

MS. ANNE NUORGAM

CHAIR OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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**ADDRESS AT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT FOR THE CLOSING OF THE 2019
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

New York, 17 December 2019

Excellencies,

Distinguished President of the 74th session of the General Assembly,
Distinguished Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs,
Distinguished Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee for the organization of the International Year
of Indigenous Languages,
Distinguished UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Indigenous Peoples,
Distinguished Director of UNESCO Liaison Office, New York,
Indigenous Peoples representatives,

Today's event marks the conclusion of the International Year of Indigenous Languages that was borne out of a process that started years before. In recognition of the serious demise in the use of indigenous languages, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommended that the United Nations organize an expert group meeting on indigenous languages in 2008 and again in 2016. The meetings made important recommendations, including that the United Nations proclaim an International Year of Indigenous Languages.

In 2016, the General Assembly adopted the resolution proclaiming 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, based on the Permanent Forum's recommendation to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote them.

In 2019, the Permanent Forum dedicated a thematic discussion to indigenous languages and reiterated that indigenous languages represent complex systems of knowledge that have been

developed over thousands of years and are inextricably linked to lands, waters, territories and resources. Indigenous languages are key, not only in preserving ecosystems but also in ensuring the continuation and transmission of indigenous cultures, customs and history. They are part of the heritage and identity of indigenous peoples. In this way, each indigenous language represents a unique framework for understanding the world.

The Forum also emphasized that any efforts to promote and revitalize indigenous languages must be owned by indigenous peoples themselves and that States and UN entities should support such initiatives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Permanent Forum expressed concern on the state of the world's indigenous languages and recommended the adoption of a rights-based approach towards indigenous languages, that considers the full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Article 13 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples enshrines the right of indigenous peoples to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages. It also emphasizes the right of indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions to provide education in their own languages.

Expanding the use of indigenous languages allows indigenous peoples to have better access to services, such as health care, and a better and more culturally-appropriate education, to ensure their overall well-being.

Language barriers also undermine due process of law in legal proceedings. Without accessible courts and institutions, indigenous peoples become vulnerable to actions by others that threaten their lands, natural resources, cultures, sacred sites or economic livelihoods.

To this extent Member States should formulate evidence-based policies, long-term strategies and regulatory frameworks, with the direct involvement of indigenous peoples, to ensure the protection and revitalization of indigenous languages, that includes adequate funding for implementation.

Conservative estimates suggest that more than half of the world's languages will become extinct by 2100. Other equally realistic estimates predict that up to 95 per cent of the world's languages may become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of this century. At present, 96 per cent of the world's approximately 6,700 languages are spoken by only 3 per cent of the world's population. The vast majority of the languages that are under threat are indigenous languages, and according to these estimates, most of them will disappear.

In order to tackle these dire predictions, the Permanent Forum strongly supported the proclamation of the International Decade on Indigenous Languages adopted at the Third Committee of the General Assembly and shortly to be considered by the plenary.

Mr. President,

In closing, I would like to thank the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its work as the lead United Nations agency for the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages and its fruitful collaboration with the Department of the Economic and Social Affairs and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

The Permanent Forum looks forward to working with UN agencies, Indigenous Peoples, Member States and other to promote indigenous languages and realize the objectives of the International Decade on indigenous languages.

Giitu / Thank you!