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SECOND WORLD INDIGENOUS YOUTH CONFERENCE

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**UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
ELEVENTH SESSION,
22 JULY - 2 AUGUST 1993
ITEM 5 ON THE AGENDA: REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS**

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE OF NATIONAL INDIGENOUS
YOUTH COMMITTEE OF AUSTRALIA.**

Madam Chairman,
Members of the Working Group,
Indigenous Elders,
Brothers and Sisters,

My name is Lorena Allam. I am a young Kamilaroi woman from New South Wales. I am speaking here on behalf of the National Indigenous Youth Committee of Australia, formed to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth at this Working Group. Our committee is part of an expanding international network of Indigenous youth.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth support and honour the achievements and leadership of our Elders, and wish to acknowledge their support in continuing the momentum of the Indigenous youth movement in Australia.

Madam Chairman, as you would be aware, from 5 - 11 July this year Australia hosted the Second World Indigenous Youth Conference in Darwin, Northern Territory. The developments I would now like to raise are those which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth at that forum identified as their most pressing concerns. Firstly, allow me to place these issues in context.

Due to the poor social and economic conditions in which many of our people live, it is estimated that the average life expectancy of an Aboriginal person in Australia is 39 years of age. Roughly 60 percent of our people are under the age of 30. However, the reality is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are one of the most marginalised, neglected and least consulted groups in Australia.

Madam Chairman, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth view the High Court decision on Native Title as a significant development affecting our futures. As you have heard, state governments in Australia are legislating to limit the full effect of the Native Title decision. We as youth believe these actions contradict the Federal Government's support for those Articles in the Draft Declaration which recognise our rights to ownership and control over our lands.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are the inheritors of any responses to the High Court decision. As such, we must be informed and consulted. To date, despite the fact that the majority of our people are youth, this has not been the case.

We call on Governments and our own leaders to begin informing and consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth on the High Court Native Title decision. Our future is our greatest concern. We as youth must be considered a potent force in determining that future.

Madam Chairman, a second significant issue facing young Australian Indigenous people is juvenile justice legislation. In Western Australia, the Serious Repeat Offender Act (1992) is an example of a law which guarantees our exposure as youth to the criminal justice system, contributes to our disproportionately high rate of incarceration, and therefore increases the likelihood of death in custody.

This Act is a racist legislation directly aimed at Aboriginal youth. It is an Act which directly contravenes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international human rights covenants which Australia supports.

We call upon the Australian Government to exercise its constitutional powers to override state legislations and immediately repeal this Act.

Australia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and thereby has a responsibility to exercise its constitutional powers. It is our hope, Madam Chairman, that the UN, through the Working Group, will monitor Australia's response to its obligation as a signatory to this Convention.

Thirdly, I would like to draw your attention, Madam Chairman, to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Of the 99 deaths investigated, a significant number were Aboriginal youth. The Royal Commission released its report in 1991. However, the reality is, Madam Chairman, that young Aboriginal people are still dying in police cells, in jails and in lockups.

We as youth call upon the Federal and State Governments to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. We urge ATSIC to endorse a process of consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to establish programs aimed at preventing our unnecessary incarceration, with the view to formulating an ATSIC youth policy.

In closing, Madam Chairman, I would like to say that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth have much energy, commitment and skill to contribute to the struggle for justice for Indigenous people in Australia.

It is often said that youth are the leaders of the future. We are prepared to put these words into action.

As a young Aboriginal delegate remarked to the Tenth Session of the Working Group, Indigenous youth are the most appropriate advisers on Indigenous youth issues. We can and must have a role to play in the decisions which affect our lives. We must work with our leaders and elders. Together we will claim our future.

Thank you.