

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
First Session  
New York  
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Agenda Item 5  
Review of the activities of the United Nations system

JOINT STATEMENT PRESENTED BY

**Brian Butler**

AUSTRALIA

On behalf of

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION (ATSIC)  
FOUNDATION FOR ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER RESEARCH ACTION (FAIRA)  
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES SECRETARIAT (NAILSS)  
NATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORGANISATIONS  
TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY (TSRA)

Mr Chairperson,

We acknowledge and pay our respect to the traditional owners whose ancestral lands we meet on today and thank them for the kind welcome which they have extended to us on our visit to their country.

Our general statement today represents a common position of the Indigenous Australian delegates who are in attendance today. They are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
- Torres Strait Regional Authority
- Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services Secretariat
- National Secretariat of Torres Strait Islander Organisations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner

As already been acknowledged, this inaugural session of the United Nation's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is the culmination of a great deal of hard work, over many years, and by a lot of people. We join the others in saying that we are extremely thankful for every contribution they have made and we convey our deepest appreciation to those of you who are present today as well as to those who could not be with us on this historic occasion. We especially want to single out from the many Madame Daes and Mrs Mary Robinson for their tireless effort over the years to get Indigenous priorities and issues on the UN map.

It is with much pride that I, as a Commissioner and the representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in Australia, stand here amongst you all today to convey that:

- we look forward to a better mechanism within the UN system to ensure regular exchange of information among governments, the various UN departments and organisations, and the Indigenous Peoples of the world;
- we look forward also to a better procedure for the involvement and consultation of Indigenous Peoples on matters that affect our lives; and,
- we look forward especially to a Permanent Forum that can establish a more progressive strategy for addressing Indigenous issues

As an expert group - and may I add, "with the help of the many other Indigenous experts of the world who surround you" - we see real opportunities for you all to convey clear recommendations to the Economic and Social Council not just on thematic or crises agendas but on long-term agendas, more strategic ones, ones that can utilise the different arms of the UN to best effect when dealing with Indigenous issues. In these ways, we can see benefits in what the inter-agency Support Group paper (E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.2) is suggesting as a possible function for the Permanent Forum.

We can all see the benefits that have come from the initiatives of other UN departments and organisations from the other reports (E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.3 to E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.13) attached to the Forum's agenda today, and we look forward to contributing comments by way of interventions over the next two weeks so that they can lead to further improvement in all the areas.

It is however also obvious from the 11 reports attached to the Forum's agenda that there is a clear need for a more efficient process to the business of addressing Indigenous issues. So I think that if we can achieve one thing over the next two weeks, let it be a consensus amongst us all to build a comprehensive plan, a clearly articulated one, specifically for the desired effect of having all the different arms of the UN pulling together more closely to address Indigenous issues. This, by implication, will enable existing capacities and resources to be drawn more efficiently into a concerted approach. And this, in turn, we hope, will enable annual reports to get beyond listing annual activities and to make reports of progress against set objectives of a more specified global UN plan.

Finally, we wish to add that we also see the benefits of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) and its mandate to evolve international standards concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples as it addresses an area where the Permanent Forum clearly does not have a mandate. We wholeheartedly support its continuation.

Mr Chairperson, we welcome the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for all these reasons and more. We congratulate all appointees. And we look forward to working with you all in the future and towards a more concerted approach for advancing agendas where Indigenous Peoples across the world can realise their hopes and aspirations for a better future.

I thank you Mr Chairperson.