

**OUTCOME DOCUMENT**

**North American and Arctic Regional Meeting**

**The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages**

23 – 26 June 2019

Victoria Convention Centre

Victoria, British Columbia,

Canada

On the margins of

the International Conference

HELISET TŦE SḰÁL – “Let the Languages Live”

24 – 26 June 2019

**PREAMLE**

The hundreds of Indigenous languages in **North America** are at various stages of reclamation, revitalization and maintenance due to the historical and political contexts that have shaped their current status, but each one is vital to the identity, health and well-being of Indigenous people and is an integral part of our collective cultural heritage. We must shift the emphasis from the “endangered” status of our languages and focus on ensuring the future of our languages. Many communities are seeing a resurgence of speakers through language planning and immersion-based strategies (language nests, school programs and methodologies for adults including silent speakers). We acknowledge recent positive steps in Canada including a $50 million commitment from the province of British Columbia and *Bill C-91, An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages*, at the national level. However, legislation must go beyond surface recognition of Indigenous languages and forge a real path for change. Fully funded national language strategies are critical to creating an environment in which Indigenous languages thrive alongside majority languages as part of a culturally rich society.

**Inuit** language is the foundation of culture and identity and its revitalization, maintenance, use, and promotion continue to be paramount. Such goals can only be achieved through concerted action, investment, and conveyance of official language status by States, sub-national governments and jurisdictions in which Inuit live, such that the stature of our language is elevated in society and resourced and supported accordingly. The Inuit language is among the most used in many regions. However, this does not diminish the urgent need to maintain its use among all Inuit, including language holders and silent speakers. We also recognize the need to be inclusive of various dialects and in particular, those that are endangered. Support is needed for Inuit language holders in teacher training curriculum with continued pedagogical support through all levels of schooling. For education to be effective throughout Inuit Nunaat, pedagogy must reflect values, culture and language, including the link between language, our unique Arctic environment and our knowledge. The *Utqiaġvik Declaration* supports the creation of pedagogies focused on Inuit values and culture with an overarching decolonizing perspective.

The traditional sources of livelihood are the basis of the **Sámi** languages. Securing the continuity of the traditional livelihoods is a crucial issue as regards to keeping the languages alive. The traditional Sámi-speaking area crosses the present state borders of the Nordic countries and the Kola Peninsula. The conditions are different in each State and for each Sámi language, which are all endangered. Strong efforts of the Sámi society have helped to improve the conditions of the Sámi for a long time, however, the development on the Kola Peninsula has not been at the same level as in the Nordic states. Cooperation on language issues provides cross-border work on terminology, language technology, media, literature, education and other areas but more has to be done to strengthen the cooperation. It is crucial for the Sámi languages that language legislation is adapted to the needs of the Sámi, that each language is adequately protected and supported, also, with fully financed language programmes. The connection between languages, culture and use of land and water must also be protected in legislation.

