

**Ms Mandy Doherty and Ms Jenny Bedford delivered the following joint statement on 22 May 2013 to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on behalf of the Australian Government and the Australian Human Rights Commission.**

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today and pay our respects to elders past and present.

This is a joint statement of the Australian Government and the Australian Human Rights Commission. It is also supported by the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

Australia's Human Rights Commission is an 'A status' national human rights institution that has a monitoring role regarding the enjoyment of human rights by Indigenous peoples, through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. The Commission, and the Commissioner, play a critical role in facilitating dialogue between the Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

Mr Chair, since April 2009 the Australian Government has supported the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

The Declaration recognises the rich heritage of Indigenous peoples and their entitlement to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is in line with our common goal of addressing Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

Recognising past injustices, the Australian Government and Indigenous Australians have seen Australia's support for the Declaration as another opportunity to rebuild our relationship in a spirit of cooperation, based on good faith, goodwill and mutual respect. It builds clearly on the historic 2008 National Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples and in particular the Stolen Generations, which was a vital step in the process of reconciliation and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

And acknowledging past dispossession and connection to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now enjoy various levels of access or control over more than 25% of the Australian land mass.

Earlier this year, Australia's Federal Parliament passed an historic Act of recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This sets in motion the process for a referendum where the Australian people will be asked to give similar recognition in the Australian Constitution.

Mr Chair, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples asks all stakeholders to find new ways of working to translate the rights set out in the Declaration into concrete benefits for all Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

The Australian Government is committed to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve improved outcomes. We are working with the Australian Human Rights Commission and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples to increase awareness of, and encourage dialogue about, the Declaration in policy development, program implementation and service delivery as a way to embed the Declaration in how business is done.

This strategy is essential to ensuring a cultural change that better acknowledges and addresses the needs identified by Indigenous peoples and communities.

We will work to raise awareness of the Declaration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and all stakeholders, and facilitate discussion regarding the principles underpinning the Declaration and what they mean in a practical context.

The Australian Government, for example, now requires proposals for new legislation to be

accompanied by a statement setting out how the law complies with Australia's international human rights obligations. In this context, Commonwealth agencies are starting to include reference to the Declaration.

Australia's journey towards reconciliation is continuing. We will continue to work to promote the human rights and human dignity of Indigenous peoples domestically and internationally.

Giving practical effect to the Declaration provides us all with an opportunity to engage positively and more effectively to improve the future for the First Peoples of Australia. The Australian Government is fully committed to this outcome, including through its Closing the Gap strategy.

Thank you.