

Statement of UNICEF
High-level event for the closing of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages
17 December 2019

Mr. President, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Representatives of indigenous peoples,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which celebrated its 30th anniversary this year, establishes that indigenous children are entitled **not only** to the individual rights spelled out in that treaty, but also, as members of a group, they require special measures “to enjoy his or her own culture (...) or to use his or her own language”. Promoting indigenous languages is therefore critical in preserving indigenous cultures and fulfilling the individual and collective rights of indigenous children enshrined in the CRC.

Investing in education in the native languages of indigenous children is essential to the intergenerational transmission of these languages, and in contributing to the realization and protection of a range of other child rights.

School curricula adapted to indigenous cultures and languages are also instrumental in ensuring that **every** child enjoys their right to education. One of the key factors leading to school exclusion and drop-out in indigenous communities is that classes disregard their cultural heritage or are given in a language that is unknown to the children.

UNICEF supports governments in increasing access and improving the quality of education in indigenous communities, ensuring that national systems integrate evidence-based, intercultural and bilingual approaches.

In **Cambodia**, UNICEF commissioned an evaluation of the Multilingual Education National Action Plan, which expanded access to education for indigenous children, to inform strengthened national programming on multilingual education.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, UNICEF's work contributed to almost 8,000 indigenous children accessing primary education through the Observe, Reflect, Act schools programme. The ORA method incorporates indigenous culture and local language, helping indigenous children integrate into government-run schools.

UNICEF **Honduras** supported the government in designing a Bilingual Intercultural Education Strategy, aiming to provide an alternative to traditional pedagogical patterns, valuing indigenous language and identity. Currently, 4,600 children receive quality education in their own language.

These are just some of the examples of the work UNICEF has carried out around the world. Much remains to be done as most of today's endangered languages are mainly indigenous languages, threatening the rights of current and future generations. We welcome the International Year of Indigenous Languages, which has drawn much needed attention to these challenges.

UNICEF remains committed to collaborating with member states, indigenous organizations and other UN agencies to advance the preservation of indigenous languages through education systems that are bilingual, evidence-based and culturally-sensitive.

Thank you.