

CONCEPT NOTE

International Year of Indigenous Languages High-level Event of the General Assembly 1 February 2019 // General Assembly Hall

On Friday, 1 February 2019, the President of the General Assembly will convene a High-level Event to mark the global launch of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages in New York, in line with General Assembly resolution 73/156.

Background

In September 2007, the General Assembly, through its resolution 61/295, adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration provides a comprehensive framework of minimum standards for economic, social and cultural well-being and rights of the world's indigenous peoples. The Declaration recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to revitalize, use, protect, preserve and transmit their histories, languages, and oral traditions to future generations. It further grants the right to indigenous peoples to establish their own media and educational systems in their own languages.

The outcome document of the 2014 high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (resolution 69/2) reiterated the importance of the United Nations' role in promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Member States committed to developing, in consultation with indigenous peoples, policies, programmes and resources to preserve and promote, among other things, the indigenous languages.

In its resolution 71/178 of 19 December 2016, the General Assembly proclaimed the year 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. Further, in its resolution 73/156 of 17 December 2018, the General Assembly requested the President of the General Assembly to support initiatives relevant to the successful celebration of the International Year, within existing resources. On 19 December 2018, the Permanent Representative of Mexico, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Indigenous Peoples, addressed a letter to the President of the General Assembly requesting the President to convene a high-level informal plenary meeting for the global launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The President of the General Assembly scheduled the meeting to take place on 1 February 2019 in the General Assembly Hall.

In the lead up to the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization played a leading role, including by developing an action plan and establishing a steering committee for organizing the International Year, in consultation and cooperation with Member States, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as indigenous peoples and a range of different stakeholders.

Indigenous languages represent complex systems of knowledge developed and accumulated over thousands of years. Each indigenous language represents a unique system and framework



for understanding the world in its ecological, economic or sociocultural aspects. Local languages are cultural treasures to communicate, share knowledge and promote local cultural specificities, customs and values.

The loss of an indigenous language can, therefore, mean the loss of vital knowledge, which could be harnessed for human improvement and sustainable development. Consequently, the disappearance of a language implies a considerable negative impact upon the indigenous culture concerned, as well as on global cultural diversity. Unique ways of knowing and experiencing the world may disappear forever. The issues around indigenous languages point to a significant cross-cutting pattern of disadvantages affecting a wide range of areas, including politics, law and justice, health, cultural practices and identities, the biosphere, access to information and communications.

Objective

The High-level Event of the General Assembly for the global launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages will mark the beginning of the International Year of Indigenous Languages and provide an opportunity for Member States and relevant stakeholders to exchange views and best practices about the preservation, promotion and revitalization of indigenous languages. The event will also draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages and to take further urgent steps at the national and international levels.

The global celebration of the International Year of Indigenous Languages will encourage stakeholders to renew their commitments to the call to preserve, promote and revitalize indigenous languages. It will further contribute to strengthening many standard-setting tools adopted by the international community, including specific provisions to promote and protect languages.

The global celebration will also contribute to the attainment of the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization, the outcome document of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, and other relevant documents, including UNESCO conventions and recommendations, achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples, alongside other relevant regional and national frameworks.

Participants

The meeting is open to Member States, observers of the General Assembly, United Nations entities, indigenous peoples and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Indigenous peoples' representatives and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council wishing to participate in the High-level Event were invited to [register here](#):

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/news/2019/01/launch-iyil/>. The deadline for registration was Monday, 21 January 2019.

Format

The High-level Event will consist of an opening segment, a plenary segment, and a closing segment. In the opening segment, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations (TBC), and a keynote address by the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The four Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee for the International Year of Indigenous Languages (two Member States and two indigenous peoples' representatives), and a representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will also speak at the opening segment

During the plenary segment and to ensure maximum participation, Member States are encouraged to limit their statements to three minutes for individual delegations and five minutes for statements made on behalf of a group of States. Representatives of the seven socio-cultural regions of indigenous peoples are invited to speak for five minutes each. Observers of the General Assembly, the three relevant mechanisms on the rights of indigenous peoples (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and United Nations entities will also be given the opportunity to speak for three minutes each.

The list of speakers will rotate between Member States and Observers of the General Assembly, representatives of the seven socio-cultural regions of indigenous peoples, the three relevant mechanisms on the rights of indigenous peoples and relevant United Nations entities. For inscription on the list of speakers, Member States, Observers of the General Assembly and United Nations entities are invited to contact the General Assembly Affairs Branch, Mr. Carlos Galindo (e-mail: galindo@un.org, with copy to gaespeakerslist@un.org; tel: 1 (212) 963-5063) beginning on Wednesday, 22 January 2019.

The closing segment will feature a statement by the President of the General Assembly.