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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Monday 20 May 2013

Follow-up to the recommendations of the Permanent Forum:

Agenda item 3(a) - Health

Indigenous persons with disabilities

Statement by Mandy Doherty, Branch Manager, Reconciliation and Relationships Branch, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chair,

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today.

As we prepare for this year's High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Realisation of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities, Australia would like to use our intervention today to bring focus to one critical aspect of the Indigenous health agenda – Indigenous persons with disabilities.

Indigenous Australians with disabilities and their families face multiple and aggravated disadvantage, relative to other Australians with disabilities and their families.

They are also significantly over-represented as a group among homeless people, in the criminal and juvenile justice system, and in the care and protection system – both as parents and children.

In an attempt to address some of these issues, the Australian Government has funded the First Peoples Disability Network (Australia). The First Peoples Disability Network is the national peak disability organisation representing Indigenous people with disabilities and their families.

It is the only formal, nationally-constituted organisation representing Indigenous people with disabilities in the world.

In 2012, the Network was represented at the historic expert meeting on Indigenous people with disabilities in Madrid, Spain, and it will be playing a leading role in developing an international movement for Indigenous people with disabilities.

In an effort to tackle problems in the disability sector across the country, Australia has introduced the National Disability Strategy. This is a ten-year national policy framework to improve the lives of people with disabilities, promote participation, and create a more inclusive society. It represents a commitment at all levels of Australian Government, industry and the community, to a unified, national approach addressing the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

The Strategy recognises the multiple layers of disadvantage impacting Indigenous Australians with disabilities. Many of these are also being tackled as part of the work being undertaken by all Australian Governments to Close the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

From 1 July 2013, the Australian Government will launch a new national disability insurance scheme called DisabilityCare Australia. The scheme has the potential to improve significantly the lives of Indigenous Australians with disabilities, their families and carers. The Government will provide \$900,000 over three years to the First People's Disability Network Australia, to provide services to assist Indigenous Australians to understand and access support from DisabilityCare Australia.

To strengthen efforts to Close the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage and using DisabilityCare services, the Australian Government will be developing a specific target aimed at increasing access to specialist services and support for Indigenous people with disabilities. The Australian Government is consulting with key Indigenous and disability stakeholders in developing this.

The new disability access target will help ensure that Indigenous Australians with disabilities can benefit fully from the introduction of DisabilityCare Australia.

Mr Chair, as we look ahead to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, and the post-2015 development agenda, it is essential to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups amongst us are heard.

Mr Chair we look forward to hearing more about this important issue from other delegates during the Forum. Thank you.