Australia’s Statement - CEDAW Virtual Day of General Discussion on the Rights of Indigenous Women and Girls

Australia acknowledges the Indigenous traditional owners and custodians of country in Australia and throughout the world. Australia acknowledges Indigenous peoples have continuing connection to land, waters and community. Australia also acknowledges Indigenous women and girls who contribute to the work of the CEDAW Committee, and whose rights will be protected by the General Recommendation.

Australia welcomes the Committee’s efforts to develop a General Recommendation in this vital area of the rights of Indigenous women and girls. The Committee’s guidance through its general recommendations is a valuable source of direction for States Parties.

In Australia, as in many other nations, Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionately high levels of violence compared to non-Indigenous women, and violence is often more severe in its impact on families. Indigenous Australian women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence than non-Indigenous Australian women. Indigenous Australian women are 3.4 times more likely to experience sexual assault, and 11 times more likely to die due to assault than non-Indigenous Australian women.

The Australian Government has zero tolerance for any form of violence against women. This is why reducing violence against women and children, including Indigenous women, is a national priority of all Australian governments.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are essential to the strength, protection and revitalisation of their families, communities, and cultures, playing pivotal leadership roles in their families and communities.

Recognising the importance of Indigenous voices, the Australian Government is developing the details of an Indigenous Voice through a co-design process, including with Indigenous women and men. Public consultation across Australia has recently concluded with more than 9400 participants engaging in conversations and providing feedback on proposals for an Indigenous Voice.

Over the past three years, Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Ms June Oscar AO, has led the Wiyi Yani U Thangani or Women’s Voices national conversation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls across Australia to understand better their aspirations and challenges, and to identify what might be done to improve their personal, cultural and socio-economic security.

Throughout 2018, the Commissioner and her team travelled to 50 locations in urban, regional and remote areas across every state and territory of Australia. They conducted 106 separate engagements and met with almost 2300 Indigenous women of all ages – including senior elders, women living with disability, girls from 12 to 17, women in prison, and those from the LGBTI and other communities. Over 100 submissions and 300 survey responses were also received.

The Commissioner’s consultations have explored all aspects of Indigenous women and girls’ experiences, including their strengths, challenges and aspirations for the future. The seven overarching recommendations of the report set out key structural reforms to address cross-cutting systemic issues of marginalisation, trauma and intersectional discrimination, and to shift fundamentally how Australian Governments engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Wiyi Yani U Thangani was guided by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the following principles:

* Self-determination, particularly the right for women and girls to shape their own lives, including their economic, social, cultural and political futures.
* Participation in all levels of decision-making.
* Respect for, and protection of, cultural traditions, values, intellectual property and Indigenous languages.
* Equality and non-discrimination.

These foundational principles should also be key to the elaboration of this CEDAW General Recommendation.

One woman who was part of Wiyi Yani U Thangani sums up why protecting the rights of Indigenous women and girls is so important. She said:

*“We want to be able to participate, because we are a part of this country, but we still have to maintain who we are, we need be who we are and not lose ourselves in the process.”*

Australia looks forward to working with the CEDAW Committee to improve the rights of Indigenous women and girls, while making sure they are who they are and do not lose themselves in the process.

1. The The Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women’s Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future Report can be found online at: <https://wiyiyaniuthangani.humanrights.gov.au/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)