

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

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**Presented by: Sasha R. Purcell**

Item 9: Future work of the Expert Mechanism, including focus of future thematic studies

Chair and Expert Mechanism, Thank you for giving me the floor, I am honored to contribute to the Twelfth Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in my capacity as delegate of the United Nations Association of Australia- Qld Division.

My name is Sasha Purcell and I am a Torres Strait Islander from the Torres Strait (Zenadth Kes). I belong to the Whaleboat family. The Torres Strait and the inhabitants are the Indigenous people of the Torres Strait Islands which is part of Queensland, Australia. More than 200 Islands make up the Torres Strait comprising island peoples living in the north of Queensland at the Papua New Guinea border. The Torres Strait Treaty is maintained between Australian and Papua New Guinea on those 17 inhabited islands, and administered locally.

I speak here today to suggest climate change as a future thematic study for the expert mechanism as these ongoing repercussions of climate change continue to destroy the Torres Strait. This suggested study will be a continuation on the current study on Indigenous people's rights in the context of borders, migration and displacement as the issue of permanent displacement resulting from Climate Change is the disheartening reality in the Torres Strait.

The risks posed by the impact of climate change are having a snowball effect on the levels of health, security, and spiritual connection and threaten to exacerbate many economic, social and health inequalities.

The Torres Strait is particularly vulnerable to increasing severity and frequency of extreme events such as El Niño, resulting in drinkable water shortages, exposed sacred burial sites and decreased traditional ocean, plant and animal resources. A loss of island land is not just a loss of physical location, it is the loss of belonging, it is the loss of ancestral bond, it is the loss of spiritual connection and if things do not change it will slowly but surely be the loss of traditional life for the Torres Strait Islander people.

I know that this is not an isolated issue for the Torres Strait and climate change continues to scourge Indigenous people from all over the world and we have heard several distinct examples from different Indigenous voices and I thank them for bringing this important issue to the attention of the expert mechanism.

I urge that the modality of the study be carefully considered to ensure that all voices of Indigenous people are heard on this important issue and I urge the mechanism to consider 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 western based models of qualitative and quantitative research models. The engagement should be transparent, meaningful and genuine. Engagement and the undertaking of this study will improve United Nations' efforts in supporting, promoting and protecting Indigenous human rights and will afford Indigenous people another avenue for their voices to be heard.

**Thank you Chairperson.**