



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

21 October 2013

Third Committee

Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement by Senator Chris Back

MrChairman,

Australia supports the high priority given to Indigenous issues by the United Nations and its Member States, including through the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

In Australia, Indigenous issues are being accorded the highest priority by the new Government. Indigenous Australians deserve a better future with improved education, more job opportunities, empowered individuals, communities and higher standards of living.

Mr Chairman,

The Australian Prime Minister is a strong advocate for Indigenous Australians and has given primacy to addressing these issues. Indigenous policies, programmes and service delivery have been moved into the Prime Minister's own Department and there is also a Minister for Indigenous

Affairs within Cabinet. In addition there is a Parliamentary Secretary to assist with delivering programme outcomes for Indigenous Australians. This framework presents a unique opportunity for issues concerning Indigenous peoples to be at the heart of decision-making, ensuring it is a priority across all areas of Government.

We must also ensure greater involvement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decisions that affect them, and ensure that policies, programmes and service delivery are effective in producing better outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

To assist in achieving this, Australia is establishing a Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with a broad range of skills, including experience in the public sector, business acumen and a strong understanding of Indigenous culture. The Council will inform the policy implementation of the Government.

Indigenous people should be properly honoured for their contribution to Australia including through Constitutional recognition.

An acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians would complete our Constitution, not simply amend it. The process to change our Constitution is not an easy one and it is important to get the wording right. The intention is to draft the constitutional amendment within 12 months with a view to putting it to the Australian people in a referendum. The key objective will be to achieve a unifying moment for the nation.

Mr Chairman,

At the global level, the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples is an opportunity for States, civil society, and Indigenous peoples to collaborate on ways to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples. Australia has supported the development of the World Conference.

Australia recognises that it has a way to go to address the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but it is committed to better engagement with its Indigenous peoples to ensure policies and programmes achieve real, positive change in their lives. We welcome progress in the international sphere to advance the rights of the world's Indigenous peoples.

Thank you, MrChairman.