

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Sixteenth Session – New York  
24 April - 5 May 2017**

**Agenda Item 3: Follow up to the recommendations of the Permanent  
Forum:  
(a) Empowerment of indigenous women**

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**Statement delivered by: Dr June Oscar AO, Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the  
Australian Human Rights Commission**

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Thank you Madam Chair

I would like to acknowledge the custodians of the land we are meeting on today and pay my respects to their elders past, present and future.

I am June Oscar, a Bunuba woman from the Fitzroy Valley, Western Australia.

I am honoured to speak about Indigenous women and the vital role that we play in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the Australian nation.

It is Indigenous women who so often take on the responsibilities of nurturers, healers and knowledge bearers – alongside of our menfolk. We are the glue that holds our families and communities together. Together with our men, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women carry the hopes of our future generations.

We undertake our role whilst holding significant trauma from past policies and current contexts in which we live. However, I want to stress that we are also innovators and hold the solutions to many of the complex challenges that we face around incarceration, child welfare and family violence to name a few.

Both the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples and Special Rapporteur on Violence against women highlighted the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women during their visits to Australia this year.

Greater emphasis on these issues, such as through existing efforts to Close the Gap will ensure that these measures are strengthened and greater outcomes are achieved.

Extending current definitions of economic development beyond infrastructure support to investing in family and community solutions is also needed.

We know innovative models exist where communities are driving social change by using their strengths in cultural knowledge to create economic opportunities through art, traditional foods, tourism and other therapeutic culture based economies.

It is my hope that our voices as Indigenous women informs the priorities of governments when shaping their policies targeting Indigenous women and our families. These efforts need to take a whole of life approach but also recognize the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

Madam Chair, I make the following recommendations:

**We recommend that the Permanent Forum:**

- 1. Urge all States to adequately fund Indigenous organisations in order to promote greater self determination and participation of women**
- 2. Urge all States to establish accountability measures to highlight progress in relation to reducing violence, imprisonment and child removals experienced by Indigenous women through regular reporting processes**