

**COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Twentieth Session 22-26 July 2002
The Promotion and Protection of Human Rights**



International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, including information relating to the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and the report of the Advisory Group

Thank you Mr Chairman

Today I will be presenting the intervention on item seven that I have prepared on behalf of Commissioner Brian Butler of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission of Australia.

First, I would like you to know something about who I am so you may better understand and accept the proposals I am about to bring forward regarding the Voluntary Fund and the Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples.

My name is Juanita Mason. I am 19 years old and it is my great honour to speak here and represent the issues facing my people.

In this intervention I wish to concentrate on the importance of young people and their access to the WGIP. I am pleased that ATSIC has identified the value of the participation of young people in sending this delegation that is actively including those of us here this week.

With consideration of the need for greater youth participation, I need to raise some questions for the Working Group to consider.

The WGIP should be regarded as the international perennial flower that grows stronger each time, that we, the Indigenous nations of the world meet and pollinate it with our individual strengths.

I see great potential for the development of young Indigenous peoples when there is a more deliberate effort to engage young people by opportunities made available through the Voluntary Fund.

I was not aware of the Voluntary Fund before this meeting as an option that clearly provides an avenue to ensure that information and knowledge of the world's Indigenous peoples can be shared and passed down to those of us just entering the system at this point in time.

It is crucial that young people have access to such opportunities at the earliest stage possible and at a wide range of levels. Young people need these opportunities to have a chance to demonstrate that we can be responsible with taking our place in progressing our peoples rights. We cannot do this without being trusted with a place around the table as this is relevant to me when we strive for self-determination in my community.

Further, the access by young people, not only to the Voluntary Fund, but to broader United Nations activities and its various instruments and mechanisms, I am concerned about the apparent lack of consideration of young peoples needs across the system.

Young people can be empowered through United Nations activities but there is a clear need for information to be available to young people in a more accessible way. We can be part of designing this and the WGIP can empower young people to be responsible by giving us responsibility.

It would be a positive sign to see information relating to this particular Forum include some information that is relevant to young people, even in the form of a web page that young people can be drawn to, that embraces our ideas and our visions and hopes for the future.

Even with the cultural considerations relating to the place of young people in my community, it is possible for young people to be included in the work for our people while maintaining the strong respect that our Elders deserve.

With this in mind, I strongly urge the Working Group to do all it can to continue the support that can be made available through the use of the Voluntary Fund and to consider using this to greater effect for the benefit of young Indigenous peoples.

Also, I understand there is strong support for the end of this Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples to be acknowledged, in part, by a world conference. I also support this proposal but urge the constructors of this meeting to ensure a place for young people to bring our concerns forward in a fully inclusive way.

This is crucial because I am aware, that I, as a young woman will be one who is responsible for carrying forward the work that such a conference will lead to and I want to be a part of creating a better future for all of my people and my brothers and sisters around the world.

May I conclude with a final urging that the Working Group take seriously the messages I bring forward today at my first ever meeting at the United Nations. I thank the Chairman for allowing my voice to be heard.

Thank you