

IYIL High Level Closing Event 17.12.19

Opening segment statement.

Aili Keskitalo, (Co-chair and Steering Committee Representative of the Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic, President of Sami Parliament in Norway)

Mr President.

I congratulate you on your election as PGA, and thank you for letting us gather here in this hall, as we did at the opening of the International Year of Indigenous languages in February.

I greet the people of this land, the Lenape, and all other Indigenous brothers and sisters that have joined in the global celebrations of our languages this year. I also greet friends of Indigenous Peoples languages, including state and UN agency representatives present here today. This year has brought us together, and that itself is a great achievement.

I recall the UN General Assembly' resolutions on the enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives and institutions in all UN meetings on issues affecting them. This year Indigenous Peoples' representatives have been equally participating with the Member states in the Steering Committee and in High-Level Events. Entering the transition to a Decade for Indigenous Languages, I encourage UN bodies and Member states to secure meaningful and enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples in the future work.

This year has illuminated that technological development has much to offer Indigenous Languages, if it is developed with our Free Prior and Informed Consent. I am proud that UNESCO and the IYIL offered a meeting place for Indigenous Peoples, technology providers and scholars at the LT4All conference in Paris recently. That conference demonstrated why we really need a decade for Indigenous Languages. The world is facing a digital leap, and we must make sure that our languages do not lag behind. We have to be able to apply our languages to all the technological opportunities, and use it to benefit our peoples and languages. We have to make sure that our languages are still relevant in the changing world, in urbanized areas, in public services and in education, in media and in popular culture.

I would like to share with you some lyrics from the Sámi rap artist Áilu Valle:

Mun in dárbbáš dáid sániid go oainnán duoddára. (I need no words when I see the tundra.)

His song *Suotnjárat Beaivváža* (The Rays of the Sun) explores the links between Indigenous knowledge, culture and nature. The sight of our ancestral lands can be overwhelming and humbling, and yet our languages ties everything together. Did you know tundra is originally a Kildin Sami word, describing a treeless mountain plain? In Northern Sami, the word is duottar.

I am sharing these words with you because while we are celebrating Indigenous Languages, we also know we did not succeed in protecting Indigenous lands and livelihoods in the climate negotiations in Madrid the last weeks. This breaks my heart. Environmental change challenges our languages, because of the strong connection between languages, Indigenous knowledge and livelihoods.

Our tundra is changing. It is growing trees where there should be none. Some time in the future, we might not recognize our treeless mountain plains anymore. The only memory we might have left, is the word itself duottar, tundra. The memory of our lands embedded in the languages. It is both sad and beautiful to reflect on how our languages are mirrors of the world we live in.

Nevertheless, to use the words of the UN General Secretary: we cannot give up. We have to continue the struggle for Climate Justice, as we close the International Year of Indigenous Languages. This year has been an acknowledgement of the global responsibility of Indigenous Peoples Languages, and its legacy should be a message of hope, of shared love of our languages and finally: a firm call for a Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Giitu. Thank you.