

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Eighth Session
New York, 18-29 May 2009**

**Agenda Item 3(a) Economic and Social Development
Delivered by: Patricia Laurie - New South Wales Aboriginal Land
Council**

JOINT INTERVENTION ON BEHALF OF:

**National Native Title Council (NNTC)
Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)
Marrinwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)
National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal and Advocacy
Service Aboriginal Corporation (ATSIWLAS)
Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM)
Bullana, The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health
National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia (NIYMA)
Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia Inc
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
(NACCHO)
Indigenous Peoples Organisation Network Youth Delegation**

The Indigenous Australian delegation acknowledges the previous work of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues concerning economic and social development and supports the conclusion recognising UN agencies and intergovernmental body's responses to the recommendations of the Forum in this regard. Governments have not followed on from the leadership provided by these UN agencies. In particular, we consider that the Australian Government's approach is not consistent with the principles outlined by the Forum in supporting social and economic development for Indigenous peoples.

For example, past and current employment and enterprise development strategies fail to adequately engage Indigenous Australians to provide meaningful and lasting economic and social benefits for Indigenous Australians because those strategies are largely based around mainstream ideologies.

For Australians, generally high levels of employment ensure that people are able to enjoy a high standard of living. The assumption that mainstream employment strategies are transferrable to the Indigenous context is not only misleading, but it helps to compound the debilitation of Indigenous people and their right to access parity with the rest of Australia. Other areas of social and economic development, such as investment in and control of infrastructure and enterprise development including ecotourism and the utilisation and development of natural resources, are not readily supported by governments.

Government policy must recognise and incorporate the primary role that Indigenous peoples have to play as a core part of general business activity and overall national wealth creation. For example, through caring for country.

In spite of both extensive and considered advice from the Permanent Forum and other UN agencies, governments in Australia continue to disregard people driven approaches to addressing Indigenous disadvantage. While the ongoing push for practical outcomes - as is the approach of the Australian government - is seen as a means of resolving Indigenous disadvantage too often such policy approaches disrupts and undermines the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by Indigenous Australians.

International frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals are not supported by Governments in the Australian context, however they offer guidance based on the principle of respecting human rights.

Government policy and programmes need to address among other things social justice and reconciliation; community development and empowerment; and culturally appropriate therapies.

Many nation states, including Australia, have a history of assimilationist policies and the control by government of all aspects of the lives of Indigenous peoples, for example through the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. While governments have acknowledged the harm caused historically by such policies they appear to not have learned from those experiences. Whilst we recognise that the safety and protection of children must be the main priority, government interventions in this regard must be in accordance with human rights principles. While children are not being forcibly removed as they were previously, contemporary government policy retains the intention of assimilating Indigenous peoples.

We therefore recommend that:

- 1. That the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues encourage the Interagency Support Group on Indigenous Issues to consider developing an international research agenda that reviews the economic, social and health impacts of past and current assimilationist strategies and policies approaches.**
- 2. That the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues encourages States to adopt employment policies and economic and social development strategies are consistent with:**
 - a. the Articles of the relevant ILO Conventions**
 - b. the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
 - c. The findings and advice of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.**
- 3. That the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues encourage States to recognise the need for health investment in order for Indigenous peoples to contribute to the economic and social development of their own communities and more broadly to national economies.**