

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – 13th Session

Australia National Statement

Delivered by: Ms Letitia Hope, Deputy Chief Executive Officer,
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Thank you Chair.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we meet and pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging for their continuing custodianship of country, knowledge and culture.

Australia welcomes the Expert Mechanism's focus on impacts of COVID-19 on the rights of indigenous peoples and their work to achieve the objectives of the Declaration and is pleased to contribute to ongoing discussions.

Australia reaffirms its support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every aspect of Indigenous people's lives.

Australia recognises the importance of working in genuine partnership with Indigenous leaders, communities and organisations to minimise the impact of COVID-19.

At a national level, reported COVID-19 cases for Indigenous Australians represents 0.5 per cent of all national cases. This is due in part to the Australian Government establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 and utilising existing partnerships with Indigenous leaders, organisations and communities to target support for our populations in vulnerable situations.

This has included addressing both the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous communities and businesses, and delivering culturally appropriate and in-language communications with Indigenous Australians.

Australia has also listened and acted on the requests from Indigenous communities, organisations and leaders implementing travel restrictions to remote communities early in the pandemic to minimise the risk of exposure to Indigenous Australians in remote communities.

While no cases of COVID-19 have been acquired in remote communities by Indigenous Australians, Australia continues to take the necessary actions to ensure all Indigenous Australians are safe, protected and have access to appropriate health care now and beyond COVID-19.

Australia welcomed the opportunity to provide a submission to the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples outlining how Australia has prepared for and responded to COVID-19 including ensuring ongoing food security and providing economic support for Indigenous business and communities.

As we continue with the roll out of national policies like the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the co-designing of an Indigenous Voice, we recognise that Indigenous Australians must play an integral part in making the decisions that affect their lives through inclusive decision-making. Together, we have the best chance of success.

Thank you