



**Statement on behalf of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN)
Network and International Indigenous Working Group on HIV & AIDS (IIWGHA),
Twelfth Session of UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) May 20-31, 2013
Agenda Item 3 (c): Culture**

Honorable Chairperson, Members of the Permanent Forum, distinguished representatives of Indigenous Peoples, sisters and brothers here today; The Native Youth Sexual Health Network, and International Indigenous Working Group on HIV and AIDS would like to increase the visibility of the need for culturally based sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice which receive little attention from human rights bodies generally due to the ongoing stigma of even talking about our culture and identity together with sexuality in the context of human rights.

This is especially true for the work of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network where culturally safe sex education which includes supporting coming of age ceremonies and rites of passage that include Indigenous understandings and knowledge about HIV and AIDS as well as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) prevention and healthy, consensual relationships - are all part of supporting the self-determination of Indigenous youth over their own bodies, spaces and cultural identities.

We reaffirm the eighth session recommendation (28) that an international expert workshop on the “Indigenous peoples and health, with a special emphasis on sexual and reproductive health” be revisited and that an inter-agency group of UN agencies convene a meeting led by Indigenous community organizations, working at the intersection of health, education and culture as it relates to sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice. This is supported by statements of the Permanent Forum (4th session, 110) referencing the Millennium Development Goals & sexual and reproductive health. However, the report from this meeting only indicates a report back from UNFPA on the reproductive health of Indigenous women. This meeting needs to include the right to practice our cultures includes issues of cultural and ancestral sexuality and gender identities, HIV and STI prevention and the promotion of healthy, consensual relationships that goes beyond sex simply for the purposes of reproduction.

We reaffirm session 4, paragraph 47 and paragraph 41 that speak to education as a conduit for combating prejudice and discrimination as well as the right of everyone to take part in cultural life. This includes Indigenous peoples living with HIV as well as the critical need for culture in the education of sexual health, HIV and addressing stigma of Indigenous Peoples living with HIV. We recommend that UNESCO follow-up on these recommendations as they relate to the role of culture in addressing the compound discrimination of racism, homophobia and transphobia faced by Indigenous peoples living with HIV including children and youth and in places where Nations states do not recognize the cultural and national identities of Indigenous Peoples.

We recommend everyone in this room to understand how you are contributing to, or dismantling stigma and discrimination associated with issues like sex education, HIV/AIDS, STIs or sexual health as part of 'living well' with our culture as a recommendation from session nine (11). Decolonizing our sexuality is also a part of our commitment to advance human rights. We also recommend the next time UNAIDS makes a report to the Permanent Forum that Indigenous peoples in those regions are given the opportunity to respond, as often these reports are not reflective of community realities.

As per session ten we additionally encourage that UNICEF, include in its ongoing implementation of recommendation 66 on data on Indigenous children and youth include increased epidemiological data with a focus on Indigenous ethnicity as this will help strengthen our claim that HIV and AIDS disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples not simply because of our cultural identity or individual behaviour but very real structural barriers. To date there is only one significant research paper that has addressed the number of HIV diagnoses for Indigenous peoples, released in 2011(1).

Following the cultural importance of Indigenous youth leadership to our communities, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network has facilitated the creation of 2 National Youth Councils on HIV/AIDS -the National Aboriginal Youth Council in Canada and the National Native American Youth Council in the United States - who have developed a strategic plan for their regions. In a joint statement from World AIDS Day in 2012 the two councils came together to issue a statement on behalf of Indigenous youth in North America and had this to say: "Our nations will be stronger if we centralize our conversations around support for youth to make decisions about their own bodies and share knowledge about HIV and AIDS. On this World AIDS Day theme of "Getting to Zero" let's also commit to getting to: Zero violence, Zero poverty, Zero suicides, Zero shame for who we are, what we aspire to be, and where we come from." We recommend that UN agencies (UNAIDS and UNICEF) and North American member states (Canada and the United States) support the work of these Indigenous youth councils' and engage them through full and effective participation in international discussions on HIV and AIDS and sexual health.

Thank you.

1 (Reference: Shea B, et al. HIV diagnoses in indigenous peoples: comparison of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. *Int Health* (2011), doi:10.1016/j.inhe.2011.03.010)

2 (Reference: National Aboriginal Youth Council on HIV/AIDS (NAYCHA), 2006, National Native American Youth Council on HIV and AIDS (NNYC-HIV), 2012)