

**Human Rights Council
15th Session**

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' study on Indigenous people's right to participate in decision making

Mr Chairman and members of the Council:

The Australian Government would like to congratulate the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) on the progress of its study on Indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision making. Australia recognises the importance of facilitating the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in decision making processes.

On 22 November 2009, the Australian Government announced its support and funding for the establishment of a national Indigenous representative body, now known as the *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples*.

The model for the *National Congress* was proposed by an independent Steering Committee, chaired by the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Dr Tom Calma and was based on 12 months of extensive consultation across Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The model reflects Articles 1-5 of the Foundational Rights and Articles 18-21 of the Political and Economic Rights in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Australian Government provided funding of \$29.2 million to cover establishment costs, and early operation of the representative body.

The *National Congress* was incorporated in April 2010. The National Congress is designed by and for Indigenous Australians. It is an independent company limited by guarantee with membership open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations, service delivery organisations, and individuals over the age of 18 years.

The National Congress will formally commence operation in January 2011 and will provide a central mechanism with which governments and the corporate and community sectors can engage and partner on reform initiatives. It will also monitor Government service delivery and performance.

The body will also focus on formulating policy and advice, providing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on issues across government and bringing an informed, strong national voice representing the goals, aspirations, interests and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Mr Chairman

The Australian Government has made commitments to Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage and to reset the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We recognise that the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the development, design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect their lives is essential to achieving this.

Mr Chairman

Australia looks forward to receiving the final version of the Expert Mechanism's study.