



***STATEMENT***

***Delivered by***

***Her Excellency Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett,  
Permanent Representative of the  
Co-operative Republic of Guyana to the United Nations***

***High-level event of the General Assembly for the launch of the  
International Decade of Indigenous Languages***

***Theme: “Rights of Indigenous Peoples: a world in which Indigenous  
Peoples entrust their languages to future generations creating a  
better society for everyone***

***United Nations General Assembly,  
16<sup>th</sup> December, 2022***

**Mr. President,**

Hallekubah! This means ‘greetings’ in Arawak. It is one of the few words that I know from my Indigenous language. Like so many others, in the name of “civilization” and religion which accompanied colonialism, my ancestors were forced, if not taught, to abandon their native language.

Language plays a crucial role in our daily lives, not only for communication, but in relation to our unique identity, culture, history and traditions, and how these are transmitted across generations.

According to UNESCO, there are at least 6,700 languages spoken in the world, 40 percent of which are in danger of disappearing. Many of these disappearing are Indigenous languages.

Moreover, Indigenous languages, are adversely affected by factors, such as migration, economic insecurity, educational barriers and cultural and religious assimilation.

It is my delegations' hope, that with the launching today of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and our efforts during the Decade, we will be able to reverse some of these adverse trends.

In Guyana, there is increased consciousness by all on the importance of protecting, promoting and preserving our nine Indigenous languages, namely, Arawak, Carib, Warrau, Macushi, Wapichan, Wai Wai, Akawaio, Patomona and Arecuna. To this end, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has started the Language Revival Programme, which emphasizes the importance of language as a transmitter of culture, traditions, and knowledge. Importantly, it involves the training of youths to become proficient in their native languages. They will in turn train others to preserve this vital aspect of their culture.

Our Ministry of Education is also collaborating with the University of Guyana and the Intercultural Bilingual Education Organization, a local NGO, to pilot the Quality Bilingual Education Programme (QBEP) in three nursery schools in our South Rupununi District – the home of the Wapichan people. The programme will be expanded in 2023 to 14 Nursery schools. Dictionaries that were produced for 5 of the nine Indigenous languages will assist in our efforts.

**Mr. President,**

The International Decade of Indigenous languages presents a focused opportunity for multi-stakeholder and multilateral collaboration. The Global Action Plan of the

International Decade of Indigenous Languages can buttress this much needed undertaking. I wish to underscore that the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in the creation of policies and frameworks during this Decade is imperative.

In closing, Guyana reiterates its commitment to the preservation, promotion and revitalization of Indigenous languages as enshrined in the Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I thank you.