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UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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AGENDA ITEM 4c): HEALTH

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

The Foundation does not support the term *ethnic populations* being used to describe Indigenous Peoples. We believe that this description denies our identity and association with the land, waters and environment, and concedes our right to political, and economic autonomy to the States.

We ask that the World Health Organisation and other international agencies respect our identity as Indigenous Peoples.

We believe that more effort needs to be made by WHO to integrate Indigenous Peoples into the operations of the organization, through exchanges with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues and Indigenous Peoples organizations.

We particularly recommend better communications and partnership between the regional offices of WHO and Indigenous Peoples.

Mr Chairman, the Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution last month which reaffirmed that all people have the human right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. This was resolution 2003/29.

All provisions of the Commission's resolution are commendable and have applicability to Indigenous Peoples, but we draw attention of this forum to paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6 and 11.

Under this resolution States are asked to, inter alia:

- Develop and implement national strategies to realize access to prevention and treatment of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria;
- Establish and strengthen health and social infrastructures to deliver prevention, treatment and care to respond to pandemics;
- Refrain from taking measures which limit access for all persons to pharmaceutical products or medical technology;
- Strengthen health care systems, including training of health care providers and technicians; and

- Ensure that those at risk of contracting malaria, in particular women and children under the age of 5 years, benefit from the most suitable community protective measures.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum bring the attention of ECOSOC the advantage of asking States to identify Indigenous Peoples needs under the provisions of this Commission resolution.

In conclusion Mr Chairman, we refer again to the situation of Aboriginal people exposed to radiation in remote regions of Australia.

In the 1950s the British and Australian governments tested atomic weapons in the regions of Woomera, South Australia. This testing was undertaken on Aboriginal lands, regardless that Aboriginal people were living in the area and exposed to the nuclear fallout.

Many of the traditional owners have died of cancer since the nuclear tests. The survivors talk of the 'black mist', the dense radioactive cloud that traveled across a vast part of the desert region, and can show scars and other medical evidence of exposure to radioactivity.

In more recent years the Indigenous ownership of these lands have been recognized and their ancient title has been progressively registered under Australian law. Their lands, unfortunately, continued to be blighted by high levels of radiation.

In defiance of its historical disregard of Indigenous rights, the Australian Government has made a decision, without the prior and informed consent of the Indigenous owners, to use some of their lands for dumping radio-active toxic waste. Last week in my intervention I said that the Australian Government has never provided 'just compensation' – a term used in the Australian Constitution – to the Aboriginal Peoples.

In the past few days it has emerged that the Australian Government is offering \$90,000 to each of three groups for an area of 2.5 square kilometers. This paltry amount may reflect market value of arid-region real estate but does not reflect the importance of the land or incorporate the value of the traditional relationship between the people and the land.

Regardless, the Australian Government is prepared to risk their exposure to the toxic waste, and risk the health of existing and future populations of Indigenous Peoples.

We call upon the Permanent Forum to express concern over the use of Indigenous lands and waters, to undertake atomic testing or to dump nuclear waste materials.

END