



AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612, Ph 212 – 351 660 Fax 212 – 351 660 www.australia-unscc.gov.au

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Giving Effect to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by Mr Mike Fordham, Assistant Secretary, Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Madam Chair

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and future.

The Australian Government is committed to an approach to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which is consistent with its domestic and international obligations. This is in line with our common goal of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

The Australian Government recognises that more needs to be done, despite good intentions and considerable investment by successive governments, the disparity in outcomes remains. The Closing the Gap targets are not on track to be met and progress has been far too slow. There is strong commitment to working with Indigenous Australians and communities to make real improvements in their lives.

The Australian Government will maintain a strong emphasis on practical action in priority areas of school attendance, employment and community safety to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to realise their human rights and to attain the same opportunities available to all Australians.

For example, consistent with Article 14 of the Declaration, in 2014 Australia commenced the Remote School Attendance Strategy as a national response to address low indigenous student attendance rates in specific remote schools. The strategy has brought a national focus to this issue and after the first year we have seen improved attendance rates (11% on average in the Northern Territory and Queensland) and greater Indigenous community engagement and ownership of the strategy. The Government will continue to look at how this can be strengthened, improved and sustained into the future.

We see value in sharing our domestic experiences with other member states, civil society and indigenous groups through the UN system. Australia regularly reports through existing UN mechanisms on actions taken to give effect to the Declaration and the Outcome

Document, including through a submission to this year's questionnaire from the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We would welcome further work to ensure such reporting is not duplicative and is aligned between existing mechanisms.

Australia welcomes further discussion on best practice approaches being taken by member states which are informed by the Declaration and the Outcome Document.

Thank you Madam Chair