

EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (EMRIP)

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Agenda item no. 7 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: good practices and lessons learned

Jacob Ashdown, Moana House

Thank you Madam Chair. My name is Jacob Ashdown and I am Māori from *Aotearoa* / New Zealand. I represent the Moana House therapeutic community - a service that assists men with histories of criminal offending and addiction to reintegrate from prison back into the community and into their families.

Indigenous peoples globally are overrepresented in prisons. Despite making up only 16% of the New Zealand population, Māori men make up 51% of the prison population and Māori women make up 63% prison population. The methamphetamine epidemic is worsening and Māori are disproportionately affected. Over half of all prisoners report having used methamphetamine in their lifetime. Last year, our service had 200 referrals of whom 78% had a methamphetamine history. The current waiting list is 148, 68% of those are Māori. Despite this demand, our service remains under resourced and the government continues to waste money by expanding an unsuccessful prison system.

Many governments worldwide, including the New Zealand government, have recognized the disproportionate indigenous incarceration issue and have developed strategies to address the issue. These strategies are unsuccessful. **You cannot rehabilitate people in prison.** So what does good practice look like? Good practice involves **a complete shift from the punitive prison system to a health-focused system.** We have identified three good practices that we would like the Expert Mechanism to raise with governments to alleviate the incarceration issue.

First, instead of building prisons, we recommend that governments increase resources to indigenous orientated NGOs for a range of innovative community-based treatment programmes **outside of prison. We need more alternatives to prison.** Alternatives that take holistic approaches to wellness, incorporate indigenous culture, values, and family into the healing processes. Second, we recommend that Justice law reform should increase opportunities for people with histories of addiction and offending to be sentenced, bailed and paroled to treatment programmes **outside of prison.** Finally, we recommend that **indigenous behavioural health must be set as a health research priority for innovation in the field.** Research needs to be conducted by indigenous researchers who are independent of government agencies.

I reiterate, good practice involves **a complete shift from the unsuccessful punitive prison system to a healing-centered and health-focused system.**

Tena koutou katoa, Thank you Madam Chair.