



AUSTRALIA

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
12TH SESSION
25-29 JULY 1994

STATEMENT BY THE HON ROBERT TICKNER, MP
FEDERAL MINISTER FOR
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
AFFAIRS
ON BEHALF OF THE AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION

**Item 7: International Decade of the World's
 Indigenous People**

GENEVA
29 JULY 1994

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chairman,

The spirit of true partnership with indigenous peoples means that their aspirations for the International Decade must be acknowledged and incorporated to the maximum extent possible in international, regional and national approaches to the Decade. They must also be reflected in the Program of Activity for the International Decade.

In keeping with the spirit of partnership, responsibility in Australia for the planning and co-ordination of activities for the Decade has been assumed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). There will be close cooperation and dialogue with the Australian Government.

I have seen the proposals tabled by ATSIC's Chairperson, Ms Lois O'Donoghue. ATSIC is the Government's primary source of advice on indigenous affairs, policy and I note that Ms O'Donoghue has consulted with indigenous colleagues representing other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations represented at this forum, and that agreement has been reached to support the proposals. The Australian Government also endorses those proposals and will work to realise those which require further UN action.

ATSIC made a significant contribution to the International Year by expending \$440,000 on staff resources provided to the Centre for Human Rights with the secondment of Ms Helen McLaughlin. We are very proud of the contribution she made. We actively encourage other governments and organisations to demonstrate their commitment to the Decade by making available indigenous staff to work in the Indigenous Peoples Unit in the Centre in coordinating and implementing activities for the Decade.

The Program of Activity for the Decade should give priority to those substantive activities and identified by, indigenous peoples themselves as meeting their needs.

One objective of the Decade is the adoption of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the further development of international standards for the protection and promotion of the human rights of indigenous peoples, including effective means of monitoring and guaranteeing those rights. To achieve this objective, it is essential that the Draft Declaration be referred to the Commission on Human Rights as soon as possible.

Australian would like the seventh point of Section A of the Program of Activity in document CRP4 to be strengthened by the addition of a sentence to this effect.

Madame Chairman, Australia supports the creation of a Voluntary Fund for the Decade. The Chairperson of ATSIC, Ms Lois O'Donoghue, has asked me to announce that ATSIC will contribute \$10,000 during 1994/95 to this Fund.

A further objective for the Decade should be to explore all avenues of financial support to ensure that the Voluntary Fund is an effective instrument for achieving the aspirations of indigenous peoples. Australia would like this point to be included in Section A of the Program of Activity for the Decade.

Australia believes that the Decade also provides an opportunity for governments to support the creation of a permanent forum in the UN system to address the broad range of issues of concern to indigenous peoples.

Finally, Australia supports the proposals made by ATSIC and others that the ninth of August be observed each year as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples.