



New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

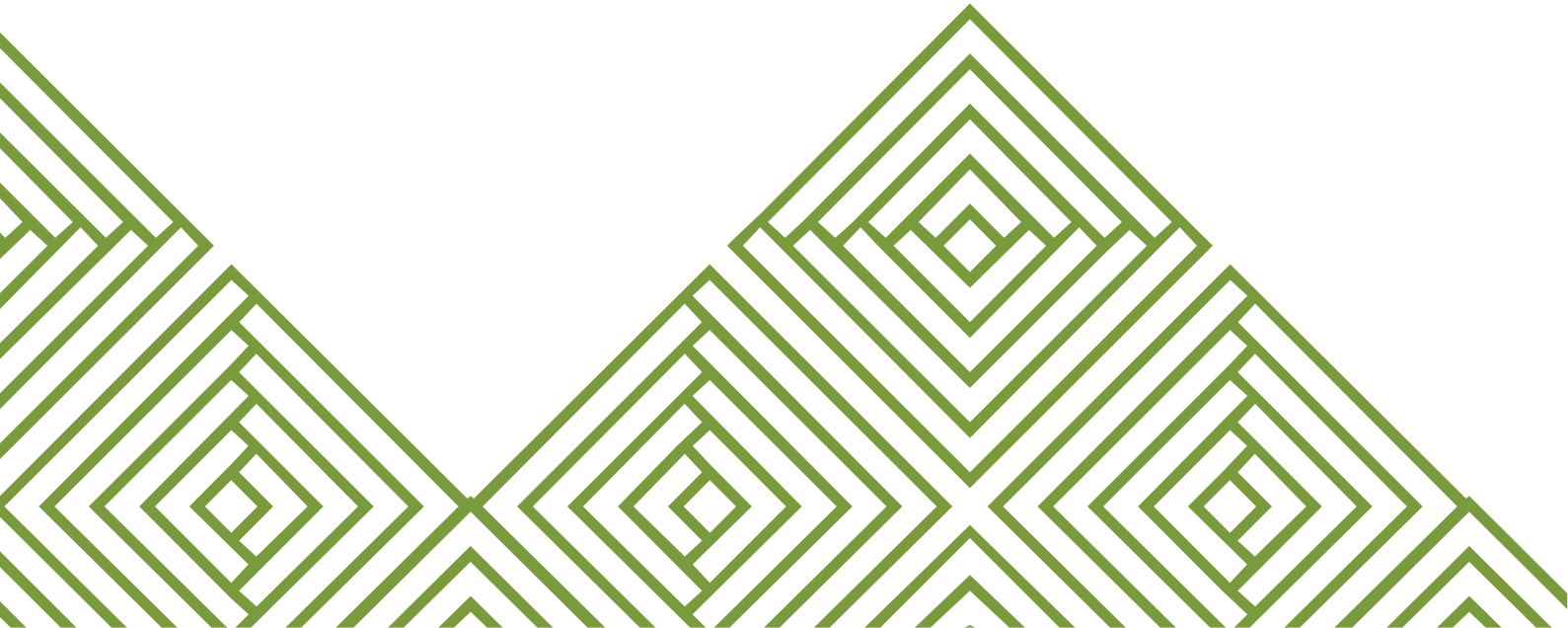
**Te Aka Aorere**

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

**New Zealand Statement delivered by  
Deputy Permanent Representative H.E. Justin Fepuleai**

16 December 2022

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Tēnā koutou katoa – I greet you in te reo Māori, the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand.

I acknowledge the Indigenous representatives here today on behalf of their Peoples, cultures and languages. I gratefully acknowledge the Lenape people, on whose traditional territory we gather today.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a strong supporter of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the revitalisation of Indigenous languages.

Each Indigenous language embodies unique environmental, technological, social, economic and cultural knowledge accumulated over millennia.

New Zealand is founded on a partnership between Māori and the Government. The rights of Māori were largely ignored for generations and oppression of Māori voices alienated Māori in their own lands. Making efforts to repair that partnership has meant that successive New Zealand Governments have needed to listen.

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Māori language petition, submitted to our Parliament in 1972. Fifteen years later the Māori Language Act was passed guaranteeing protection for te reo Māori as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, and empowering New Zealanders to use the Māori language in areas of public life such as the courts system.

One significant lesson is the importance of empowering Indigenous Peoples to lead their own language revitalisation, including by trusting them with Government resources to develop and implement their own strategies and action plans.

While Indigenous Peoples must be empowered to lead, the Government has an important role, starting with legislation.

Another key part of our language revitalisation strategy, led by our Māori Language Commission, is promoting Māori language to the broader population. This is delivering an increase in the proportion of New Zealanders that see the Māori language as something that invokes pride and part of their national identity.

We call on all Member States to take the opportunity of this Decade to take concrete actions to revitalise Indigenous languages, including ensuring revitalisation efforts are Indigenous-led, passing supportive legislation, entrusting Indigenous Peoples with resourcing, and taking efforts to ensure recognition of Indigenous languages by all people, whether Indigenous or not.

Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to enhancing the participation of Indigenous voices at the UN. We support Indigenous Peoples in their call to establish a unique category for their participation in the UN system.

We welcome the enhanced attention on the importance of Indigenous Languages, and look forward to sharing learning experiences to ensure material improvements for Indigenous languages over the coming decade.