



AUSTRALIA



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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Comprehensive dialogue with United Nations agencies and funds

Statement by Shirley McPherson
Chairperson, Indigenous Land Council (ILC)

(Check against delivery)

Australia acknowledges the significant work of the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) in promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous children and women; and recognises the efforts undertaken by other governments in partnership with UNICEF. We note for example the efforts undertaken in Argentina, Paraguay, Cambodia and the Congo to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children including through respect and support for Indigenous culture and languages.

As in a number of other countries, we in Australia recognise there are specific complexities to delivering high quality education in remote areas. The Australian Government's 'Closing the Gap' agenda identifies three clear and specific targets, set in 2008, relating to Indigenous education in Australia. The first is to ensure access to early childhood pre-school education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities by 2013. We have work underway to obtain improved data, but I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the available data, we believe this first target to be achievable. The target is supported by two National Partnerships with state and territory governments under which infrastructure and additional services are provided. These include 38 Children and Family Centres (16 of which are to be in remote areas), providing child care, early learning and parental support to Indigenous families, and funding to support universal access early childhood education services for all Australian children, under which there is a specific focus for actions and reporting on Indigenous children, particularly those in remote communities. The two additional longer-term educational targets are to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Indigenous children by 2018; and to halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment

rates by 2020. While there is a challenging job ahead of us, there are positive signs for both sets of targets.

The Australian Government is committed to driving changes that provide good access to quality education for Indigenous peoples and is working to improve teacher quality and foster better outcomes for Indigenous students. It is taking steps to ensure Indigenous education is provided in ways that respect Indigenous culture.

Australian Education Ministers have agreed to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* that provides impetus for education providers to accelerate improvements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Action Plan outlines targets, performance indicators and national, systemic and local actions in six strategic priority domains that evidence shows will have the most impact on closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other Australian students. These domains are Readiness for school; Engagement and connections; Attendance; Literacy and numeracy; Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and Pathways to real post-school options. Mr Chairman, participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood education programs and care can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to get the best start in life. These programs should build upon the rich cultural, linguistic and conceptual skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to early childhood education.

In 2009, the Australian Government announced its National Indigenous Languages Policy. This policy demonstrates the Government's commitment to keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages alive and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to connect with their language and culture. In 2010-11, AUD\$9.4 million was allocated to support over 60 community based language maintenance and revival projects, incorporating around 200 languages across Australia.

My own organisation, the Indigenous Land Corporation is contributing to improved educational outcomes through its support for the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence. This facility in inner-Sydney, built and funded by the Indigenous Land Corporation, provides world-class facilities in sport, education and the arts for up to 5,000 young Indigenous people from around Australia each year. It symbolises a new era in Indigenous education, engagement and leadership.

Through its four development pathways of Sport, Learning and Innovation, Culture and Arts and Health and Wellbeing, the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence is helping to Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage in reading, literacy and Year 12 attainment rates.

We support a program called the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, based at the facility. The program is working to match more than 500 Indigenous high school students in 43 schools with 750 volunteer mentors from universities to make sure they complete their schooling and progress to university.

Primary school children have access to a six-month accelerated literacy program at the centre's intensive literacy tutorial centre.

This program, run in partnership with Macquarie University and the Exodus Foundation, has produced phenomenal results with literacy levels for some children rising by two years in just six months.

The Centre is also providing new education and employment opportunities for local Indigenous youth including jobs in sport, recreation, youth and community programs, and hospitality.

Education is a key factor for improving wellbeing and success. Quality early childhood education is critical in setting foundations for learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to educational achievement. Finishing school improves prospects for employment or further education. With sustained effort from all levels of government and from the community sector we are hopeful about the future for Australia's Indigenous children.