



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ORGANIZATION (IPO) AUSTRALIA



EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

13TH SESSION

PACIFIC AND ASIA REGIONAL MEETING: 1 DECEMBER 2020

Agenda Item:

The impact of COVID-19 on the rights of indigenous peoples under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Intervention delivered by Cathryn Eatock, as Co-Chair of The Indigenous Peoples Organisation -Australia

Thank you distinguished members of EMRIP, I'm Cathryn Eatock, a Gayiri/Badtjula woman and Co-Chair of the Indigenous Peoples' Organisation of Australia. The IPO is a coalition of 288 Aboriginal organisations and members who advocate for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I would like to first acknowledge the almost 1.5 million deaths globally to date from this pandemic.

Given the chronic health concerns and overcrowding, Aboriginal people are particularly vulnerable to Covid 19. In response, Aboriginal communities called on State Governments to lock-down discreet Aboriginal communities. This cooperation and quick response protected our most vulnerable communities. However, it has emphasised the susceptibility of Aboriginal people and the critical need to address those vulnerabilities.

Covid is more deadly where comorbidities occur. For Aboriginal people, poverty and poor living conditions contribute to a heavier health burden. Diabetes rates are 13% among Aboriginal adults, with a death rate 5.2 times that of non-Indigenous people¹. Kidney disease and renal failure was 6.8 times the rate of non-Indigenous peoples, 18 times in the Northern Territory. While cardiovascular disease rates are at 18% in remote regions².

Cancer accounted for 9% of the disease burden for Aboriginal people³ and chronic respiratory disease is the third leading cause of death, while our babies are 4.5 times more likely to die⁴. The failure to address disparities in health care leaves Aboriginal communities particularly vulnerable to Covid.

Overcrowding and homelessness significantly increase the threat of transmission of Covid. Yet 18% of Aboriginal people experienced overcrowding, 28% lived in substandard housing⁵ and 29% of Aboriginal people have experienced homelessness⁶.

¹ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet(2018) *Summary of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Status 2018*, Edith Cowen University p13

² Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2018) *Summary of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Status 2018*, Edith Cowen University p10

³ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2018) *Summary of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Status 2018*, Edith Cowen University p11

⁴ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2018) *Summary of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Status 2018*, Edith Cowen University p17.

⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p22.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) 4714.0 - *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15*,

In remote regions 49% experienced overcrowding, with more than 20 people per house⁷, causing sewage overflow⁸. The Remote Housing Review found 13% of showers were not functioning; 19% of houses were not electrically safe; 9% didn't have a working toilet; and 76% didn't have a working kitchen⁹.

Overcrowding negatively impacts physical and mental health¹⁰, children's school attendance¹¹ and is a key contributing factor for assault and sexual assault¹². Adequate housing underpins improvements across all social indicators and is critical to meet Australia's 'Closing the Gap' targets. The building and maintenance of housing could also provide crucial employment and training opportunities for our people.

We recommend EMRIP add Covid19 to its annual agenda, requesting Nation States report on their efforts to address Covid and the disparity in health and housing, to counter the susceptibility of Indigenous communities.

⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p20.

⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, pp16-17.

⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p18

¹⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p15.

¹¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p19.

¹² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018) *The Remote Housing Review 2008-2018: A Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy 2008-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, p19.