**PROCLAMATION**

1. As participants representing Indigenous peoples, public organizations, academia, representatives of cultural, information, and heritage organizations, public sector, and speakers of Indigenous peoples’ languages, inter-governmental organizations, and others gathered for the North American and Arctic Regional Meeting of the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) on the territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, Songhees and Esquimalt Nations [Victoria, BC, Canada], we adopted the following Proclamation on June 26, 2019[[1]](#footnote-1). This regional IYIL meeting was held in collaboration with the International Conference entitled HELISET TŦE SḰÁL - ‘Let the Languages Live’ conference, a significant event organized by and for Indigenous peoples and an important example of proactive initiatives to promote, protect and revitalize Indigenous peoples’ languages.
2. Recalling resolution A/RES/71/178 on the rights of Indigenous peoples, proclaiming 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Language[[2]](#footnote-2) to draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous peoples’ languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote Indigenous peoples’ languages and to take further urgent steps at the national and international levels, as well as mobilize stakeholders for coordinated actions around the world, and invites the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to serve as the lead agency for the Year, in collaboration with other relevant agencies, within existing resources, and endorsed Action plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (E/C.19/2018/8).
3. We welcome the Indigenous peoples’ processes related to the IYIL, including the global, regional and local Indigenous peoples’ conferences held in response to the International Year of Indigenous Languages and the full and effective engagement of the representatives of Indigenous peoples and organizations, as well as consultations launched by UNESCO to prepare a Strategic Outcome Document of the 2019 International Year in order to set future directions.
4. We reaffirm our support for the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007 and our commitments made to respect and recognize the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, including their right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, and by consulting and cooperating in good faith with Indigenous peoples through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing measures that may affect them, in accordance with the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration*. These rights are critical to the promotion, protection, use, access and revitalization of Indigenous peoples’ languages at the local, national, regional and international level.
5. We decry of all parties and their practices for the damage done of Indigenous peoples’ languages and persistent assimilation policies leading to the endangerment of cultural identity, including through residential schools that were operated, in part, to eradicate Indigenous peoples’ languages by forcing dominant languages and immersion on Indigenous children. We welcome processes of truth and reconciliation to address and remedy these injuries, including the intergenerational legacy of these direct historic harms. Similarly, States where Indigenous peoples’ languages were historically, or continue to this day, to be suppressed in ostensible support of national unity, should engage in processes of acknowledgment and reconciliation.
6. Recognizing that the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration* are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible, we acknowledge the provisions of the *UN Declaration* that specifically reference Indigenous peoples’ language rights in the context of use, revitalization, and transmission (Article 13), education (Article 14), media (Article 16), and other articles that bear on Indigenous peoples’ language rights including the right to cultural diversity (Article 15) and rights and responsibilities to traditional knowledge (Article 31). We underscore the State obligations to take measures, including legislative measures, supporting the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration* (Article 38), to provide technical and sustained financial assistance for the exercise and enjoyment of these rights (Article 39), and the fact that they constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples (Article 43).
7. We acknowledge the importance of other international human rights instruments, including the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No.* 169)[[3]](#footnote-3), General Comment 23 of the *Convention to Eliminate All forms of Racial Discrimination* and the 2016 Organization of American States *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,*[[4]](#footnote-4) to ensure the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world and their fundamental right to language as a key element of their cultural identity, well-being and cultural integrity. We further draw attention to the *Yuelu Proclamation*[[5]](#footnote-5) and the *Declaration of the Protection of Indigenous Languages* from the second Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas.[[6]](#footnote-6)
8. We acknowledge the diverse interrelated, interdependent and indivisible rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to Indigenous peoples’ languages, ranging from rights recognized in constructive arrangements to inherent rights of Indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic, social structures, spiritual and cultural rights as distinct peoples.

We support implementation of *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[[7]](#footnote-7)* and emphasize the strong correlation between linguistic diversity and biological diversity, noting also that the *Alta Outcome Document*[[8]](#footnote-8) addresses the linkage between Indigenous peoples’ ability to safeguard our languages, customs, belief systems, values, cultures, knowledge, and spirituality and Indigenous peoples’ rights to lands, territories, resources, air, ice, oceans and waters, mountains and forests. More specifically, we acknowledge the linkages between Indigenous peoples’ languages and Goal 3 regarding our health and well-being, including medicinal practices; Goal 4 concerning quality education; Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production; Goal 13 related to climate action; and Goal 14 addressing the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans, seas and marine resources, especially for those Indigenous peoples in the Arctic and North America that are dependent upon the marine environment.

