

Statement by Ms. Beverly Jacobs

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Fourth Session

United Nations, New York

May 16-27, 2004

Agenda item 3: Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals: Achieve universal primary education

May 19, 2004

### Statement by the Native Women's Association of Canada

Chairperson, members of the Permanent Forum, panelists, Indigenous sisters and brothers, my name is Sherry Lewis and I have the honour of addressing the Permanent Forum as the Executive Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada. I am a \*\*\* woman from \*\*\* community in Canada. I will speak about the challenges and strategies to attaining Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals, that is, to achieve universal primary education for Indigenous children, particularly girls.

In Canada, like many other parts of the world, the educational needs of our children are still inadequate. There are too few schools that provide culturally appropriate education in Indigenous languages. The needs of children with disabilities are not adequately met. Racism in the education system, and particularly gendered racism for Indigenous girls, hinders Indigenous children from enjoying a high quality education. Further, while achieving universal primary education for children is an important first step, this is not sufficient to ensure that Indigenous children, particularly girls, have the adequate levels of education to be self-sufficient as adults and live free from poverty.

Indigenous peoples continue to live in poverty at much greater rates than non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Indigenous women are poorer than Indigenous men and more likely to be lone parents of their children. The link between poverty and other socio-economic conditions, such as low educational and employment rates and high rates of ill health and violence, is well-documented. The sexual and reproductive health of girls and boys is hindered by a lack of comprehensive, accessible, available, acceptable sexual health services, including sexual health education within school systems. As a result, our youth suffer from high rates of HIV/AIDS. These trends are reflected in many Indigenous communities around the world.

Given these realities, the Native Women's Association of Canada recommends that the Permanent Forum:

1. Urge States to adopt measures necessary to create an enabling environment in the child's home, community and country. These include having her or his basic needs met and living free from violence and for Indigenous girls, barriers related to sexism and gendered racism, such as beliefs about the unimportance of education for girls, must be removed. In this regard, we recommend that the Permanent Forum urge States to adopt relevant recommendations from the report

of the Third Session of the Permanent Forum found in Annex I, Section IV, paragraph 7, particularly subparagraphs (a), (b)(i) to (iii), (vii), (viii) and (c).

2. Urge States to ensure that education for Indigenous children is universally provided in a culturally appropriate manner and in Indigenous languages, to be acceptable and accessible to Indigenous children. In this regard, we recommend that the Permanent Forum urge States to implement relevant recommendations from the report of the Third Session of the Permanent Forum found in Chapter I, Section B, paragraphs 16 to 19.
3. Urge States to provide gender-specific, culturally relevant sexual health education in order to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive rights and health of Indigenous children, particularly girls. By doing so, States will be implementing the recommendations of the Permanent Forum contained in the report of the Third Session in Chapter I, Section B., paragraphs 8, 14 and 17(g) (regarding Indigenous gender mainstreaming and non-discrimination).
4. Urge all relevant UN bodies, including UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, OHCHR, to take measures to achieve the second MDG and beyond, to achieving universal secondary and post-secondary education, for Indigenous Peoples, paying particular attention to the unique needs of Indigenous girls and women.

Thank you.