

12th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Agenda item 10: Proposals to be submitted to the Human Rights Council for its consideration and approval.

Chair and Expert Mechanism, I thank you for the floor.

As a Torres Strait Islander and the delegate for the United Nations Association of Australia- Qld Division I respectfully put forward the recommendation that a thematic study on the impacts of climate change on the Torres Strait be undertaken and that an all-econompassing study on Indigenous people worldwide be conducted and request that this proposal be submitted to the Human Rights Council for their consideration.

We have heard this week from many speakers about issues they face in their homelands and islands as a result of climate change including the loss of homeland, the loss of sacred burial sites, the loss of water and food resources and the loss of spiritual connection. Although disheartening to hear, acting as a collective voice it gives me hope for the future that we as Indigenous people can come together and advocate with strength to protect our homelands and islands.

Indigenous communities have had to adapt to many challenges as a result of climate change, and many have become skilled at doing so. We are a resilient people. However these challenges are escalating in ways that calls for the Human Rights Council to engage in this ever expanding crisis and bring to the table a visionary and coordinated approach to protecting the traditional, cultural and spiritual ways of life of which these rights are enshrined in Article 26 of the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination”

I reiterate the importance that the modality of the study should be undertaken in a manner that ensures that all voices of Indigenous people are heard on this important issue and that the Human Rights Council considers alternative methods of acquiring the data necessary to inform themselves. Participation in any study with Indigenous peoples in a full and meaningful engagement requires a modality that should be flexible and in accordance with Indigenous custom and paradigms as well as utilizing western based research models. This engagement should be transparent, meaningful and genuine and be accessible to all Indigenous peoples in an equitable manner. The Human Rights Council's engagement on this issue will provide another avenue for Indigenous voices to be heard and will advance the United Nations's efforts and support in promoting and protecting Indigenous human rights.

Thank you Chairperson.