1. We are convincedthat control by Indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs, including the intergenerational nature and need to advance transmission of language use, revitalization, access, and promotion of all related practices to Indigenous youth, including development of Indigenous language legislation, and to support and fund national, regional and community plans.
2. We commit ourselves to development of comprehensive programs to respond to the continuing and urgent need to preserve, revitalize, promote, and maintain Indigenous peoples’ languages and to take further steps at the national and international levels by declaring an International Decade of Indigenous Languages.
3. We acknowledge that States must support and play an active role in eliminating barriers to the revitalization, maintenance, access and promotion of Indigenous peoples’ languages, and promotion at the local, sub-national, and national levels, including through the enactment of effective legislation, sustainable funding, policies, and programs that genuinely assist in maintaining the health of Indigenous peoples’ languages. This includes the elimination of barriers faced by Indigenous peoples divided by international borders and their right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for linguistic, spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders as well as protection and promotion of dialects and sub-dialects.
4. We encourage States and Indigenous peoples to take an inclusive approach to planning and negotiating measures to realize Indigenous peoples’ language rights, honoring the right to Indigenous peoples’ participation in lawmaking with full respect for the principle of free, prior, and informed consent.[[9]](#footnote-9)
5. Consistent with articles 41 and 42 of the *UN Declaration*, we further encourage UN member States, UNESCO, and UN agencies, UN Indigenous rights’ mechanisms,[[10]](#footnote-10) and other intergovernmental organizations to undertake concrete actions, including through the mobilization of financial cooperation including funding schemes such as fund, and technical assistance, building institutional capacities of civil society, academia and public organizations to support Indigenous peoples and States in the development of language learning tools and resources. Furthermore, we encourage all UN agencies, including WIPO, WHO, UNICEF, UN Women, IOM and others to join and support UNESCO in mainstreaming Indigenous peoples’ rights to language in all contexts, including intellectual property, health, the rights of children[[11]](#footnote-11) and women, and migration. At the national level, such funding must be in context of legislation to ensure support for the development of national Indigenous language strategies.
6. We further request that the United Nations and its relevant agencies, in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, to develop a comprehensive programme of work for facilitating the sharing of good practices through the development of an online platform between States and among Indigenous peoples in the areas of Indigenous language legislative, policy, and program development, including other public and private partners.
7. We encourage all UN organizations and specialized agencies, and others to join and support UNESCO in mainstreaming Indigenous peoples’ rights to language in all societal contexts and domains, including intellectual property, health, the rights of children and women, and migration, technological and scientific development, and environment.
8. Recalling the commitment[[12]](#footnote-12) “to develop and implement national action plans, strategies or other measures, where relevant, to achieve the ends” of the *UN Declaration*, we call upon all UN member States to commit themselves to the objectives of preserving, revitalizing, promoting and maintaining Indigenous peoples’ languages, consistent with the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration* and other international human rights instruments and specifically to prepare, adopt and implement national Indigenous peoples’ languages legislation, policies, action plans, and other measures that support the revitalization, promotion and maintenance of Indigenous peoples’ languages.
9. Reaffirming the recognition of the “distinctive spiritual relationship” that Indigenous peoples have to their environment and their responsibilities to future generations, we call upon member States to recognize and facilitate the profound linkage between Indigenous peoples’ rights to their total environment and linguistic rights, recognizing that Indigenous peoples’ relationships with land are deeply and uniquely encoded knowledge and wisdom in Indigenous peoples languages (including marine and coastal seas, territorial boundaries, usufructuary rights, plant knowledge; and sacred sites designations); and therefore engage in initiatives to return traditional place names in maps and surveys, as well as in land titling, litigation, and other administrative and legal processes.
10. We recommend that States and Indigenous peoples recognize and facilitate the roles of Indigenous peoples’ languages in decolonizing Indigenous peoples’ own laws and legal institutions, including Indigenous peoples’ use of Indigenous languages in their own legal processes, such as tribal codes and courts, as well as in intercultural diplomacy and treaty interpretation. This includes Indigenous personal names, communities, relations and other dimensions of cultural identity through Indigenous language in all aspects of use by the Indigenous peoples concerned.
11. We recommend that States recognize and facilitate the importance of revitalization, maintenance, and promotion at the local, sub-national, and national levels of Indigenous peoples’ languages and Indigenous peoples’ right to establish and control their own educational systems, including instruction in their own languages, which must not be impeded by other language policies; and that States, civil society, and other institutions must be led by Indigenous peoples and language activists in the development of Indigenous languages, which may include language nests, immersion schools, and other methods of instruction.
12. We recommend that States recognize that sustainable development of language activism and education presupposes open and inclusive, inclusive, diverse, pluralistic, democratic societies, in which Indigenous peoples’ values may be heard; and that the well-being of any society is elevated when Indigenous peoples enjoy rights to self-expression, both individually and collectively.
13. We recommend that States, as well as UN organizations and specialized agencies, academia, and other stakeholders recognize the need for comprehensive research on Indigenous peoples’ language revitalization (a topic that has traditionally been marginalized in linguistic studies focused on preservation); with funding for studies, especially by Indigenous scholars, on methodologies of Indigenous language revitalization, as well as the relationship between language revitalization and both individual and collective community well-being, in the realms of health, education, economics, political participation, employment, culture, and other social indicators.
14. Recognizing the diverse Indigenous language experts from across the Indigenous world, there is a need for renewed dialogue and collaboration between Indigenous language communities and academia to achieve greater alignment of the work of linguists and Indigenous language activists in the name of the common goal of preserving and revitalizing Indigenous peoples’ languages, including the need for academic institutions and universities creating intellectual and physical space and departments for language revitalization. Further, the implementation of those national strategies must be driven by Indigenous peoples and supported by States to ensure development of Indigenous capacity, research and approaches to invest in results-based programming at the community level.
15. Acknowledging the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), as stated in the *Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society* (WSIS) (Article 15), UNESCO’s *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace* (2003), we draw attention to the fact that Indigenous media, the lack of access to own digital content, resources, services and tools in Indigenous peoples’ languages, and limited digital skills continue to be a major form of digital exclusion in social, political, cultural and economic domains for many Indigenous peoples. ICTs and Indigenous peoples’ media organizations can support Indigenous languages revitalization, support and promotion processes while opening new opportunities for digital social, economic and political inclusion, life-long and distance learning, employment, knowledge sharing, cooperation, collaborative efforts and the intergenerational transmission of languages to younger generation.
16. We call for and commit ourselves to establishment of a Focal Point on Indigenous Issues or for Indigenous Peoples within the UN agencies for permanent, sustained attention to the preservation, revitalization, and promotion of Indigenous peoples’ languages and interrelated rights in order to realize and safeguard the cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples, including sustained financial and technical support for a Focal Point on Indigenous Issues or for Indigenous Peoples.
17. Convinced that human rights can only be realized when Indigenous peoples are truly free to speak, think, and live in their own languages, and that the impacts of hundreds of years of language suppression cannot be reversed in one year, we call upon the United Nations General Assembly to proclaim an International Decade of Indigenous Languages, the developments related to the IYIL and identification of the need for sustained attention to formulation of domestic legislative agendas, academic research and data collection, as well as the development and dissemination of pedagogies for language revitalization. Furthermore, the overarching rationale for the proclamation of an International Decade of Indigenous Languages include *inter alia* the following:

