



AUSTRALIA

Statement

by

Mr John Van Buerden

**of the
Australian Observer Delegation to the
First Meeting of the United Nations Permanent Forum
on Indigenous Issues**

Item 5: General Comments

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**AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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Mr Chairman,

Firstly, on behalf of the the Australian delegation, let me congratulate you and your fellow office bearers on your election to the bureau of this historic first meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We are pleased to be able to participate as an observer to the meeting and to lend our support to the Permanent Forum as it begins its work, and we are confident that, with the support of us all, it will be able to make a significant practical contribution to ensuring that the work of the United Nations on indigenous issues and its interactions with indigenous peoples are meaningful and constructive.

It is clear from the statements made so far that the expectations of the Forum of indigenous peoples representatives, states and UN agencies alike are high. We welcome these statements as endorsements of the Forum's role as the primary UN body dedicated to consideration and coordination of the UN's work on indigenous issues, and as recognition of the clear intention that its mandate encompass all relevant parts of the UN system. However we must recognise as well that the UN is not monolithic. Each agency has its own mandate, governance arrangements and culture, and constructive relationships will have to be established between the Forum and each relevant agency if it is to be effective in the role that it has been given. We should all be aware that this is a major task which will require sustained engagement from both Forum members and agencies over time. It cannot and will not be done overnight. That said, we welcome the constructive approach taken so far by the Forum and UN bodies alike.

This work will also require appropriate support. Many speakers have already referred to the need for adequate funding, and Australia fully supports this call, but we note also it is important for us to know what it is that needs to be funded. We look to the Forum, with the support of all of us - states, indigenous peoples representatives and other non-government bodies and UN agencies - to make clear what it intends to do in the period between now and its next session, and, as far as possible, to foreshadow activities for the subsequent year. This will enable the relevant UN bodies to determine what funding will be necessary and sufficient to support this work, and so provide a basis for states to ensure that adequate funding is available from the UN regular budget, and, as appropriate, from other sources as well.

In this context we recall the comments of the New Zealand Minister for Maori Affairs earlier this week that UN resources are not unlimited and it is important to get the best out of what is available. This is a fundamental principle which guides Australia's work in relation to all UN Agencies and programs, but it is particularly important in relation to the Forum as here we have an opportunity to ensure that we start off on the right foot. It is important also to recall, in this context, the decision that, once the Forum has held its first annual session, ECOSOC should review all existing mechanisms, procedures and programs of the UN concerning indigenous issues with a view to rationalising activities, avoiding duplication and overlap and promoting effectiveness. We see this review, and action taken as a result of it, as a crucial element in ensuring that the Forum will be the success we all hope it will be.

Finally Mr Chairman we note that there have been many references made to the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples prepared by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and to the work of the Commission on Human Rights Working Group tasked with negotiating a declaration for adoption by the UN General Assembly by the end of the International Decade of the World Indigenous People, taking into account the WGIP's draft. Australia has been an active participant in the Working Group where we, like many other states, have made clear our difficulties with aspects of the WGIP's draft. We have also made clear our recognition of the critical importance indigenous peoples place on having an agreed and internationally recognised articulation of their rights, both collective and individual, and our own strong commitment to working to this end. An agreed declaration will clearly provide a firmer basis for the work of the Permanent Forum, and we encourage all parties to redouble their efforts to ensure that the Working Group completes its work by the end of the Decade.