

**United Nations High Level Event for the Closing of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages**  
**Tuesday December 17, 2019**  
**UNGA, New York, NY**  
**Concluding Remarks**

**Speaker: Dr. Wilton Littlechild, IPC; Cree name: Walking Wolf, Golden Eagle**

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Thank you, Mr. President of the United Nations General Assembly. Your Excellencies, all Dignitaries, Representatives of Indigenous Peoples, Tribes and Nations. I add my voice to all the gratitude that has been expressed in thanking everyone here and to those watching.

Let me begin by thanking "Great Spirit", join me please in your own way, however you acknowledge our Creator for all wonderful blessings during this International Year. Special thanks to our Spiritual and Ceremonial leaders who opened this High-Level event this morning and to the Eagle Staff present here with us today.

For many years, indeed decades, at different conferences and meetings concerned indigenous leaders called for attention to the loss of our languages. In some instances, to the direct assault on children, our families, cultures and communities. Some concluded this era as Cultural Genocide, others argued it was and is genocide that continues.

Our Indigenous Language Warriors would not give up. After all, it is an Inherent Right and fundamental to the Right of Self-Determination for Indigenous Peoples. It is manifested in our spiritual relationship to Mother Earth. It is gifted by the Creator as a way we communicate through Ceremony, Song, Dance and our Spirituality.

Efforts since at least 2005 in Japan, China, Norway, Canada among others, escalated to bring focus to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Expert Mechanism, Special Rapporteurs. Finally, an Indigenous Languages' Caucus was organized to call for an Expert Group Meeting, then a call for a Proclamation to declare an International Year.

We owe great gratitude to so many persons and organizations present in this room, and others, to get us to this point today in the various ways they worked so hard. Thanks to UNESCO Staff and the Steering Committee for leading the way.

As we come to a close of the International Year, three guiding questions within the context of the implementation of the Action Plan were presented for consideration today.

1. What concrete support can be given to facilitate a role of Indigenous languages in Peace Building, Sustainable Development and Reconciliation in our societies?

2. What is necessary to ensure the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Peoples' Languages?
3. What role can be played by Indigenous Peoples' organizations, Member States and the UN System in the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous Peoples' Languages?

These are very important and ongoing questions. Fortunately we will now have a two year transition period to consider in depth the best solutions to these questions. We heard for example:

1. From my perspective, to build peace - the existing Peace and Friendship Treaties must be honoured and respected as called for by the United Nations and Organization of American States Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These have been recommended before by the three Indigenous specific mechanisms. So what is necessary is implementation. I firmly believe there will be more healing, better relationships. The UN/OAS Declarations are solutions as they support peaceful co-existence. That is also what true reconciliation looks like. Even where no Treaties currently exist. Recently EMRIP adopted Global Ten Principles of Reconciliation and are a blueprint that can be utilized to work together with Private Industry in the advancement of Sustainable Development.

2. The full respect of Traditional Wisdom Keepers and including them in guiding the best ways to Teach, Maintain And Re-vitalize Indigenous languages. One practical and useful example is the promotion and enhancement of the World Indigenous Nations (WIN) Games as those proposed for Rio, Brazil by Marcos and Carlos Terena committee in the Fall of 2020 as announced during the UN Permanent Forum's last session. The Traditional Games and Sports are also actually an implementation of Articles 3 and 31 of the UN Declaration and Indigenous Languages are a fundamental part of executing successful games and promoting Human Rights.

3. The most important and fundamental success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was the culturally relevant approach to it's work as advised by Elders and Survivors of a legislated form of assimilation. The single most important advice for true reconciliation, healing and forgiveness to happen is "to work together". In unity and to build on the strengths of our people. Language and culture were and are considered as treatment to the great harm that was done to children's identity and self-esteem. The role of language is central to which each entity can and must contribute.

In conclusion, please allow me to be the first to welcome the decision on an Indigenous Global Call for Action to proclaim a Decade for Indigenous Languages. Let us work on a positive and assertive Plan of Action. Let's set attainable Goals and Targets. Starting now, no more

indigenous languages will die. They are living and the value they add to the beauty and rich diversity of humankind can only make the world better. By 2032 there will be at a minimum of a doubling in the language fluency among indigenous language speakers.

Many interventions must work together as one to ensure that Indigenous Languages are not subject to further gaps or marginalization. This must be accomplished by joining efforts outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. Indigenous Languages are actually central to the full realization of each of the goals. If no one is to be left behind, then we must ensure that Indigenous Languages are not pushed behind. By working together collectively we can do it - what it means is Healing and Reconciliation. Healthier, stronger, Indigenous Peoples, Tribes and Nations. When Indigenous Peoples Win, the World Wins!

Hai Hai, Thank you.

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