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NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS



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UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

ITEM 7 : URBAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MIGRATION

STATEMENT BY

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

New Zealand would like to take the opportunity to comment on the question of urbanisation and migration, which has been of profound relevance to New Zealand's indigenous people and New Zealand as a whole.

Following the end of World War II, the rate of urbanisation by Maori as a group was the highest in the world. Most migrated for new employment opportunities in the cities, like many other indigenous around the world are doing today. As a result, more than 80% of the Maori population now resides in urban areas, and this has wrought a fundamental change on the character of our society. A high level of integration, understanding and contact between Maori and non-Maori in New Zealand is one of the positive consequences of urbanisation.

But the pace of change also had serious negative effects. Urbanisation fractured the traditional relationship of individual Maori to whanau (or family), hapu (sub-tribe), tribal lore, ancestry, language and land. During economic downturns, Maori no longer had traditional support networks and were also often most likely to be engaged in low skilled jobs vulnerable to unemployment. This established a long-term cycle of poverty, disadvantage and a crisis of identity for many Maori individuals in urban areas, with serious implications for Maori as a people and New Zealand as a whole.

Maori have spent the last decades adapting and emerging from this period of major change. One of the most interesting and positive developments has been the adaptation of tribes to the urban environment and the establishment of urban authorities to help provide cohesion and support. The government has made a concerted effort to support whanau (families) and to encourage full participation in the labour force, with dramatic results. Since 1999, the Maori unemployment rate has dropped from 44,000 to 9,000, the lowest since records began. Maori have up-skilled. Self-employment and entrepreneurship has been a major feature of this positive change.

New Zealand believes that others can learn from our experience. Government and Maori themselves did not anticipate the scale of the social change triggered by urbanisation or respond quickly enough. The necessary support for Maori to make a transition from rural tribal life to urban environments was simply not there. We strongly believe that policy must be developed to manage social change associated with urbanisation and to minimise negative effects. Dedicated programmes must be funded to allow the continued promotion of indigenous culture, identity and support systems in new geographic areas beyond tribal boundaries.

For the well-being of indigenous peoples and societies as a whole, governments and indigenous groups need to work together closely on the question of urbanisation and to support indigenous individuals in their choices. The UN has a role to play in this regard in ensuring that the specific needs of

indigenous are addressed in its urbanisation and development work. We encourage the Forum to continue to engage actively and annually on the question of urbanisation in order to promote greater awareness and action on this issue.