

High-Level Event on the Conclusion of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 73/156

Plenary Session

Theme: “Indigenous languages matter for peace building, sustainable development and reconciliation”

17 December 2019

Minister Clara Morin Dal Col, Métis Nation

I represent the Métis Nation, based in western Canada. Michif is our national language. On July 23, 2000, the Métis Nation issued a Declaration, recognizing and declaring Michif as the official language of the Métis Nation.

The Métis Nation and its citizens have been impacted by the history of colonization in Canada. This includes the illegal dispossession of the Metis from our lands, and the forced removal of large number of Metis children from their families and communities. Nonetheless, the strength of the Métis Nation has been sustained throughout its history, playing a central role in Confederation. 2020 marks its 150th anniversary of joining Canadian Confederation as the province of Manitoba.

In the past few years, we have made advancements in the preservation, promotion and revitalization of Michif, through domestic policy and legislative efforts in Canada, resulting in the recent passing of *An Act respecting Indigenous Languages*, which we were involved in co-developing.

UNESCO has proclaimed that Michif is a critically endangered language, in need of urgent attention. Thus, concerted efforts across the Metis Homeland are needed. We have developed best practices, such a language nests, an immersion program for early-childhood education, and the mentor-apprenticeship program, where university students study intensely under the mentorship of a Michif speaker. These best practices can be leveraged in our efforts to reclaim Michif.

It will be imperative that in the implementation of this Act, resources are allocated to prioritizing languages, including Michif, that are critically endangered. Similarly, it will be imperative that in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, efforts be focused on critically endangered Indigenous languages around the world.

I now respond to the questions posed for this meeting:

First, by advancing the rights of Indigenous peoples to speak their languages, societies become more inclusive, breaking down colonial impacts, leading to peaceful societies. This is also key to achieving reconciliation. Furthermore, much traditional knowledge is held within Indigenous languages, a critical link in advancing sustainable development practices.

Second, it is necessary to share good practices amongst each other in order to ensure the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages. We need to find ways to document languages that are critically endangered so that the important learning that needs to take place across the generations can be facilitated over the course of the International Decade and beyond.

Third, it will be important for States to support international efforts through not only providing crucial financial support domestically, but also by providing support to an international fund that can serve the unmet needs of Indigenous peoples from developing regions of the world. Collectively, we can, and indeed, *must* advance the linguistic, cultural and self-determining rights of Indigenous peoples through the Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Marsi (thank you).