

Questionnaire to Governments

The report of the 13th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues provides a number of recommendations within its mandated areas, some of which are addressed to Member States.

The Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues invites Governments to complete the attached short questionnaire on any action taken or planned in response to the Permanent Forum's recommendations. All the questionnaire responses from Governments will be compiled into one report for the fourteenth session of the Permanent Forum.

Please submit your completed questionnaire by **1 January 2015** to:

Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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The questionnaire can also be downloaded from this site:

<http://undesadspd.org/IndigenousPeoples/UNPFIIISessions/Fourteenth/Questionnaire.aspx>

Question 1

Briefly state what recommendations from the Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)¹ or recommendations from previous sessions (not included in previous reports) that have been addressed by your Government. Where possible, also provide information on the situation of indigenous women.

Australia is a federation of six states which, together with three self-governing territories, have their own parliaments, governments and laws. The Australian Constitution establishes the Commonwealth Government, referred to here as the Australian Government, defines its structure, powers and procedures, and defines the rights and obligations of the states in relation to the Commonwealth. The policies and programmes described below include Australian Government initiatives and initiatives agreed by state and territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments. They demonstrate the Australian Government's support for Indigenous people, in line with the aspirations of the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, the Outcome Document of the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and recommendations in the Report on the Thirteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The Australian Government has a clear reform agenda to work with Indigenous Australians and communities to achieve real, practical and demonstrable improvements in their lives, recognising the special place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold in the nation. Action is focussed on:

- making sure children go to school;
- getting adults into work;
- making sure communities are safer to live in and that the rule of law is applied; and
- achieving recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution.

The Government is also focused on improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. This will support the Government's efforts towards getting children to school, adults into work and making communities safer.

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy² commenced on 1 July 2014 with funding of \$4.8 billion over four years. The Strategy replaced more than 150 individual programmes and activities with five flexible, broad-based programmes that will focus on achieving results in the Government's key priority areas of education, employment and community safety. The five broad programmes are:

- Jobs, Land and Economy
- Children and Schooling
- Safety and Wellbeing
- Culture and Capability
- Remote Australia Strategies.

¹ The following paragraphs of the Report on the Thirteenth Session of the Permanent Forum (E/2013/43) contain recommendations addressed to Member States: 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 33, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 53, 62, 63, 64, 65, 73, 74

² Principles of good governance consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples

So that decisions can be made closer to the people and communities they affect, the Government's Indigenous Affairs Network will move to a regional model. These reforms will ensure devolved decision-making closer to local Indigenous communities to achieve more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage and improving the education, employment and health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is also a high priority for Australian governments. In 2008 Australian Governments agreed to six Closing the Gap targets addressing life expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment. An additional school attendance target was agreed in 2014. The Prime Minister reports annually on progress towards achieving the Closing the Gap targets.

The Closing the Gap targets are:

- Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- Ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade
- Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance.

Australia is on track to achieve some of these targets, however, more needs to be done to improve outcomes in the areas of school attendance, literacy and numeracy, employment and life expectancy.

Children to School - Australia is committed to working collaboratively with communities to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students³, no matter where they live, where they go to school or their personal circumstances. A complex range of factors affect achieving education outcomes, including socioeconomic status, health issues, participation in preschool and school attendance.

Many children in remote communities are not going to school every day, with attendance in some locations very low. Australia aims to increase attendance rates in remote schools so all children get a good education. The Remote School Attendance Strategy works with schools, families, parents, and community organisations. The Strategy is being implemented in partnership with communities and schools and is designed to be driven by communities to suit their local needs. The Strategy aims to break the cycle of non-attendance and ensure parents and carers take responsibility for educating their children. This Strategy has delivered improvements in school attendance, with attendance increasing in most of the schools involved.

The Australian Government is also working closely with States and Territories through the Council of Australian Governments to lift attendance levels with a focus on compliance and ensure children get a

³ Support for Indigenous youth in line with OP15 of the Outcomes Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

decent education that can open up opportunities later in life. Australian governments have also agreed a Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages which is linked to the Australian Curriculum.

Adults into Work - Supporting employment⁴ is one of the Australian Government's top priorities in Indigenous affairs. Having a job helps people build the future they want for their families and communities. Employment and the opportunity to own a home, run a business, and provide for themselves and their families will mean a strong future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In July 2015, the Australian Government will implement a new national employment services system, which will introduce Indigenous Outcomes Targets to increase focus on outcomes for Indigenous job seekers.

The Australian Government is also supporting new demand-driven Vocational Training and Employment Centres. This initiative will see unemployed Indigenous Australians receive practical training with a guaranteed job at the end.

The Australian Government has a long history of working with Indigenous people, particularly in natural resource management and heritage related activities. The Australian Government recognises and respects the knowledge Indigenous people have in managing Australia's land, fresh water and sea, and in conserving biodiversity. The Working on Country Indigenous ranger programme continues to deliver successful environmental outcomes and provides important opportunities for Indigenous employment as land and sea managers.

