



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail [australia@un.int](mailto:australia@un.int)

150 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 [www.australia-unsc.gov.au](http://www.australia-unsc.gov.au)

20 October 2014

## **General Assembly, Third Committee Agenda Item 65**

### **“Rights of Indigenous Peoples”**

**Statement by Tanisha Hewanpola  
First Secretary  
Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

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Thank you Madam Chair

Australia is deeply committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, domestically and around the world.

Australia welcomes the success of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the adoption of the conference outcome document by consensus. This historic meeting of the world’s leaders and indigenous peoples from around the globe is a critical next step in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples. It calls to action all people, all States and the United Nations system to ensure that the rights of the indigenous peoples are protected.

Australia reaffirms the importance of the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the United Nations on issues which affect them and

welcomed the inclusion of indigenous people in the preparatory processes of the World Conference.

Australia recognises the critical role of indigenous women and girls in the sustainable development of their communities, their indigenous women's organisations and the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. Australia strongly supports States' commitments to empower indigenous women as contained in the outcome document.

Australia notes however that indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence and aggregated forms of discrimination. Australia remains deeply committed to the elimination of violence against indigenous peoples. Australia welcomes commitments to intensify efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against indigenous peoples, particularly women and children, youth, older persons and persons with a disability.

Australia is doing its part to safeguard the rights of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia proudly supports the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We remain committed to ensuring that the rights contained within the Declaration are supported, and to working collaboratively with States and indigenous peoples to share perspectives and best practices to achieve the ends of the Declaration.

The Australian Government has placed indigenous issues at the front and centre of its reform agenda and we are committed to ensuring our policies

and programmes make meaningful, positive and sustainable changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

One of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's first decisions was to elevate responsibility for Indigenous Affairs into his own portfolio, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, in order to give national prominence to Indigenous issues.

For over a decade Prime Minister Abbott has spent time each year working and living in remote Indigenous communities to gain a personal understanding of the lives and needs of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Prime Minister Abbott has reaffirmed his commitment to continuing these visits. In September this year he effectively shifted the centre of our national Government from our capital Canberra to the lands of the Yolngu people in remote Arnhem Land in Northern Australia, accompanied by Ministers, parliamentary colleagues, and senior Government officials.

The Australian Government is committed to better engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on decisions that affect their lives. In July 2014 the Australia Government introduced the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, a \$4.8 billion dollar programme designed to achieve real results in the key priority areas of getting children to school, adults into work, and building safer communities. The Australian Government works in partnership with indigenous peoples, communities, industry and service providers to achieve these priorities, which remain critical to achieving long-term improvements in the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Australia's journey towards reconciliation is on-going. As a critical next step, the Australian Government is committed to pursuing recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

Constitutional recognition would acknowledge our shared history and the value we place on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples heritage. While constitutional change is difficult in Australia – it requires a referendum with support from a national majority of voters and a majority of voters in a majority of states - the Australian Government is committed to work towards a referendum which will recognise in our founding document the rightful place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as our nation's first peoples.

In September 2013, Prime Minister Abbott established the Indigenous Advisory Council, whose role is to advise Government on practical changes which can be made to improve the lives of Australian Indigenous peoples. Membership of the Council consists of twelve Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from a range of backgrounds and locations who provide a variety of views and experience. The Council engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including existing Australian Indigenous advocacy bodies, individuals, industry and organisations to ensure that the Government has access to a diversity of views.

As we finalise the elaboration of the Post-2015 development agenda, Australia reaffirms that it is critical that indigenous peoples are not left behind. Australia calls on all States to ensure that indigenous peoples are considered in the elaboration of the new development agenda.