

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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**CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF**  
**NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**ON**

**THE OCCASION OF THE CONCLUSION OF THE**  
**INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL**  
**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS**  
**NEW YORK**

**17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2019**

**Mr. President,**

Let me begin by thanking you for organizing this special event to mark the end of the “International Year of Indigenous Languages” in line with General Assembly Resolution 73/156. It is a critical event for Nigeria, which is proudly a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilinguistic society, with its over 350 ethnic groups. Indeed, our strength lies in our diversity. So, as we celebrate today, Nigeria would like to underscore the need to work for the survival of the many indigenous languages all over the world, some of which are under the very real threat of extinction.

**Mr. President,**

2. Language is more than mere words and symbols. It is the expression of our cultures. It is the very carrier of that which is most profound in us as human beings, both individually and collectively. Language is a maker and marker of identity. Through our indigenous languages, we are socialized and taught what it means to be human and to relate with other people. Through our mother tongues, we are taught human values and given our moral sense. Indeed, through their proverbs and wise sayings, indigenous languages are particularly adept at inculcating moral values and life skills in human beings.

3. Beyond its effects on individuals, indigenous languages are embodiments of great civilizations, histories and heritages. They serve as sources of social cohesion locally and nationally. Consequently, the loss of any indigenous language represents a huge loss to the human patrimony.

4. Nigeria has since understood the vast potential inherent in our indigenous languages and their capacity for peacebuilding and national development. For this reason, successive Nigerian Governments have put in place deliberate legislative, policy and practical frameworks to promote indigenous Nigerian languages and harness their potential.

5. One of the most significant aspects of promoting indigenous Nigerian languages is through our schools. For example, in primary and junior secondary schools throughout the country, languages indigenous to specific states of Nigerian are taught in schools. What this policy means is that, in each of the States of the Nigerian Federation, the indigenous languages of those States are taught to pupils and students in their formative years. In some of these States, students are exposed to more than five (5) languages indigenous to those States. This policy therefore has the multiplier effect of maximizing the learning of Nigerian languages not just informally in families and communities but also in formal classroom settings.

6. Beyond our schools, our film industry, popularly known as "Nollywood," and the mass media have also been veritable tools for promoting and protecting our indigenous languages. Many movies are acted in several Nigerian languages. Furthermore, most Nigerian media, both private and state-owned, have several programmes that are broadcast in the indigenous languages of the states within which they operate. Crucially, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria ensures that there are news summaries, nationwide, in nine (9) major indigenous Nigerian languages. All these steps contribute to promoting and keeping our languages alive.

**Mr. President**

7. It is true that many indigenous languages are struggling to survive. Indeed, for many indigenous languages, the Darwinian thesis of the survival of the fittest is amply demonstrated. Even in Nigeria, some of our languages have gone extinct, while a few more have become so orphaned that they are also on the brink of extinction. Some of the causes of the loss of prestige and near-extinction of indigenous languages include the history of colonization and imperialism as well as trade and commerce. Today, indigenous languages are also threatened by urbanization that is rapidly and aggressively transforming itself into full-scale globalization.

**Mr. President,**

8. In spite of these threats to the survival of indigenous languages, they do not need to suffer the fate of extinction if we can dare to be creative. We must apply the slogan of the SDGs to indigenous languages.

9. So, in conclusion, my delegation would like to stress that the greater the challenges to the survival of indigenous languages, even greater must be our creativity and resolve to ensure that no indigenous language is left behind.

10. I thank you for your kind attention.