

STATEMENT by President of the Sámi Parliament in Norway, Silje Karine Muotka

**UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 15th Session
Item 7: International Decade of Indigenous Languages**

4 July 2022

Giitu ságadoalli – Thank you Chair,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Sámi Parliaments in Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Language is one of our basic skills. Our language starts developing from the day we are born and follows us throughout life. Through languages we communicate, express our feelings, thoughts, and dreams. With language we interact with others and understand the world around us. Language is pivotal in developing our identity.

The fact that most of the endangered languages are Indigenous Peoples' languages, puts cultures and knowledge systems at risk. Saving Indigenous Peoples' languages is a matter of great urgency and is crucial to ensuring the protection of the cultural identity and dignity of Indigenous Peoples.

Mr./Ms. Chair,

On the occasion of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples' Languages, The Sámi parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland are cooperating on a joint Sámi flag-ship project in language technologies, with the purpose on strengthening the position of the Sámi languages, and to decolonize the digital landscape.

As we know, Language technologies are now advancing at a rapid pace and widely spreading. Language technology is probably one of the most important elements in the work of getting more active language users. This is also a key in transferring Indigenous Peoples' languages to the next generations.

However, the situation is very different across the worlds' languages. While the infinite opportunities of language technologies exist for some languages, Indigenous Peoples' languages do not have the same opportunities and conditions for keeping pace with technological developments. This creates a digital divide, which places languages in danger of digital extinction.

Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages, oral traditions, writing systems and literatures. Further, it provides that States shall take effective measures to protect this right, including through interpretation in political, legal and administrative proceedings.

It is vital for the survival of Indigenous Peoples' languages, that they are given the possibility to benefit from the full range of language technologies. It will require measures from states, the big techs, and international organizations. It is crucial that states and other actors, in their work with the decade, consult Indigenous Peoples in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent.

Ollu giitu – Thank you for your attention.