



THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples – 9 August 2019

Indigenous languages

ECOSOC Chamber

10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Background

9 August commemorates the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. It is celebrated around the world and marks the date of the inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the United Nations in 1982¹.

As part of the commemoration, the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch - Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues/DISD/DESA, is organizing an event that will bring together indigenous peoples' organizations, UN agencies, Member States, civil society and relevant stakeholders.

This year's theme is *Indigenous Languages* and will focus on the current situation of indigenous languages around the world within the framework of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages². The aim is to highlight the critical need to revitalize, preserve, and promote indigenous languages and share good practices through expert/interactive panels and presentation of innovative initiatives on indigenous languages. The event will also showcase creative initiatives and videos on indigenous languages at the United Nations visitor's lobby.

Format

The opening segment will begin with a traditional ceremony, followed by a high-level segment. Subsequently, a keynote speaker will address the importance of indigenous languages, followed by a panel discussion on the theme, with the participation of indigenous experts and guest speakers. The panel will be moderated by Ms. Chandra Roy-Henriksen, Chief of the Indigenous Peoples and Development Branch - Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

In the afternoon, an interactive segment will offer presentations of creative initiatives on the promotion, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages. This segment will be moderated by Mr. Eddie Avila, Director of Rising Voices³.

The event will be webcast live on UN web TV. Viewers and listeners are encouraged to post questions or comments through the Twitter account @UN4Indigenous during the interactive segment in the afternoon.

¹ A/RES/49/214

² A/RES/71/178

³ Rising Voices is an outreach initiative that provides training, resources, microgrant funding, and mentoring to local underrepresented communities that want to tell their own digital story using endangered or indigenous languages and participatory media tools.





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An innovation hub on indigenous languages will be set-up at the United Nations visitor's lobby (Sputnik area) where participants and the general public will have the opportunity to interact and engage with current technological innovations that promote indigenous languages.

Background information

Estimates suggest that more than half of the world's languages will become extinct by 2100 and that 95 percent of them may become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of the present century⁴. The vast majority of the languages under threat are indigenous languages, and most estimates confirm that a high number of them are likely to disappear.

The loss of indigenous languages is one of the most critical issues that indigenous peoples face today. Indigenous languages are not only methods of communication but extensive and complex systems of knowledge that indigenous peoples have developed over millennia. They are central to their identity, preservation of culture, worldview, the environment they inhabit, and ultimately function as an expression of self-determination. In essence, when indigenous languages are under threat, so too are indigenous peoples and their cultures.

There have been some advances in the protection, preservation, and development of indigenous languages, including government policies and programs, changes in national legislation, strengthening of bilingual education programs, capacity development of indigenous teachers, recognition of indigenous education systems and institutions, and the development of indigenous media. At the international level, article 13 and 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) upholds that indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit their languages to future generations, and have the right to all levels and forms of education in their own culture and languages. The UNDRIP further calls for States to take the necessary measures to ensure those rights⁵.

Since its creation, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has raised its concerns about the situation of indigenous languages to the United Nations system and its Member States. In this regard, it has made several valuable recommendations to generate attention on the urgent need to protect and promote indigenous languages. The Forum has also galvanized action at the international and national level to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities for indigenous languages. Moreover, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) organized two Expert Group

⁴ E/C.19/2005/7

⁵ A/RES/61/295





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Meetings on Indigenous Languages (2008 and 2016), and the General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

While national regulations and policies on the protection and revitalization of indigenous languages have gradually developed, implementation has been very slow. There is a growing demand by indigenous peoples for Member States to better address language crises, including ensuring intercultural bilingual education programs, adequate funding for revitalization and protection initiatives, cross-border cooperation programs on indigenous languages and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to promote indigenous languages and facilitate language revitalization efforts⁶.

This event aims to present indigenous languages as a valuable resource to a country's language diversity and cultural heritage, and show how States, UN agencies, academia, civil society and others play a crucial role in the protection and development of indigenous languages worldwide.

Sources:

International Expert International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages: Preservation and Revitalization

<https://undocs.org/E/C.19/2016/10>

International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages

<https://undocs.org/E/C.19/2008/3>

United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

⁶ E/C.19/2016/10

