

**Statement by Akilech'oh
Grand Chief Edward John
TI'azt'en Nation, First Nations Summit
Co-Chair, UNESCO Steering Committee
International Year 2019 for Indigenous Languages**

**UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Eighteenth Session
New York, April 23, 2019
Item 14: Future Work**

**Excellencies
Elders, Chiefs, Indigenous Leaders and Youth
Distinguished guests and friends**

I am Akilech'oh, a proud Dakelh hereditary Chief. My name is Edward John, Grand Chief TI'azt'en Nation. My ancestral home lies in unceded Dakelh lands in the northwest part of this continent. My people are Dene speaking and we share this language with Indigenous peoples in Canada, in the southwest USA and in Alaska.

Andid dzin chaza, nja "Yoh Wha Cho", lha now ts'oz dil. Nay gha nih koh wha gha tsa til' dugw. Dul cho, ndi yun k'ut, ahlggo nay gha nih, k'oh za wha dil ts'uhl. Tabay hwoolh' tus' uhn nez nin dil. Nja nez ni dil, hun ta si, ndi nay gha nih k'oh, nay lhah ooh neh. Nja yoh nay dzi ndo nah ood neh.

[Translation: "Today, once again, we have come together in this Big House. We will talk about our Indigenous languages. All over the world our Indigenous languages are becoming less and less. We all have come to a very difficult place for our languages. We are hopeful you will understand and help us. Our hearts are lightened by this"]

I am one of seven Indigenous members, as well as a Co-Chair, of UNESCO's Steering Committee. Along with seven State representatives, we are honored to assist UNESCO to act on the UN General Assembly Resolution setting 2019 as the International Year

for Indigenous Languages. This Resolution is an action item from a recommendation from a previous Permanent Forum session.

As peoples we come as bright colorful tapestries woven together over millennia by our ancestors, binding us to a common and collective path on this planet, while respecting our diversities including our philosophies of life, teachings, spiritualities, cultures and languages; that no one peoples are greater or lesser than others.

We inherited goodness from our ancestors. Yet as Indigenous peoples we have seen evil: genocide, slavery, mass killings, racism and so on. Indigenous peoples treated as inferior in philosophies, teachings, spiritualities, cultures and languages. These were to be eradicated through successive, destructive, colonial and assimilationist policies and practices rooted in unfounded and racist notions of superiority.

Today Indigenous peoples continue to face an uncertain future and challenges for our survival, dignity and well-being and that of the continued existence of our languages. Yet our hope continues, based on our deep resilience based on our responsibilities to our future generations.

The United Nations has responded to and continues to respond to our calls. Some constructive measures from the UN includes:

- 1. The establishment of 3 Indigenous specific mechanisms to address critical issues facing Indigenous peoples;**
- 2. Adopting human rights instruments and other measures including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (“Declaration”) in 2007 and the “Outcome Document” from the 2014 UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.**

The rights, norms and standards in the Declaration and the extensive follow up commitments in the Outcome Document provide an important pathway forward and must guide our collective efforts forward. Strong and determined efforts by members States and by the UN, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples, are needed for the full and effective implementation of Indigenous rights.

The UN has established a System Wide Action Plan to implement the Declaration. As well many States continue to develop National Action Plans and Strategies to implement proactive reconciliation and redress measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on the Permanent Forum to:

- 1. Call on the continued support from and actions by the United Nations and Member States to ensure proactive measures to meet the enormous social, political, economic and environmental challenges and gaps which Indigenous peoples face;**
- 2. Listen to and heed Indigenous peoples. We are peoples and should be recognized and respected. We have voices and should be heard. We are visible and should be seen. We are here and should be included. In the spirit of the founding principles of the United Nations in 1944 and in the wisdom of the development of human, civil, economic, environmental and political rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, call on the United Nations and member States to find ways to ensure the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in the United Nations bodies including in the General Assembly;**
- 3. Call on the United Nations and member States to fully and effectively support UNESCO to fulfill its mandate for the 2019 International Year for Indigenous Languages. Regional and Global events will need to be convened to develop an Outcome Document for the UN General Assembly to consider at a UN General Assembly High Level Event convened in late 2019. The proposed Indigenous Peoples Languages Outcome, developed with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, should provide an Indigenous Peoples languages platform with the necessary commitments and actions to ensure the continued survival, revitalization and well-being of Indigenous peoples' languages;**

- 4. The UN WCIP 2014 “Outcome Document” committed the United Nations and members States to develop and implement System Wide Action Plans and National Action Plans. UNPFII call on the UN and member States to act on these commitments including the survival, well-being and revitalization of Indigenous Languages;**
- 5. UNPFII call on States to: enact legislation for the survival, well-being and revitalization of Indigenous languages; ensure adequate and sustained political and fiscal support for the delivery of teaching and learning of Indigenous languages; ensure elementary and secondary immersion and bi-lingual education at Indigenous communities level and monitor the status and well-being of all Indigenous languages, in particular those which are considered endangered.**
- 6. The Yuelu Proclamation (2018) developed as a result of a regional session convened by China and the Havana Declaration on Indigenous Languages (Oct. 2018) provided constructive analysis, advice and recommendations for the pathway forward. The Yuelu Proclamation, consistent with the advice from UNPFII and EMRIP, calls for an International Decade for Indigenous Languages. UNPFII recommend to the UN General Assembly and member States to adopt an “A Decade for Indigenous Languages Revitalization”;**
- 7. UNPFII, consistent with UNESCO’s general mandate for all languages globally and consistent with the UN’s recognition for enhanced participation of Indigenous peoples in the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, recommend to the UN General Assembly and member States to act on the ongoing commitments for Indigenous Languages post 2019 and that UNESCO be charged with establishing a platform for Indigenous Peoples Languages for the purposes of ensuring the monitoring, survival, well-being and revitalization of all Indigenous languages. In considering the development of UNESCO’s Indigenous Peoples’ languages platform UNESCO review the UNFCCC Indigenous peoples’ platform in matters relating to climate change.**

Snachilya. Thank you.