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ARCHIVES

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

EIGHTH SESSION

31 JULY 1990

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE NORTHERN AND CENTRAL LAND COUNCILS

MADAM CHAIR,

FELLOW INDIGENOUS PEOPLES,

FRIENDS OF THE STRUGGLE.

IT IS MY PLEASURE AND PRIVILEGE TO TRAVEL ACROSS THE GLOBE TO ADDRESS THIS FORUM AND SHARE WITH YOU OUR COMMON HISTORY OF DISPOSSESSION, REPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT IS LIKE TO BE SECOND CLASS CITIZENS IN OUR OWN LANDS AND TO FEEL THE BITTERNESS OF NOT BEING ABLE TO CONTROL OUR OWN DESTINIES IN A FREE AND SELF-DETERMINED MANNER.

OUR LAND IS CENTRAL TO OUR CULTURE.

ONE CANNOT FREELY EXIST WITH OUT THE OTHER, BECAUSE OF OUR SPIRITUALITY.

THE LAND HOLDS THE SITES OF OUR ANCESTRAL BEINGS AND SACRED SITES WITHOUT WHICH OUR CULTURE DIES . ALREADY WE HAVE WITNESSED THE DESECRATION AND DESTRUCTION OF OVER 90% OF OUR SACRED SITES AND DREAMING TRACKS ACROSS AUSTRALIA .

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MADAM CHAIR ."OUR LAND IS OUR LIFE".

MADAM CHAIR .I WOULD NOW LIKE TO PRESENT TO THIS FORUM OUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF LAND AND LIFE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF OUR ART.

THIS PAINTING IS A GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF A CULTURE THAT HAS SURVIVED FOR OVER 60,000 YEARS AND THE RELIGIOUS ACTS PERFORMED BY MEMBERS OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE TOTEMIC CENTRES . THESE RELIGIOUS ACTS ARE SEEN AS INDISPENSIBLE FOR THE CONTINUATION OF ALL HUMAN, ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE IN OUR COUNTRY.

EVEN NOW, MADAM CHAIR, OUR LANDS AND SITES ARE BEING THREATENED BY POWERFUL AND WEALTHY MINING INTERESTS WHICH MAINTAIN A RIGOROUS PUBLIC CAMPAIGN AGAINST ABORIGINAL CONTROL OF SACRED SITES AND LANDS .

THESE ARGUMENTS ARE BY AND LARGELY SUPPORTED BY THE CONSERVATIVE MEDIA AND ALL GOVERNMENTS IN AUSTRALIA .

THIS SITUATION MADAM CHAIR IS LUDICROUS AND UNTENABLE BECAUSE WE NOW HAVE POLITICIANS WHO CAN DETERMINE BY SOME FORM OF ACTION OR INACTION OF WHAT DESIGNATES THE SIGNIFICANCE OR VALUE OF OUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

IF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CANNOT ASSIST IN THE PROPER PROTECTION OF THESE BASIC FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS , THEN THE FORMER STATEMENTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES ARE MERE RHETORIC AND MUST BE DISMISSED AS SUCH.

MADAM CHAIR. PRIOR TO EUROPEAN OCCUPATION , APPROXIMATELY 15 MILLION ABORIGINALS LIVED AND DIED IN OUR LANDS. TODAY OUR PEOPLES NUMBER LESS THAN 300,000.

SINCE THE 1967 REFERENDUM, WHICH RECOGNISED EQUAL RIGHTS AND ALSO ALLOWED US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS , WE HAVE WITNESSED A SERIES OF BROKEN PROMISES AND MISLEADING STATEMENTS EVEN IN THIS VERY FORUM.

IN PARTICULAR, WE REMEMBER THE PROMISE TO THIS WORKING GROUP OF A FORMER MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIFORM NATIONAL LAND RIGHTS LEGISLATION.;

THE PROPOSAL OF THE MAKARATA IN RELATION TO WHICH THE NAC (NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE) STARTED NEGOTIATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY; THE JOINING IN 1988 OF THE PRIME MINISTER WITH ABORIGINAL LEADERS IN THE SIGNING OF THE "BARUNGA " STATEMENT, PROMISING THE COMENCEMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS FOR A TREATY BY THE END OF THAT CALENDAR YEAR AND IN THE LIFE OF HIS GOVERNMENT .

THE RAPIDLY DETERIORATING SITUATION MADAM CHAIR IS ONE IN WHICH PROMISES OF A TREATY HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY MERE DISCUSSION OF A PROCESS OF AN "INSTRUMENT OF RECONCILIATION".

IN CLOSING MADAM CHAIR , UNLESS WE RECIEVE AN UNEQUIVOCAL GUARANTEE OF CONTROL OVER AND PROTECTION OF OUR LANDS, OUR SACRED SITES, OUR SKELETAL REMAINS AND CULTURAL ARTEFACTS , IN YEARS TO COME PAINTINGS LIKE THE ONE WE HAVE JUST SHOWN YOU WILL HANG ONLY IN MUSEUMS AS RELICS OF A CULTURE WHICH NO LONGER EXISTS

MADAM CHAIR , I THANK YOU FOR THE TIME YOU HAVE ALLOWED ME FOR MY PRESENTATION ,AND I NOW WISH TO CONVEY A MESSAGE TO OUR INDIGENOUS BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

THEY HAVE TAKEN MUCH AND THEY WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE MORE. THEY MAY TAKE US IN OUR HUMAN FORM , BUT THEY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO TAKE OUR SPIRIT BECAUSE THAT ALONE IS OURS