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**Joint statement by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Caucus – Agenda Item 8:
Ongoing themes and priorities – Indigenous Children and Youth**

We the Australian Indigenous Youth delegation wish to recognise and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land in which we meet, and are honoured to pay our respects to the Elders and our youth brothers and sisters of the visiting nations from around the globe.

Madam Chair,

This intervention is by the Australian Indigenous youth delegation present at the 7th Session of the UNPFII, with the support of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. The Australian youth delegation is comprised of members from rural, remote and regional communities. However, we are all impacted by similar issues which affect us in different ways.

We the Indigenous Australian Youth welcome and applaud the apology to the stolen generations of Indigenous peoples by the Parliament of Australia, however, policies are just paper, unless real and practical outcomes are achieved.

The Indigenous children and youth of Australia make up approximately 60 per cent of the Indigenous population, and therefore our views are crucial to this forum. Today we are growing up in a legacy of disempowerment and submissive behaviours, and it would be naive to pin point it to one particular issue. Today, we will focus on health, identity and education.

The social determinants of health have impacted specifically on Indigenous children and youth through the history of Australia and trans-generational trauma. We have a lower life expectancy, so too will our children, high rates of chronic disease, so too will our children, cancers and respiratory diseases, so too will our children. Even before birth, indigenous children are at a disadvantage, with high infant mortality and lower birth weights in our communities. Pre-natal care is a high priority with a number of our babies being born with foetal alcohol syndrome.

Young indigenous peoples often have poor access to education facilities, experience institutional racism in schools and are recorded as having low attendance rates across all levels of education. There are also low expectations on Indigenous children and what they are capable of achieving in education systems. There is no recognition of cultural education and language within our formal education system. We also have an untrue depiction of what Australian history is where in the formal system children are only taught of the colonisation of Australia and no education on the atrocities and attempted eradication of the Aboriginal culture.

We recognise, and celebrate the diverse cultural identities that exists within Australia's Indigenous children and youths, however, we are losing our identity in culture and tradition because we are being dominated by western ideals.

We are extremely concerned about the portrayal of Indigenous cultures by mainstream media in Australia that misrepresent our cultures, does not celebrate the diversity within our communities, or accurately reflect our true views.

It is normal for us to grow up in communities lacking health and other appropriate social services as well as being dominated by welfare dependency, drug and alcohol abuse, and incarceration – all factors that significantly impact on our personal and cultural self-esteem.

We support the comments by the Global Youth Caucus Statement on Human Rights which emphasises the importance of our identity to our well being.

As indigenous youth delegates, we rely on the doctrine of responsible Government to implement real and sustainable policies – policies that not only alleviate social and economic disadvantage, but aim to eradicate it.

In Australia, we are currently at a stage where policies tackling climate change, social exclusion, poverty as well as economic and social disadvantage are gaining real momentum. The time has come in our nation's history to play an active, responsible and collaborative role in putting these policies into practice - by assessing and acting upon what the human and social costs will be if the change that is needed does not happen now.

We, as Indigenous Youth, want to see these issues as the key priorities in all nations spending throughout the world. We, like many of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, would applaud our governments and leaders spending more on these as targeted domestic priorities, rather than supporting international conflicts.

We want our children to be born into a world not marred by conflict but one that has matured into one that has embraced cultural diversity, one that our children have the same life chances as their non-indigenous brothers and sisters and where being Indigenous is not seen a social stigma.

Following on from the welcomed and timely apology from the Australian Government, we ask the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to:

- Encourage States' to ensure representation of Indigenous peoples in decisions about our issues, including through supporting nationally elected representative bodies.
- Encourage States to assist and implement indigenous youth parliaments within their countries. The parliament formation should be elected by the Indigenous peoples of the nation.
- Support and commend the Australian government's pledge to close the gap in Indigenous health and encourage them to do this in transparent practical steps.
- Call on UNICEF, and other relevant UN agencies, to encourage state education systems on all levels to recognise Indigenous cultures and perspectives within on mainstream history curricula.
- Call on States to develop stronger infrastructure that includes services that support the above issues including mental health, families, substance abuse, and the justice system.

IN conclusion, we the Indigenous youth of Australia believe there is no one solution to the issues facing our communities, and we need and require a holistic approach from all levels of government working in partnership with our communities.

Thank you Madam Chair.