

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

COMMENTS BY THE SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHILD CARE - AUSTRALIA-----

WGIP 84/066. AUS/6

Thank you Madam Chair for the opportunity to speak.

MADAM CHAIR

We have heard much from indigenous people in the last few days on the review of developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations. I would just like to bring more information to the Working Group on developments within Australia. Our particular interest rests in the promotion of Aboriginal community control and thereby the exercise of Aboriginal rights in the area of child care, the protection of family and right to life is of vital importance we believe to the integrity of Aboriginal society. I might take the opportunity Madam Chair, to outline briefly the substance of the issue I place before the Commission.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is a collective agency of community based and community-controlled Aboriginal Child Care Agencies/ Services/Committees across Australia and as directed by its membership, represents the position of Aboriginal and Islander communities in relation to Aboriginal and Islander child care.

The Secretariat was formed six years ago on the initiative of Aboriginal communities and their agencies to form a national lobby group and forum through which national policies could be formed on Aboriginal and Islander child care. The most important feature of SNAICC is its ability to gain local, community opinion by always maintaining the principles and practices of community control, self determination and self management.

Aboriginal community based child care agencies have achieved much since their inception and have witnessed many shifts in fundamental child care provision, practice and philosophy within the field of "welfare" (outside of our communities). They have not, however, seen significant change in the delegation of power outside of the community, particularly within State Welfare Departments. We find today that State and Federal governments still have the same degree of understanding and commitment to the Aboriginal and Islander cause as they did in the past. Different policies exist today to meet the "trend" of today's political climate, but there has been little change in the relevance, effect or outcome of these policies.

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The Aboriginal people of Australia are still being affected by outdated and insensitive welfare practices, and there has been no indication of change being made to the system that dictates and determines these callous practices.

We have been subjected to State welfare practices that conflict blatantly with the basic values, desires and needs of our communities and have been denied the right to care for our children according to our traditional values. The practice of removing children from their homes, communities and cultural environ, has continued as white welfare practices are imposed upon us.

Aboriginal and Island communities must have total care, custody and control over their children and we must implement any child placement principle relating to our children. Day to day survival issues which will maintain our spiritual, cultural and physical well being as an indigenous race within our own country can only be achieved if we have self-determination and self-government.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak and I hope that in sharing these developments with your Working Group that recognition of the immediate need for attention is quickly acted upon.

Thank you Madam Chair.