The Government commissioned a review of Indigenous training and employment programmes to ensure Indigenous training and employment services are properly targeted and administered to connect unemployed Indigenous people with real and sustainable employment. As a part of its response to the Review, the Government has recently announced major reforms to strengthen the employability and employment outcomes of all job seekers in remote Australia. This includes stronger incentives for providers to support long-term job outcomes, funding for local businesses to provide real pathways to employment, and new financial incentives for employers to employ job seekers from remote communities.

Community Safety and Access to justice - Ensuring the law of the land operates in Indigenous communities is one of the Australian Government's top three priorities in Indigenous Affairs. The Government wants the standards of law and order that exist in other areas across Australia to apply equally in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Australians are substantially over-represented in the justice system. The Government believes the reduction of violence is key to achieving safer Indigenous communities where people can make a living and raise healthy families. The Australian Government is working with Indigenous people to reduce the rate of victimisation and offending and address the underlying issues that lead to high rates of contact with the criminal justice system. Key to the Australian Governments efforts in reducing violence, victimisation and offending is to ensure that Indigenous people are educated and employed.

⁴ UNPEII 2014 Report para 48 'employment, and the recognition of traditional occupations and livelihoods of indigenous people

Specific actions aimed at reducing Indigenous contact with the justice system include family violence prevention legal services, women's legal services and prisoner through care. Work with state and territory governments to improve community safety, including through establishing new police infrastructure to support a permanent police presence in some remote Indigenous communities, is also being progressed.

In Australia, different groups of women⁵ have different experiences of violence and can be more vulnerable. Statistics show that Indigenous women experience higher levels of violence than non-Indigenous women. Australia's long-term National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 -2022, brings together Government's efforts to ensure Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities. Supporting Action Plans focus on foundations to stop and respond to violence and to address violent crimes of domestic, family and sexual assault.

Constitutional Recognition - The Australian Government is also committed to recognising the First Australians in the Australian Constitution. Recognising First Australians in the Constitution would acknowledge the shared history and the value placed on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

The Government has funded the 'Recognise' campaign, through Reconciliation Australia, to help build community awareness and support for Constitutional recognition. In March 2013 the Australian Parliament unanimously passed the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013* which recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of Australia and is a significant step towards a referendum for constitutional change. The Prime Minister has reaffirmed his commitment to holding a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution, and he hoped to see Australia vote on the issue by 2017.

Indigenous health and Indigenous Peoples with disabilities – The goal of Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (the Plan) is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the best possible mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. The Plan recognises the need to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing through initiatives that promote connections to traditional culture and land, Indigenous languages, family and community. The Plan also recognises the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be involved in the service planning, design and implementation of policies. Many Indigenous organisations manage and deliver alcohol and other drug treatment services, sport and active recreation and food security in remote locations. Under the IAS, the Safety and Wellbeing program supports the enhancement of Indigenous wellbeing and community safety. This includes grant funding through strategies known to enhance community safety, including the prevention of family violence, combating alcohol and other substance misuse, reducing offending and supporting victims of crime.

The Australian Government is developing a plan that sets out tangible actions in both specialist and mainstream policy and programme areas to improve life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability. The plan will sit alongside the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 second Implementation Plan which is expected to be published in mid-2015.

⁵ In line with OP17 of the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the Australian Government provides support for Indigenous women and girls

Consultation - The Australian Government is committed to a fresh approach that involves people on issues that affect them. This new way of working with Indigenous people, communities, industries, business and service providers, allows for joint development of solutions that will work over the long term.

The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council has been established. The Council provides on-going advice to the Government on emerging policy and implementation issues related to Indigenous affairs, and focuses on practical changes to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from a range of backgrounds and locations make up the Council which may undertake consultations with external experts in the field.

Indigenous land The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that Indigenous Australians living on Aboriginal land have the same opportunities as other Australians to benefit from long-term, tradable tenure that supports home ownership and economic development. This includes ensuring that there are accessible pathways for Indigenous people to leverage their land assets as part of the mainstream economy for the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. Land can be granted to Indigenous people under land rights legislation or recognised as being subject to native title rights.

The Council of Australian Governments recently announced a joint investigation into Indigenous land administration and land use. The investigation will focus on options to enable traditional owners to readily attract private sector investment and finance to develop their own land, with new industries and businesses to provide jobs and economic advancement for Indigenous people.

Indigenous languages - The Australian Government recognises the importance of Australia's Indigenous languages and is committed to addressing language loss. Across Australia, a wide range of activities are funded by the Australian Government through the Indigenous Languages Support programme to maintain and revive Australian Indigenous languages. The Australian Government has also made a substantial funding contribution to Indigenous interpreting services since 2000 for initiatives to improve the supply of Indigenous interpreters.

Data collection and disaggregation by ethnicity, gender, indigenous identity, language, language skills and self-identification and improving data on self-harm for Indigenous children and youth
The Australian Government supports the collection of Indigenous status information (based on self-identification) across all major national data collections to assist reporting and ongoing monitoring of health, wellbeing and other social determinants as well as specific national surveys. Australia also supports Indigenous specific research and surveys including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS). The Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres programme supports Indigenous specific research which aims to address Indigenous social and economic disadvantage in remote Australia.

