United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Sixteenth Session - New York
24 April-6 May 2017

Agenda Item 12: Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues considered by the Economic and Social Council and emerging issues

INTERVENTION DELIVERED BY CATHRYN EATOCK ON BEHALF OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ORGANISATION OF AUSTRALIA AND THE ABORIGINAL RIGHTS COALITION.

Thank-you Madam Chair and distinguished Brothers and Sisters. I am speaking as Chair of the Indigenous Peoples Organisation of Australia. My name is Cathryn Eatock and I am a Kairi woman, from Queensland, Australia. I am addressing future work with respect to the 2030 Sustainable Agenda, empowerment of women and poverty alleviation.

Our recommendations first, are:

1) That the Forum develop a report on the empowerment of women through self-determination, and it seek written responses from States on their efforts to increase Indigenous women’s decision making.

2) The forum undertake a report on Indigenous rights to their ancestral lands, as a key strategy to alleviate poverty, seeking State responses on Indigenous peoples rights to and control over their ancestral lands.

Women’s strength has always been the backbone of our communities, as sustainable caretakers of country. Our women traditionally had our own Women’s Business which set out our lore as custodians.

Our mothers, grandmothers, ancestors, and sisters today, have great strength, they have survived the additional dimension of violence, which gives us the many complexions of our communities.

That tenacity is reflected across the country where women are on the ground working to defend our communities but are not always reflected in decision making, particularly imposed hierarchical and patriarchal structures.
It is crucial to Indigenous self-determination and decolonization processes to consciously address the lack of women in decision making. Aboriginal women often bring differing approaches, drawing on cultural values of responsibility to community and country, remembering ancestors past and obligations to generations ahead. Women tend to draw on inclusive and consensus decision making, rather than more western directional approaches.

Our women have valuable insights and lessons, not just for our own communities, but for the benefit of the world and within these United Nations forums.

However, our women face particular challenges, Aboriginal women die from violence at 10 times the rate and are hospitalised for assault 35 times the rate of non-Aboriginal women.

Levels of violence increased with social deprivation, alcohol use, financial stress, over-crowding, and being a member of the stolen generation.

The historical use of police to enforce occupation and control over Aboriginal people, the removal of children and poor experiences of the justice system, contribute to low reporting rates.

However, independent analysis shows that violence is lowest in Aboriginal communities where cultural connection is strongest, where our people practice lore on their traditional lands.¹

We need to recognise that women’s outcomes directly impact outcomes for next generations.

Indigenous women need real and meaningful agency and self-determination over their lives for them, their families and communities to thrive and prosper.

Thank you, Madam Chair

¹ Don Weatherburn and Lucy Snowball, Is there a cultural explanation for Indigenous violence? A second look at the NATSISS Survey Analysis for Indigenous Policy in Australia