

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Eighteenth Session**

Tuesday April 23, 2019

Agenda Item 9: Discussion on the theme “Indigenous peoples’ Traditional knowledge, generation, transmission and protection”

Speaker: Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations

Joint Statement of Assembly of First Nations, Amnesty International / Amnistie Canada francophone, BC Assembly of First Nations; Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers); First Nations Summit; Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee), KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice; Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot, Canada Research Chair of Global Indigenous Rights and Politics, Brenda Gunn Robson Hall Faculty of Law.

Thank you Madame Chair. I am speaking on behalf of several Nations and organizations. Tawaw kahkiyaw, okimâwak, nâpewak, iskwewak, kêtêak, oskâyak. Okimaw piyasiw awasis nitisihkason. Miyo kisikaw anoch. I have begun in Cree – my language, and the language of my ancestors. My statement focuses on the transmission and protection of Indigenous peoples’ knowledge systems through language.

The International Year of Indigenous Languages puts a spotlight on the importance of Indigenous languages and the critical work that is taking place and must continue to ensure the very survival of our languages.

As I said yesterday in a side event - Our languages must be living languages— an inseparable part of our relationship to our lands and territories, expressing our creation stories and alive in our ceremonies and daily lives. When we lose Indigenous languages, we lose Indigenous knowledge and the opportunity to transmit that knowledge to future generations.

We hope UNESCO and the entire international system will work with Indigenous peoples to ensure that the International Year leads to concrete results that will have positive impacts on the both transmission and protection of Indigenous knowledge systems through our languages.

Recognition and support to Indigenous languages is a vital aspect of implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Accordingly, Canada’s Indigenous languages legislation can be a positive example of how domestic laws can be in compliance with the UN Declaration to ensure respect for our human rights.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum call for:

1. A high level event in December to close the International Year with a substantive Outcome Document – a legacy for the Year;
2. An international decade on Indigenous Languages – with a focus on reclamation and revitalization;
3. UNESCO to develop an Indigenous Peoples platform within that agency – to ensure Indigenous peoples are active in all areas of this work throughout the UN. The Indigenous Peoples' platform at the FCCC can be a model for this;
4. States to consider domestic legislation for the reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous languages;
5. States to meet their duty of redress by providing adequate, sustained support to enable delivery of trauma-informed language services at the community level.