



**Second Session of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues
New York, 12 to 23 May 2003**

**Statement by Trina Miisaaq Landlord
Alaska Federation of Natives**

Agenda Item 4 (c) – Health

Mr. Chairperson and Distinguished delegates, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Forum today on the issue of youth suicide prevention.

Camai. Atka Misauquuq Trina Landlord Asa' carsamium. Banikanga Martina Landlordam Mountain Villagegarmium, Brian O'Learyimllu Greensburgmium, Pennsylvania, tutgarkanga Maria Patsym Theodore Landlordam.

My name is Trina Miisaaq Landlord from Mountain Village, Alaska. I am the daughter of Martina Landlord of Mountain Village and Brian O'Leary of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and the granddaughter of Maria Patsy and Theodore Landlord of Mountain Village, Alaska.

The impacts of suicide on rural communities are staggering. In March 1985 in Alakanuk, Alaska, a young man walked out onto the tundra behind this Yukon River village and carefully, neatly shot himself in the heart. The sound of the shot rolled across the flat delta land through the supertime darkness of a cold spring day. It breached the walls and windows of the wooden houses, marking the moment as a beginning of a 16 month suicide epidemic that ended the life of eight young villagers. Eight suicides in a community of 550 people would be the equivalent of more than 45,000 suicides in New York City.

Alaska Native cultures, communities, families and individuals have been negatively impacted by several hundred years of rapid and often traumatic changes in their lives. When an Inupiaq Eskimo Elder was asked why young people commit suicide, her response was that young people are not taught how to balance Native values and Western values and often turn to self-destructive behaviors or suicide in their hopelessness.

There are over 98,000 Alaska Natives residing in the State, with Native youth comprising 33% of the population. During the years 1990-94, there were 46 suicides within the Alaska Native community per year. Alaska Native youth ages 12-17 years old have the highest rate of alcohol use of any group in the United States. This statistic reveals the relationship between suicide and alcohol abuse in Alaska.

In October 2002, the Alaska Federation of Natives conducted a statewide Youth and Elders Conference with a primary theme of Wellness. The conference provided a collective meeting ground for youth and elders to gather, share knowledge about wellness issues and work to find solutions to alcohol and drug abuse. As a result, the youth and elders at the conference created resolutions addressing issues of staying alcohol and drug free, setting goals, and maintaining open communication between individuals, families and communities.

Based on the Youth and Elders Resolution 02-66, the Alaska Federation of Natives recommends to the Permanent Forum that the United Nations support in every way possible indigenous communities in establishing culturally relative suicide prevention programs that utilize indigenous values to address the root causes of self-destructive behavior, to provide a forum for discussing suicide prevention, and to determine the steps necessary to achieve and promote health, wellness and to restore hope. With hope, Alaskan Native youth will live to perpetuate our unique cultures and to celebrate the beautiful gift of life.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.