

**United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues  
Eighteenth Session – New York  
22 April – 3 May 2019**

**Agenda Item 11: Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur**

**Delivered by: Shannan Dodson, Jumbunna Institute, University of  
Technology Sydney**

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Thank you Madam Chair,

Ngaji gurrijin, ngayu nilawal Shannan Dodson. Ngayu Yawuru jarndu.

We acknowledge the original custodians whose land we stand on today and the work of the Special Rapporteur during her visit to Australia and thereafter.

The Jumbunna Institute at the University of Technology Sydney is honoured to work with Indigenous communities across Australia and we bring those voices with us to this place. We acknowledge our Indigenous brothers and sisters from Australia and around the world who are here today.

To many, Australia is known as the lucky country. We are a country of great wealth and prosperity, but this is not shared by all.

It is time that we share with you the reality of what it means to be an Indigenous person in Australia today.

Our children are still being removed from their families by Government authorities at rates much higher than at the time of the Stolen Generations policy; our people are incarcerated more now than at the time of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Our women are one of the fastest growing prison population in the country and are still amongst the most hospitalised and the most vulnerable in our society. We need more support to address family violence, but we also need more support to address the violence of the State. Time and time again our people die in custody, or because failures of our health and justice systems.

This must change.

We are also facing a suicide epidemic. Already we have had at least 35 Indigenous suicides this year alone, including from children as young as 12. The Kimberley region – where my mob are from – has the highest rate of suicide in the country. If the Kimberley was a country it would have the worst suicide rate in the world. If this

were non-Indigenous kids it would be a national emergency, but most Australians have no idea this is going on.

We live in a country where Indigenous kids are tear gassed in a detention centre, where you are more likely to go to prison than school, where we die much younger than our non-Indigenous peers, where Indigenous kids die and nobody bats an eyelid and families like those in Bowraville can wait a lifetime for justice that just never comes.

This is the face of Australia that Indigenous people live every day. There are some things worth celebrating, but there is so much to do to ensure it is the lucky country for all.

**Madam Chair, I make the following recommendations that the Permanent Forum through ECOSOC:**

- 1. Urge all States to continue to resource Indigenous community-controlled organisations that support Indigenous child welfare, health and justice agencies and reform the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to ensure Indigenous funding goes to Indigenous groups not non-Indigenous groups**
- 2. Urge all States to commit to supporting community led initiatives that empower our self-determination**
- 3. And urge all States to work with us to develop national strategies by us, for us, to address disgraceful Indigenous suicide rates.**