

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**MR. LIU ZHENMIN
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AND SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
TO COORDINATE FOLLOW UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

**Statement
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 Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee for the organization of the International Year of Indigenous Languages,
Distinguished Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Liaison Office, New York,
Distinguished Goodwill Ambassador for Culture of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Indigenous Peoples representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. This was in recognition of the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages.

This closing event highlights that indigenous languages do indeed matter for issues at the heart of the mandate of the United Nations – building peace, sustainable development, and reconciliation.

Important as it was, the proclamation of the International Year of Indigenous Languages was only a prelude to a greater milestone. A resolution proclaiming the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to commence in 2022, is expected to be adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December. This is an opportunity to address the silent crisis confronting many of the world's indigenous languages.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is committed to the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Yet, the marginalization, the expropriation of indigenous peoples' traditional lands, and other human rights abuses, continue. There is no doubt that indigenous peoples must be empowered politically, economically and socially. They should not

have to give up their language and culture, or migrate due to economic needs, just to ensure their livelihoods.

Mr. President,

Languages shape how we communicate. They are linked to indigenous peoples' cultures, histories and identities. With every language that disappears, the world loses a wealth of traditional knowledge. Despite their immense value, indigenous languages continue to disappear at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, there is no census evidence, nor accurate details about indigenous languages. Thus, it is urgent that the 2020 World Population and Housing Census ask about regular home use of indigenous languages, not just language spoken.

Too many of the world's 370 million indigenous peoples still lack basic rights. Systematic discrimination and exclusion continue to threaten their ways of life, cultures and identities. This is contrary to the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially regarding inclusive societies and equality for all. Much work must be done to stop and reverse this development.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge and thank:

- all stakeholders involved in the organization of a successful International Year;
- all indigenous peoples who are working tirelessly to preserve their languages and cultures;
- Member States for their continued efforts to promote the preservation of indigenous languages; and
- UNESCO, the lead agency, for engaging with stakeholders and strengthening international cooperation and partnerships in supporting indigenous peoples' initiatives.

The United Nations stands ready to support initiatives aimed at realizing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Thank you.
