

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Seventh Session
New York, 21 April – 2 May 2008**

Agenda Item 4.2 d: Education

JOINT STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF

Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)
National Native Title Council
Murray Lower Darling River Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)
Indigenous Peoples Organisation Network Youth Delegation
Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
Kimberley Language Resource Centre
North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
Menzies School of Health Research
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO)
New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)
University of New South Wales, Indigenous Law Centre
Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
National Indigenous Higher Education Network
National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia

Presenter: Professor Peter Buckskin on behalf of the National Indigenous Higher Education Network

Thankyou Madam Chair

We welcome the Expert Paper prepared for the 7th Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues titled "Forms of education of Indigenous children as crimes against humanity?"

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia there is an extreme urgency for the provision of quality education that affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, pride and dignity and increases educational outcomes. Children must be given the tools to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship while maintaining their cultural integrity.

Australia is yet to acknowledge and accept that it has two knowledge systems, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and the imposed western knowledge systems. This raises concerns about the loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control and ownership, the maintenance of cultural integrity and the marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as custodians.

Australian Education systems have been shaped by western knowledge and pedagogies that continue to have a profound detrimental impact on the western learning outcomes of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their long term educational options.

In comparison to other Australian children Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the lowest school attendance, retention rates and english literacy and numeracy outcomes. This situation has serious consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation, retention and graduation rates in higher education which are significantly lower than other Australians.

The lack of quality education provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students significantly contributes to their poor social and cultural wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are now more than ever at risk of experiencing depression and attempting suicide. With poor levels of educational attainment the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment rate is higher than other Australians.

For over two decades the Australia Government has had in place the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP).

The policy was written in close consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples taking into consideration several international covenants recognising international standards for the protection of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. These include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and Civil and Political Rights.

Future education policy and program review or development will require the consideration of the 2007 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is expected that the Australian Government will become a signatory to the Declaration later in 2008..

Despite being signatories to these Covenants and the richness of the NATSIEP policy the western Academy and governments have failed to achieve parity of outcomes with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Whilst there has been some improvement over the last twenty years in access, participation and retention in educational processes it still remains that Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders continue to have the lowest basic english literacy and numeracy levels, attendance and retention rates compared to other Australian students.

The failure to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making has meant programs are not designed nor implemented in a culturally competent context.

Equality of access to quality preschool and secondary schooling in remote communities continues to challenge the capacities of Governments to deliver effective educational services.

The failure of Australian Governments to provide and support culturally appropriate education services has meant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders culture and languages continue to be under threat of extinction.

There is insufficient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and understandings within pre-service education and post graduate courses in Australian universities affecting the quality of service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Equity of educational participation has not been achieved with school attendance and retention rates being significantly lower than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students.

Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes have yet to be achieved across all levels of education, preschool, primary and secondary schooling, adult and higher education.

Australian Governments failure to provide adequate resources and culturally relevant programs to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making processes combined with the lack of equality of access to educational services, equity of educational participation and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes can be described as systemic neglect. The Expert paper prepared for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues titled "Forms of education of Indigenous children as crimes against humanity?" for Item 4 and 7 defines this neglect as cultural genocide.

Recommendations

That the 7th UNPFII note the continued challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve culturally appropriate and equitable education outcomes across preschool, primary and secondary schools, adult and higher education sectors, and encourage the Australian Government to address this educational deficit as an urgent national priority;

That in recognition that Indigenous Education is a global concern we request the 7th UNPFII to call on the United Nation Economic and Social Council to establish a Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Education.