

WGIP Agenda Item 6(f) – Disappearance of States

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC CAUCUS

Presented by Terry Widders

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

The Pacific Caucus of Indigenous Peoples welcomes the Working Paper prepared by Mrs Hampson and appreciated the range of technical issues that have been identified.

We are sorry that many of the Indigenous Peoples from the Pacific – including those who may soon be devastated by environmental change - do not have the ability to be here for this discussion.

We ask the Voluntary Fund to give special consideration to bringing more Pacific Islanders to the meetings in 2005 so that they can make special presentations to the Working Group and to the Permanent Forum.

We also ask the UN and international organisations, like the Commonwealth, to help us hold meetings in the Pacific region to discuss the issues of this working paper. It is silly that the people who are to be affected are not alerted to these problems.

There are also many other problems to be considered, e.g., climate change can make islands uninhabitable because of changing rain patterns, destructive storms, or the disappearance of coral reefs by warming of the seas.

Another problem is that looming devastation, itself, will cause rising tensions between groups and between the government and the people. We can see that the people may lose faith in their political representatives if they cannot answer questions or show that they are best dealing with the crisis.

We agree with Mrs Hampson's recommendation that a questionnaire might be sent to those States at risk. However we want to emphasise how important it is to ensure that the people are given information and the greatest opportunity to think and make decisions.

We also consider that this issue will greatly affect the confidence of all of the island nations in the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans.

It will also affect other Indigenous Peoples in these regions who do not have statehood. Many peoples, including Maori, Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, and Hawaiians, live in tribal or clan groups in island communities.

They face the same issues regarding the survival of Indigenous identity, but they do not have status in the United Nations, or in intergovernmental organisations, and their destiny can be in the hands of detached government.

In the Pacific region we are looking to hold regional meetings of the Indigenous Peoples to discuss identify and deal with the important issues. We need support to have these meetings, and we will need support to organise our agendas and receive legal and technical instruction.

We hope that the Working Group can help us to increase our resources for dealing with important issues such as these, and we look forward to bringing ideas and answers to the next session of the Working Group.