Reconciliation and healing -The Government has established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation which funds healing projects across a range of domains, building a professional workforce that can better respond to loss, grief and trauma in Indigenous communities.

The Australian Government funded the National Library of Australia to collect, preserve and make accessible to the public oral histories of those forcibly removed from their families (the Stolen Generations). The Government also funded the development of a publically accessible website where 50 members of the Stolen Generations tell their stories or testimonies.

Question 2

At its fourteenth session in 2015, the Permanent Forum will review the following areas:

- (a) Outcome of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, also known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples;
- (b) Post-2015 Development Agenda;
- (c) Youth, self-harm and suicide.

Please briefly state how your Government deals with these issues in regards to indigenous peoples.

- (a) Implementation of the Outcome of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, also known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

World Conference on Indigenous Peoples – Australia is a supporter of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the first meeting of its kind, held on 22-23 September 2014 in New York, and Australia supported the Outcome Document of the World Conference.

As a long-time supporter of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Australia co-sponsored the initial UN resolution establishing this event. The Australian Government provided support for Indigenous Australians to attend the World Conference to participate in their own capacity. Australia also made one of the highest contributions to the UN Voluntary Fund, which supports indigenous people from around the world to participate in international fora, including the World Conference.

Australia supported the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and looks forward to the continued positive engagement between Member States, Indigenous Peoples and United Nations agencies to help realise the goals of the Declaration. Australia continues to be an active participant in Indigenous international forums.

The aspirations of the World Conference Outcome Document are in alignment with Australia's support for its Indigenous peoples. The Australian Government is giving effect to these goals through policies and actions being taken across Indigenous Affairs as outlined above.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – The Australian Government is committed to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve improved outcomes. The Australian Government's priority areas of school attendance, employment and community safety will provide a basis to facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve their human rights and the opportunities available to all

Australians.

The Australian Government is committed to an approach to the Declaration which is consistent with its domestic and international obligations, including in respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is in line with our common goal of addressing Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

Relevant agencies within the Government liaise closely on relevant issues to ensure these are taken into account in policy and program development.

(b) Post-2015 Development Agenda and the inclusion of indigenous peoples in this process.

Australia is an active participant in international negotiations on the post-2015 Development Agenda, supporting continuation of the core elements of the Millennium Development Goals (including eradicating extreme poverty, making sure every child can attend school, and empowering women and girls) and a greater focus on economic growth, as private sector development and jobs creation are the primary drivers of poverty reduction.

(c) Youth, self-harm and suicide and how this is being addressed.

A key priority for the Government is to help reduce incidents of self-harm and suicide among Indigenous people. The Government is working with the community on this serious issue.

Australia is concerned that, while there are some positive trends in the wellbeing of Indigenous youth with improvements in health and education outcomes, the rate of deaths from suicide for Indigenous Australians was almost twice the rate for non-Indigenous Australians during 2008–2012. In addition, from 2004-05 to 2012-13 the hospitalisation rate for intentional self-harm increased for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians by 48.1 per cent, while the rate for other Australians remained relatively stable.

The Australian Government is working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group on strategic and practical ways to prevent suicide and improve the mental health of Indigenous people.

In addition, the Australian Government is supporting research on addressing youth suicide and self-harm through an Australia-wide programme tackling the high rates of suicide and other social and emotional wellbeing problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Australian Government has funded the University of Western Australia for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project to evaluate the effectiveness of existing suicide prevention strategies.

The Australian Government has also tasked the National Mental Health Commission to assess the effectiveness of all existing mental health programmes across both government and non-

government sectors to ensure that programs and services are as effective as possible.

Question 3

What are some of the obstacles your Government has encountered in implementing the recommendations of the Permanent Forum?

Australia seeks to continue to implement the recommendations of the Permanent Forum and continues to address Indigenous disadvantage.

Question 4

What are some of the factors that facilitate your Government's implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum?

The Australian Government supports a practical approach to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The priority areas of school attendance, employment and reducing violence will provide a basis to facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve basic human rights and the opportunities available to all Australians.

As described in Question 1, practical reforms to engagement and service delivery will facilitate positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and ensure they have a greater say about how government services that affect them are delivered regionally.

Question 5

Please provide information on how your Government currently promotes and/or implement the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Australia continues to support the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While the Declaration is not legally binding, it remains useful and relevant to help inform the direction of policy, programmes and legislation. Australia shares the underlying commitment to deliver real and lasting improvements for Indigenous peoples and their communities. The Australian Government is committed to an approach to the Declaration which is consistent with its domestic and international obligations, including in respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Australia issued its statement of support for the Declaration in April 2009. The Declaration recognises the rich heritage of indigenous peoples and their entitlement to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Government has clear priorities in Indigenous affairs: to focus on making sure children go to school so they receive a good education; working with leaders, communities, individuals and employers to get adults into work; making sure communities are safer to live in and that the

rule of law is applied; and achieving constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For information on the implementation of policies and programmes please see the response to Question 1.