* To truly achieve *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,[[13]](#footnote-13) which emphasizes the strong correlation between Indigenous peoples’ languages and contribution to peace building, attainment of sustainable development goals and to ensure reconciliation processes in our societies, especially in the context of Indigenous peoples, who are regarded as the most vulnerable and marginalized;
* Despite efforts to eradicate Indigenous peoples’ languages, the focus of a Decade will assist Indigenous peoples and the world community to revitalize, reclaim, promote and sustain the importance and vitality of Indigenous peoples’ languages;
* To recognize, respect and value Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing and their contributions to the co-production of knowledge;
* Existing and emerging technology can and must be developed to revitalize, reclaim, promote and sustain Indigenous peoples’ languages;
* It will take a Decade to begin to reverse the effects of assimilation and obliteration of languages, to undo the invisibility of Indigenous peoples’ languages that former policies have created, and turn the story of Indigenous languages, cultures and peoples to a more befitting, humane and just place within the world community;
* That an equal amount of effort and resources used to eradicate Indigenous peoples’ languages must be devoted to the revitalization, reclamation, promotion and sustenance of them;
* That policies and resources to educate majority populations about Indigenous peoples, their languages will contribute to greater success in the urgent reconciliation processes that are needed; and
* A Decade to support these initiatives will result in an extraordinary contribution by Indigenous peoples’ contributions to all of humanity.

1. Convinced of the value strengthening international and domestic standards on linguistic rights of Indigenous peoples, we also call upon the United Nations to consider adoption of an international legally binding instrument to support Indigenous peoples’ languages as a way to advance the long-term objectives of all Indigenous peoples to maintain their distinct status, rights, identity and contributions, which will be of value to all humanity and our future generations.

1. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the endorsement or expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The preparation of this document benefited greatly from the editorial expertise of participants who attended the regional meeting. The analysis, recommendations and statements of this document do not necessarily reflect the views of UNESCO. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations A/RES/71/178, Seventy-first session Agenda item 65 (a) adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2016 [on the report of the Third Committee (A/71/481)] 71/178. Rights of indigenous peoples, paragraph 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989* (No. 169), International Labour Organization, adopted Geneva, 76th ILC session 27 June 1989 (entered into force 5 September 1991) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, AG/RES. 2888 (XLVI-O/16), adopted without vote by Organization of American States, General Assembly, 46th sess., Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 15 June 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Yuelu Proclamation*, Protection and Promotion of Linguistic Diversity of the World adopted at the International Conference “Role of linguistic diversity in building a global community with shared future: protection, access and promotion of language resources” 19 - 21 September 2018 Changsha, The People’s Republic of China. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Declaration on the Protection of Indigenous Languages, Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas, Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 27-28, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN Doc. A/RES/70/1 (25 September 2015) (adopted without a vote), at 3 (Declaration), paras 3 and 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alta Outcome Document (A/67/994), June 10-12, 2013 – Following a global consultation process involving representatives of the indigenous peoples and nations of the seven global geopolitical regions as well as the women’s caucus and the youth caucus. It sets forth their recommendations for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples along with the historical and current context of indigenous peoples from around the world, at <https://undocs.org/en/A/67/994> last accessed 1 July 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [CITE EMRIP STUDY ON FPIC <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/245/94/PDF/G1824594.pdf?OpenElement> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Paragraphs 14 and 15, Outcome Document. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. General Assembly, Outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, UN Doc. A/RES/69/2 (22 September 2014), paragraph 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN Doc. A/RES/70/1 (25 September 2015) (adopted without a vote), at 3 (Declaration), paras 3 and 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)