

ESTONIA

Permanent Forum of the Indigenous People

Item 5, on 22 April 2019

Madam Chair,

Estonia firmly supports the aims of the International Year of the Indigenous Languages - to raise global awareness of indigenous languages and to mobilize different stakeholders and resources for coordinated action in this field around the world.

According to UNESCO, there are 7000 languages in the world, from these 2700 face a risk of extinction. With the loss of a language however, a whole culture may confront critical risks.

Protecting languages also directly relates to protecting the human rights of indigenous peoples. The protection of the rights of indigenous peoples is a vital part of Estonian foreign policy and human rights activities in the international organisations. We have a firm belief that indigenous peoples add to the diversity of the world and enrich our cultures.

Estonia, belonging to the small family of the Finno-Ugric peoples, puts much emphasis on the protection of the small indigenous cultures and languages. We are convinced that to take care for your language and culture and most importantly to develop them, is an obligation of each nation to the world.

As a member of the Steering Committee for the implementation of the year of the indigenous languages, Estonia is actively engaged in its activities: Estonia has celebrated the year with special events dedicated to the small local dialects of Estonia.

The International Year of Indigenous Languages was officially opened in February in Tallinn with an event including interactive panel discussions and cultural performances. In October there will be another large scale event introducing Fenno-Ugric culture and focusing on the importance of preserving and developing indigenous languages. Other events in smaller scale are also taking place and are organized among others by the civil society.

Next year the Estonian National Museum is going to host the 8th World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples on the 17-19. of June. The theme for this meeting is undoubtedly timely- „Culture- language and mind“. One panel of the Congress is devoted to indigenous languages and identity- in particular to the best practices of promoting and enhancing learning of indigenous languages and the role of NGOs in this respect.

Madam Chair,

We would like to commend UNESCO for taking on the task of coordination the year of the indigenous languages and we are glad that the opening ceremony in Paris and here in New York was a success. We hope that resources allocated for the projects of the international year help to achieve the full implementation of the planned activities. I am glad to say that Estonia has contributed financially to support the activities of the international year of the indigenous languages (*with 30 000 euros*). We hope that this year will yield tangible results and will contribute to concrete activities also beyond 2019 ensuring preservation and development of the indigenous languages.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that it is paramount that the international community does everything possible to support indigenous peoples, honour their past and guarantee their future. It is high time that we step up efforts towards fulfilling the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples both at the national and international levels and cooperate for preserving the unique linguistic and cultural diversity.

