

STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS  
ISSUES BY GINGER GOSNELL, ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL YOUTH  
COUNCIL

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and indigenous peoples of Mother Earth.

My name is Ginger Gosnell and I am from the Nisga'a Nation. We are situated close to the Alaska Panhandle, but within the Canadian border. I am a representative of the Assembly of First Nations National Youth Council.

I have had many opportunities to learn about First Nations youth issues through consultations, research and personal experiences as a First Nations young person. After all I have learned, there is much that I cannot understand.

I don't understand why First Nations youth, in heart-breaking numbers among the highest in the world, choose to kill themselves, rather than try to cope in their surroundings.

I don't understand why, when Canada has a government department specifically for First Nations issues and management, they still can't give these young people anything worth living for, even though they have over seven billion dollars in their pockets.

I don't understand why First Nations youth are more likely to go to jail than complete high school.

And again, the Canadian government has chosen to spend crazy amounts of time and effort on something called the First Nations Governance Act, rather than give the youth a chance at a life worth living. Sometimes, I truly feel that they don't mind that our young brothers and sisters make up to 80% of some of their prison systems. Sometimes, I feel that they like it that way.

First Nations youth have the lowest levels of education in Canada, yet we have 10,000 aspiring young people on waiting lists who want to get a post-secondary education, but cannot because there is no money for them. All of North America is land thieved from us not so long ago, and yet, we have no money to receive an education.

I wish that our First Nations could have some time to heal from Canada's colonization policies.

I hope that this time granted would be meaningful. How long does it take a youth, a parent, a grandparent or a community, altogether, to find their strength and become peaceful? How much money would it cost, and how many non-indigenous people should be there telling us how to do it? Well, it wouldn't take a seven-billion-dollar government Department of Indian Affairs run by non-indigenous people and an ancient piece of paper called the Indian Act or FNGA or whatever they call it these days. All of it hasn't worked. It hasn't saved the life of a young person. It hasn't reconciled peace for an Indigenous brother in prison. It is not sending our youth to attend university.

This is what I do understand.