

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 18th Session, 22 April – 3 May 2019
Agenda Item 5: Discussion on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages
International Indian Treaty Council statement presented by Ron Lameman, April 22nd, 2019

Madame Chair. Ay Hy, Ninanaskomon oma iyino pikiskwewina eniykan asta ewoko oma piyak aski ekwa ote niykan (I'm thankful that Indigenous Languages are being prioritized this year and in the future). I bring greetings from the Cree Nation and our Allies from Treaty No. 6 Territory, the International Indian Treaty Council and all of our affiliates, to all the brothers and sisters gathered here today to talk about something that is so essential to us as Indigenous Peoples of the world. The topic of discussion that is before us speaks to the core of who we are, our culture and spirituality and our relationship to our Mother the Earth. Collectively we owe it to our future generations to ensure that we can continue to use our beautiful languages when we do our ceremonies and communicate with all of creation that was put here for us by the Great Spirit Kisemanto. It is our legacy and it is a must as we can and should do no less for our children, grandchildren and all future generations.

Despite their central importance to our ways of life and ways of knowing, as we all know, Indigenous Languages around the world are threatened due to the process of colonization including, in Canada and the US, the legacy of the residential and boarding schools' forced assimilation policies where the Indigenous children were punished for speaking their sacred languages.

Protection, revitalization and transmission of Indigenous languages is a central underpinning of nearly every area of Indigenous Peoples' work both at home and at the United Nations including on the six (6) mandate areas of focus for the Permanent Forum.

We therefore call upon the UNPFII to recommend to UNESCO that it develop a new Platform on Indigenous Languages with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples. We also call upon the UNPFII to recommend that this vital focus be maintained by calling for the establishment of an International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous Peoples Languages by the UN General Assembly with a program of work to be coordinated by UNESCO in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples around the world.

Finally, we call upon the Permanent Forum to recommend that the UN bodies addressing Indigenous Peoples' rights, food systems, health, education, sustainable development, traditional knowledge, repatriation, climate change adaptation and cultural heritage embed and prioritize consideration of Indigenous language protection and revitalization within their respective mandates and programs of work. Ay hy, thank you.