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Eminent members of this United Nations Working Group, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends, Guests and Observers. I give thanks on behalf of Torres Strait Islands Women and their loved ones for the opportunity to address this Conference.

Today, I am here in Geneva as the messenger chosen by the Torres Strait Islanders women, who attended the International Indigenous Women's Conference held in Adelaide, Australia three weeks ago, to deliver the Torres Strait Islanders statement of principles, of consensus, and of being of Torres Strait Islanders women and their loved ones.

Because of the time restraint, I have summarised this report, and there are copies available, to enable interested persons to understandably follow particularly our recommendations.

This report has been prepared by the IINA Torres Strait Islanders Women's group in Brisbane, Australia, endorsed and supplied by the majority of Torres Strait Islanders (both men and women) throughout Australia, included the islands of Torres Strait.

We believe in cultural survival through:

- sea and land rights
- the preservation of Torres Strait island culture, customs, arts and crafts.
- The right to equal opportunities and to practise what is indigenously Torres Strait Islander.

I will begin with RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS INHERENCY.

For many years Australia has projected the image of a country tolerant of its indigenous race of people, which people were named "Aborigine" by the establishment of the time through its Sciences Branch, purely in a generic sense to clarify the indigenous inhabitants of "australis terra firma".

In the 1800's the island group named Torres Strait after Captain Louis Torres was annexed to the fledgling State of Queensland, from the governing control of the British, through the London Missionary Society, to the governing control of the Queensland State Government.

It was from this annexure to Queensland, that Australia proper came into territorial possession of another indigenous racial class of people.

In spite of the patient suffering of the Torres Strait Islanders, we declare this day before his conference of United Nations that within the territories of Australia, there exists not a "second" indigenous racial group, but two indigenous racial groups.

To this very day, the establishment of Australia continues to use the term "Aborigine" in its generic sense when addressing its two indigenous racial groups at local, national and international level.

This use is both misleading and incorrect, despite being knowledgeable of the fact. Hence our recommendation, that the Torres Strait Islanders all for the unequivocal support of this fact from the United Nations, that each nation support this statement to the attention of the nation of Australia.

FISHERIES AND FAUNA

We are seafaring people of many generations, have technology applied to their natural environment, these traditional skills are harmonious with the fish migration and the cycle of the food chain both land and sea, and are compatible with the regeneration time required for the replenishing of these resources and this dynamic balance of traditional methods has been disrupted by methods employed by commercial fishing which depleted the food chain in particular this depletion has affected the proliferation of the Dugong and Turtle to the extent that, the Department of Primary Industry through its Fisheries Branch declare these two mammals protected species.

The reason given is that the cause of the depletion was through the food gathering methods of Torres Strait Islanders, and of Aborigines, have caused this order in Council to become effective.

Little credence is given to the possibility caused by commercial fishing and various netline fishing methods used by Commercial fishermen has seriously disrupted the dynamic balance.

In view of these stock depletions the Queensland State Government by order in Council have placed a restriction ban and a protection order on certain species of sea creatures that are part of our staple diet.

In this regard, customary law and territorial rights practised indigenously by generations of Torres Strait Islanders have been sacrificed on the commercial altar.

Hence our recommendation, we seek international recognition and support of the customary laws and rights inherently ours regarding traditional food and that this United Nations duly notify the Australian authorities to advise them of this recognition and support.

In regards to EDUCATION we recommend for education in Torres Strait the United Nations seek a commitment from the Australian Government to observe that international conventions exist or may come into existence, which clearly defines the need to adequately and properly address the unique educational needs of the Torres Strait Islanders by including in the curriculum the teaching of Torres Strait languages, their history, culture and customs at all levels of teaching, and clearly defines the needs to adequately and properly address the total needs, including adequate safe and comfortable accommodation for students as is provided to the providers of education, and to prepare the Torres Strait Islanders for employment, rather than the hand-outs.

HEALTH

[The greatest threat now facing the Torres Strait Islanders is the increasing prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, and in the march of both forms of the Hepatitis B disease (bacterial and viral) throughout the Torres Strait region] mainly brought in through:

- migrations of Papuan New Guineans (legal or illegal) because of abuse of the "Traditional visit" sanction built into the treaty with the two Governments concern.
- migration of other races
- the transit of merchant and fishing shipping
- and the Tourist contingent.

[Health regulations are practically non-existent in the Torres Strait, and what passes as Regulations are rarely enforced in consequence of the lack of necessary infrastructure, along with this abysmal lack, there is no community health organisations that is run by locals] (See the attached chapter on health from the national Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (NAHSWP)).

We recommend that the United Nations duly notify Australian authorities of receipt of this major concern, and urge these ~~some~~ authorities through avenues that are available to it to attend to;

- immediately implement health education programmes that are translated through suitable Torres Strait Islanders personnel,
- establishing and supporting recurrently, Community Health Organisations that are run by Torres Strait Islanders,

- assisting Torres Strait Islanders in the establishing of an adequate infrastructure that will define health regulations and also enforce them,
- provide support to the request by the eighteen inhabited islands and communities of the Torres Strait indigenous people as in the NAKSWP report , to provide their community with excellence in health care facilities and qualified staff, and provide the existence of a community based Health Education Communications network that spans the eighteen inhabited islands and communities of Torres Strait.

EMPLOYMENT

As previously mentioned, through condition resulting from the lack and neglect of education, the Torres Strait Islanders have been subject to the handout mentality by custodians of our welfare without adequately addressing the employment issues faced by Torres Strait Islanders in the Torres Strait Islands, and a lesser extent on mainland Australia.

The Aboriginal Employment Development Program established by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is not holistically appropriate for Torres Strait Islanders, as its charter, makes no room for the development of positions in the Public or Private Sector, that allow for Women Executives.

RECOMMENDATIONS: that the United Nations duly notify Australian Authorities of the receipt of this statement of concern, and support for the;

- that the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, national representative for the TSI people be of Torres Strait Island descent,
- and for vocational training for Torres Strait Islanders, as well as other training courses,
- reation of an efficient Service Delivery of Employment services all manned by and slanted towards Torres Strait Islanders.

As time is running out, I urge the United Nations to initiate support for our remaining issues of concern and recommendations in politics, conservation, child welfare, domestic violence, traditional adoption which relies strongly on the United Nations acceptance a supporting on customary law.

To this date there has been no recognition of Torres Strait Islanders customary law. by our caring Governments. To our distress and disgust,

we learn of further amendments and regulations that are applied by our caring Government to the preservation of national parks and wildlife interpreted by Torres Strait Islanders as being affront.

We are a minority group, where for decades of lack and neglect to the Aboriginal indigenous race have spilt over to the Torres Strait Islanders indigenous race.

Human rights and equal opportunities are recognised as being necessary by all Australians whether caucasian or indigenous.

Our recommendations that the United Nations duly notify the Australian authorities of receipt of this statement of concern and that;

- the Torres Strait Islanders be given all assistance to access what rights are accorded them as Australian citizens,
- that these rights be defined specifically to meet the unique needs faced by Torres Strait Islanders,
- that the Australian authorities defining these rights conduct full negotiations with Torres Strait Islanders towards the resolution of definition,
- that Torres Strait Islanders be accorded the right to indulge in what resources are available to all Australian citizens, for the purpose that these rights are located across the broad social spectrum of the Torres Strait Islanders community and its people where even in Australia they may be.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the United Nations. I thank you for your time in listening and in conclusion I wish you all sincerely, a safe and comfortable journey back to your homeland with God's blessing.