



PRESS RELEASE

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL Welcomes UN General Assembly proclamation of a Decade of Indigenous Peoples' Language

December 19, 2019 – New York – The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a significant resolution that “*Proclaims* the period 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages and to take urgent steps at the national and international levels.”

The final resolution also “*Invites* Member States to consider establishing national mechanisms with adequate funding for the successful implementation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in partnership with indigenous peoples, and invites indigenous peoples, as custodians of their own languages, to initiate and develop appropriate measures for the implementation of the International Decade.”

Present at the High-Level Event For The Closing Of The 2019 International Year Of Indigenous Languages (17 December, UN Headquarters, New York, United States Of America) and speaking on behalf of the Arctic socio-cultural region, Aluki Kotierk, President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. referred to the ICC resolution supporting the Decade and further underscored that “we have much work to do to address language inequities.” She further stated within Nunavut “Inuit make up 85% of the population and 70% identify Inuktut as their mother-tongue” yet though it “is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a majority language that is not one of the federally recognized official languages... Despite this fact, Inuktut is not the working language of government nor the language used to provide essential public services.”

ICC Canada Vice-President (International) Lisa Koperqualuk attended the launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages at the United Nations in early 2019. She stated, “this year has been important for raising awareness of the issues surrounding our Inuit language, in terms of language loss, efforts required to maintain and strengthen it, and its vital links to our culture. We realized a year was not enough to focus on language. The decade will permit us to recover, strengthen, and revitalize our language.”

Liubov Taian, ICC Vice Chair for Chukotka, stated “We, representatives of the Inuit people (Yupigit) from the Arctic Russian territory, welcome and support the proclamation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Languages are essential for the identity of our peoples and individuals and for their peaceful coexistence. They are also a strategic factor in moving towards sustainable development and establishing a harmonious balance between global and local interests. Our common goal is to recognize at the national, regional and international levels the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in educational, administrative and legal systems, in the field of cultural expression, as well as in the media, Internet and commercial relations.”

Vera Metcalf, ICC Executive Council Member of Alaska speaking first and foremost in St. Lawrence Island Yupik indicated that “Elngatall una piyuknapigtuq kayutngullequq akuzipigayugnun. This Proclamation is much needed and will be helpful to all Indigenous language speakers. More importantly, recognizing indigenous languages will reinforce our cultural knowledge and identity.”

For Inuit across the Arctic, language is the foundation of culture and identity and its revitalization, maintenance, use, and promotion continue to be paramount. We have identified that such goals can only be achieved through concerted action, investment, and conveyance of official language status by States, sub-national governments and jurisdictions in which Inuit live, such that the stature of our language is elevated in society and resourced and supported accordingly.

We have iterated that actions to promote our language and its various dialects, does not diminish the urgent need to maintain its use among all Inuit, including language holders and silent speakers. As articulated in the Declaration arising from the North America and Arctic Region Proclamation of June 26, 2019, we also recognized the need to be inclusive of various dialects and, those that are endangered. For example, the Nuuk ICC office recently held important discussions with the Inuit of East Greenland on this very topic.

The ICC has also recognized that support is needed for Inuit language holders in teacher training curriculum with continued pedagogical support through all levels of schooling. For education to be effective throughout Inuit Nunaat, pedagogy must reflect values, culture and language, including the link between language, our unique Arctic environment and our knowledge. The *Utqiaġvik Declaration* supports the creation of pedagogies focused on Inuit values and culture with an overarching decolonizing perspective.

The text of the UN General Assembly resolution can be found at <https://undocs.org/A/74/396>

Contact:

Kelly Eningowuk
ICC (Alaska)
(907) 274-9058
kelly@iccalaska.org

Carole Simon
ICC (Canada)
(613) 563-2642
CSimon@inuitcircumpolar.com

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an Indigenous Peoples' Organization (IPO), founded in 1977 to promote and celebrate the unity of 180,000 Inuit from Alaska (USA), Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). ICC works to promote Inuit rights, safeguard the Arctic environment, and protect and promote the Inuit way of life. In regard to climate change, we believe that it is crucial for world leaders and governments to recognize, respect and fully implement the human rights of Inuit and all other Indigenous peoples across the globe.