



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail [australia@un.int](mailto:australia@un.int)

150 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 [www.australia-unscc.gov.au](http://www.australia-unscc.gov.au)

## UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

16 December 2022

### Launch of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages

**Statement by H.E. the Hon Mitch Fifield  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the  
United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

---

In Australia, we begin all formal events with an Acknowledgement of Country. And so today, I would like to begin by acknowledging all Indigenous people who are joining us from across the globe and paying my respects to your countries and ancestors.

We are here in New York, the traditional lands of the Lenape people, to launch the Decade of Indigenous Languages.

This Decade will bring the much-needed attention that is required to protect, reawaken and continue our treasured and sacred Indigenous languages around the world.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Global Task Force in getting us to this launch point. Australia has been proud to work with UNESCO and member states in developing the Global Action Plan.

The situation in Australia is critical. Australia has one of the highest rates of language loss in the world and action is urgent.

Of the estimated original 250+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, only around 120 are still spoken and all are at risk.

Without further action, many of these languages may become extinct within our lifetime. The next 10 to 30 years will be critical in reversing this trend.

Government policies that ensure that Indigenous languages are strong, supported and flourishing are required to change this trend.

In Australia, there is strong political will to change direction. The International Decade has strong synergies with Australia's domestic policy agenda, in particular Australia's National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

For the first time, our domestic agenda includes a target to increase and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

At the launch of the Decade in Paris, Australia presented on the partnership approach that we are taking to better preserve and protect First Nations languages.

Partnership ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are central to decision-making, which is absolutely essential for delivering lasting reform.

To ensure that we are being true to ‘nothing about us, without us’, Australia has established the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group, made up of 13 language experts, to work in partnership with the Australian Government on the International Decade.

The Directions Group has developed five themes that will provide the high-level framework for Australia’s Action Plan for the International Decade. This will complement the strategic objectives of the Global Action Plan.

I would like to close by congratulating UNESCO on the launch of the Decade of Indigenous Languages, and reaffirming Australia’s continuing commitment to working with you.

Word count: 409 (3 minutes)