

Statement by Les Malezer, Co-Chair, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

In her report to the Human Rights Council in September 2014 the Special Rapporteur reminds us that disadvantage suffered by Indigenous Peoples should be understood in the context of being denied self-determination, land and resource rights, and related rights to their economic and social development.

The Special Rapporteur also addresses the complications in delivering programmes and services to Indigenous Peoples in rural and isolated areas. We agree that the solution is not to move indigenous peoples to urban areas, but rather measures must be put in place to ensure that indigenous peoples can enjoy the same social and economic rights as other segments of the population, without having to sacrifice important aspects of their cultures and ways of life, including their attachment to their traditional lands.

In Australia we are extremely concerned that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are portrayed as burdens upon the mainstream Australian population. This is regularly reinforced by the Australian government which uses 'dog whistling' statements - i.e. statements which convey a hidden message while seeming to be innocent comments - to send a message to the public that they are paying for our livelihood through welfare handouts, and that we are bludging upon their wealth and goodwill.

The truth is that the Australian government has never made settlement for the taking of our lands and resources. They make no payment to us for use of the lands or exploitation of the natural wealth contained in our lands. For example official figures are released by government to say that \$30 billion is spent annually on our peoples. Of this amount they claim \$5 billion is paid direct to our communities and organisations. Many people believe that, despite these figures, no achievement is made through such expenditure and that our peoples are to blame. The truth is a long way away from these figures.

For example the government has provided recent information about the revised funding arrangements under the so-called "Indigenous Advancement Strategy", a new program for funding our communities and organisations for basic and essential services. From the limited and scrambled information provided by government we understand that the annual funding to our peoples totals about \$860 million, not the \$5 billion claimed, and that the majority of those funds are provided to non-Indigenous organisations and otherwise used to provide temporary work placements for long-term unemployed peoples.

On the other hand Australia earns \$300 billion worth of exports of minerals and agricultural products, taken from our lands and resources.

In the continuation of the exploitation of our economic rights governments in Australia are now proposing to close down our Aboriginal communities that continue to survive on their traditional lands in the rural and isolated regions of Australia. The Australian government does not accept that it has a duty to protect our peoples' rights to maintain their cultural existence on their traditional lands.

Aware that the Special Rapporteur has previously provided a report We ask the Special Rapporteur to re-investigate Australia's proposals to shut down communities and to provide in her report some findings upon the economic and social circumstances of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Further we ask the Special Rapporteur to seek communications with the Australian Government, and involving the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, to review the economic and social arrangements in Australia which recognise the rights of the First Peoples to development.

We look to the Permanent Forum to support this request.