this concludes the presentation of the World Council of Churches. I thank you for the opportunity to present this report and request that a report be made to the 5th Session on progress made and resources allocated.

Thank you.