

**International Indigenous Health leaders
call for improvement in the health of
Australia's Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.**

The Aotearoa Declaration

18 October 2007
Rotorua, Aotearoa/New Zealand

The International Network of Indigenous Health Knowledge Development (INIHKD), meeting in Rotorua, Aotearoa/New Zealand has declared its support for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia.

INIHKD is a global network of Indigenous elders, traditional healers, academics, researchers, doctors, educators, nurses, psychologists, social workers, health workers, peak health organizations, health service managers and policy makers.

INIHKD addresses three main themes – improving Indigenous health by sharing outcomes, experiences and solutions; using knowledge to transform and improve health by putting knowledge into practice; and contributing to Indigenous workforce, research, health service capacity building and development.

As Indigenous Peoples we have deep, strong and eternal connections with all of our Indigenous brothers and sisters through our common bond - our mother earth.

We have responsibilities to our ancestors and to those who in the future will remember us as their ancestors. We must maintain and protect our culture, our language, our identity for these are the things that keep us in wellness now and make for a strong future.

As an international community of health leaders, we bear witness to the human rights violations against our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives in Australia. Such violations occur in all corners of the world. We affirm our collective resolve to fight injustice against our Peoples.

After 20 years of negotiation, we observe that four countries voted against the ratification of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* on 13 September 2007. These countries - Australia, Canada, the United States of America and New Zealand – are diminished in the international community as a result of this action. The citizens of these recalcitrant countries must demand more of their political leaders.

Under the United Nations *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, (ICESCR), in particular Article 12, everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, of which Australia has been a signatory to since 1976. The ICESCR is the principal framework for the universal right to health.

We are comforted in our knowing that our ancestors are with us always and we commit to continuing their legacy to achieve justice for all.

Over the coming weeks the Australian people will be deciding on a new government. We ask them to deeply consider the position of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders within Australia.

In exercising their democratic right, we call on them to support our democratic rights to a future that will make us all proud. A future that recognizes and respects Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders and our collective humanity to eliminate the existing 17 year life expectancy gap.

Specifically, the INIHKD calls on all Australian political parties to:

- Close the 17 yr life expectancy gap by half within 10 years, and completely within 25 years;
- Make constitutional change the highest priority. Any amendment to the Constitutional preamble must be accompanied by the substantive recognition of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders rights in the operative text;
- Demand that the incoming Australian Prime Minister deliver a formal apology;
- Establish dedicated Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders seats in both houses of the Australian Federal Parliament;
- Establish a legislated and democratically elected national Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders peak body. This body would negotiate with government to right the wrongs of the past; monitor the implementation of policies and reviews (past and present) and create strong future pathways;
- Respect Aboriginal and Islander knowledge and support Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders solutions;

- Make decisions based on the best evidence instead of the politically expedient;
- Appropriately and accurately count Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in all administrative data collections, ensuring that these collections are governed by Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders;
- Provide resources that match true need. Financing for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders health must mirror the actual state of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders health – three times the level of non Indigenous Peoples per capita for a disease burden at least three times greater;
- Repeal all discriminatory aspects of the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation.

18th October 2007