

PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Second Session
12 - 23 May 2003

AGENDA ITEM 5: METHOD OF WORK

Statement by Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)
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Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I take the floor under this agenda item to make a brief comment in relation to the statement from New Zealand, and seek comment from Australia.

The New Zealand Government states that it believes the role of the States is to maximize Indigenous involvement in the Forum, and that it supports an approach in the forum of partnership and engagement.

New Zealand affirms that it is committed to the elaboration of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and urges completion of the Declaration, through a more cooperative approach from all of the parties, by the end of the Decade on Indigenous Peoples.

Mr Chairman, there has been in the past few days a significant policy change by the Australian Government which will seriously affect the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this forum and all United Nations and international meetings concerning Indigenous Peoples.

In contrast to these assuring comments by the New Zealand government, we have clearly a policy from the Australian Government to oppress Indigenous rights.

In Australia, the government has acted in the past few days to dismantle the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. From 1 July 2003 the government will give the funds of ATSIC to a government agency, a virtual department.

The government also has legislation in the parliament to abolish the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and the position of Race Commissioner.

The Australian Government refuses to establish a plan of action to eliminate racism, following the program of action from the World Conference Against Racism.

Please remember that the Australian Government has already been found to be in

breach of its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and has suspended the Racial Discrimination Act in order to pass the Native Title Amendment Act of 1998.

In yesterday's newspapers, we read that the government is intending to halt Indigenous participation in this forum and other UN meetings.

Other reforms are expected to be detailed in tomorrow's Federal Budget.

It is believed ATSIC's Geneva office and the commission's representations at the United Nations in New York will be closely examined.

These cost taxpayers \$500,000 a year, sources say.

It is believed future funding for overseas representations will be determined by the Indigenous Affairs Minister.

And there may be a curtailment through tighter controls on the ATSIC budget. (Herald Sun Editorial, 12 May 2003)

I refer to Document E/C.19/2003/20 presented by the Australian Government which states that the Australian Government:

Stresses that the Permanent Forum's secretariat must be funded from within the existing budgets;

States that existing UN resources be employed without imposing additional burdens on other UN agencies OR STATES;

Opposes the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Children; and

Considers that it would be premature for States to consider the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Mr Chairman, I complete this list of negative attitude by pointing out that the Australian Government also opposes the continuation of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples.

Mr Chairman, I now call upon the Australian Government to respond to these allegations, by confirming its commitment to Indigenous rights as being discussed and understood in the various United Nations forums, and as included in the universal human rights standards.

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