

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**  
**July 2021 Session**  
**Regional Meeting for Africa and North America**  
**Monday, July 12, 2021**

**U.S. Statement, as delivered by James Bischoff, Legal Adviser, U.S. Mission Geneva**

Thank you, Ms. Lightfoot. I am James Bischoff, the Legal Adviser at the U.S. Mission in Geneva. I am gratified to see some familiar faces today from my past work for the U.S. government on indigenous issues, including the successful 2016 EMRIP reform effort and the 2016-2017 discussions on enhanced participation in the General Assembly. I'd also like to personally welcome you on behalf of the U.S. government. We look forward to working with you as the North America member of EMRIP.

The United States is pleased to be engaging in this EMRIP session. While EMRIP's report on indigenous children suggests that the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples creates certain rights, this is not the case. The Declaration is an aspirational document. With that said, we welcome the chance to comment on some aspects of the report.

EMRIP's report notes that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts indigenous populations, including children. In contributing to the global pandemic response, the United States places its focus on the most vulnerable persons, including members of indigenous communities. We have allocated more than \$20 billion to develop vaccines and therapeutics and initiate preparedness efforts. We have contributed \$2 billion to Gavi, the global Vaccine Alliance, to provide vaccines to 92 low- and middle- income countries. We plan to commit an additional \$2 billion by 2022.

Domestically, the U.S. government makes COVID-19 vaccines available to all individuals within the indigenous healthcare system. The Indian Health Service – part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that works to ensure healthcare to indigenous communities in the United States – has received nearly \$3 billion to respond to the coronavirus

pandemic. Partnerships between IHS and tribal nations on vaccination and other programs have contributed to reducing the number of COVID-19 infections.

Second, the report analyzes how indigenous children and youth are more vulnerable to self-harm and suicide. The U.S. government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration gives Native Americans access to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services that encompass modern science and traditional cultural practices. The U.S. government also sponsors alcohol and substance abuse prevention, education, and support programs available to all Native Americans.

Third, the report notes that indigenous children, particularly girls, are more subject to domestic and sexual violence. It recommends that states take measures to protect indigenous children and hold perpetrators accountable. President Biden has a long history of supporting efforts to help Native American survivors of gender-based violence. As a senator, he authored the original Violence Against Women Act. When he was Vice President, specific protections for Native American survivors of domestic violence and dating violence were added to the reauthorization of this Act. At President Biden's urging, the latest reauthorization bill includes expanded protections for Native American survivors of sexual assault and sex trafficking.

Lastly, the report recommends that indigenous children have access to high quality, culturally responsive education, including in their traditional languages. The U.S. government works to ensure that teachers, principals, school leaders, and staff provide culturally relevant instruction to Native American students, so they can gain knowledge of Native communities; reclaim their languages; and protect their tribal histories, traditions, and cultures. We help to provide quality education opportunities throughout the life span, in accordance with tribes' needs for their cultural and economic well-being.

Thank you.