

**United Nations**  
**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

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Seventh Session

New York, 21 April - 2 May 2008

Agenda Item 8

**Ongoing Priorities and themes and follow up:**

- (a) Indigenous children and youth
- (b) Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People
- (c) Urban indigenous peoples and migration

JOINT STATEMENT DELIVERED BY ON BEHALF OF:

Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)

Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner

Menzies School of Health Research

North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)

National Native Title Council (NNTC)

New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)

Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MILDRIN)

National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN)

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Madam Chairperson,

The Australian Indigenous Peoples' Caucus wishes to reiterate the importance of focusing on issues facing Indigenous children and youth. We also take this opportunity to discuss important matters related to the 'Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples' and issues affecting 'Urban Indigenous peoples and migration'.

Children and youth

Australia's Indigenous population is fast growing and has a very young age structure. In fact 63% of the indigenous population is under the age of 30.

At present, we cannot say that an Indigenous child born in Australia today has an equal life chance as a non-Indigenous child. This is due to a range of factors – lack of equal access to primary health care and health infrastructure; limited services for early education, particularly in discrete Aboriginal communities; and other issues relating to access to services in urban settings.

These factors often mean that by the time our children enter the formal education system they are already facing a range of barriers. The Australian government has recently entered into a new partnership with the Indigenous health sector to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They have committed to closing the gap in literacy and numeracy standards, as well as early childhood health outcomes within a decade, utilizing a collaborative partnership approach with Indigenous peoples and their communities. This commitment is to be welcomed.

Achieving this will require functioning systems for health, education, social supports and justice systems; support for safe communities and functional families; and parenting support. It also requires appropriate legislative and administrative support for the rights of indigenous children. To this end, we note that Australia has only provided limited incorporation of its obligations under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* into domestic law.

There is need for the development of a national framework for the protection of the rights of Indigenous children that integrates these issues. We also see the need for the United Nations to provide an improved focus on these issues – such as through the development of a global report on Indigenous children – to be coordinated through UNICEF and with the input of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Madam Chair, the Australian Indigenous Peoples' Caucus supports the view of the Youth Caucus that young indigenous people play an important role in building solutions in our communities. Our communities are often much younger than non-indigenous communities. As a result, if indigenous peoples are to create meaningful and lasting change in their communities, it is necessary that young people are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of solutions.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples

The Australian Indigenous Caucus reiterates its support for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, noting in particular the urgent need for global co-operation and strengthening the co-operation between States and Indigenous Peoples.

We note that the new government in Australia has committed to the completion of a 'National Report Card' on the socio-economic position of Indigenous peoples, in particular the 10 year target of 'Closing the Gap' as it relates to Indigenous health.

We congratulate the Government in this regard and see this as a step in the right direction. We note, however, the continued absence of a national plan of action and the implementation of domestic policy as it relates to the objectives and priorities as defined in Resolution 59/174 of the Report of the Secretary-General, 'Draft Program of Action' for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples' (A/60/270).

The Australian Government must recognise the central role that Indigenous peoples can play in developing policies affecting their lives. This requires the urgent dedication of adequate resources and technical expertise to support Australia's Indigenous peoples in designing and implementing a range of projects at the community, regional and national levels. Projects developed in support of the full expression of the human rights of Australia's Indigenous peoples through a national plan of action will go a long way to supporting at a national level the objectives of the Second International Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples.

We further note the General Assembly declaration made in December 2007 for the Second Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. We recognize that Indigenous communities across the world are disproportionately affected by poverty, which needs to be adequately reflected in the mandate and the plan of action for the Second Decade

## Urban Indigenous peoples and migration

As demonstrated by the 2006 census data very little economic opportunity exists for Indigenous people who wish to remain on their traditional lands outside of general colonial industries such as pastoralism and mining. Many non-Indigenous commentators in Australia use such evidence to argue for the closing down of remote Indigenous communities and the forced migration of people to urban and rural locations. This is not the answer as 'culture based economies' have demonstrated their benefits for Indigenous people who remain on country, while also serving the broader public interest.

Culture based economies are not just a concept, but a growing practice that first and foremost enables Indigenous peoples to exercise choices around economic development while fostering the provision of effective environmental services. Culture based economies combine Indigenous livelihoods with economic development strategies that work primarily through Indigenous people living on country.

As we have previously stated in this forum 'the freedom to choose where we live is a cultural right just as much as it is an act of self-determination'.

Madam Chairperson, there is a contradiction within the general Australian psyche that implies that in spite of our socio-economic disadvantage Indigenous peoples living in remote and rural areas are at least culturally rich, while urban Indigenous Australians live in cultural poverty. It is true that Indigenous Australians endure horrific levels of socio-economic disadvantage, but so too do many urban Indigenous peoples. What is not true is that urban Indigenous peoples live in cultural poverty.

Urban Indigenous people must manage effective bi-cultural lifestyles often at the risk of having their identities questioned by many elements of the mainstream society. It further leads to the false assumption that mainstream service providers can meet the needs of urban Indigenous Australians.

The mainstreaming of contemporary service delivery for Indigenous Australians combined with the ongoing removal of our children from their families is little more than a hybrid of past government's forced assimilation policies. Formal apologies for the actions of past governments must now be followed by the development of policy – in concert with Indigenous peoples – which ensures the effective delivery of services for urban Indigenous peoples; promotes the retention and protection of cultures, identities and heritage.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Permanent Forum urge states, relevant UN agencies and indigenous people's organizations to, where they have the capacity, include young indigenous people in any meetings in preparation for the sessions of the Permanent Forum and on their delegations to the Permanent Forum.**

2. The Australian Delegation encourages the UN Permanent Forum to call upon all States to re-commit to the goals and actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.
3. We recommend the Permanent Forum strongly urge Member States to implement the principles and goals of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
4. We further recommend the Permanent Forum call upon all Member States to dedicate and allocate adequate resources to support Indigenous peoples in implementing with governments national plans of action that includes support for participation at relevant international fora.
5. We also recommend that the Permanent Forum encourage Member States to provide regular reports under this action item so that they may be assessed and reviewed by all relevant parties.
6. The Permanent Forum consider as an agenda point in their next session the Second Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.