



## **Oral Statement at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of UN Human Rights Council**

### **Annual Panel Discussion on the rights of Indigenous People**

**18 September, 2019**

**Delivered by: Ms. Adrienne Ringin**

Mr. President,

In this the International Year of Indigenous Language, Edmund Rice International is calling on the Australian government to commit to the preservation of indigenous languages through the creation and formal adoption of education policies which allow for the education curriculum to be taught using the relevant indigenous languages.

Earlier this week, this council heard testimony from Djuwan Hoosan, a 12 year old Arrernte boy.<sup>1</sup> In July, Australia heard the plea from Indigenous Youth at the Garma Festival through the Imagination Declaration.<sup>2</sup> We echo these pleas today. Australia must provide the opportunity for its indigenous children to be educated in their own language.

Language is a key component of identity. It is through language that a person is able to situate themselves and create an understanding of the world, their culture and their place within it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-11/12yo-aboriginal-boy-gives-speech-at-un-about-age-of-criminality/11492796>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.yyf.com.au>

<sup>3</sup>Indigenous Language Learning and Maintenance Among Young Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, Sarah Verdon, Sharynne McLeod, 30 January 2015 pg 155.

Australia has the oldest living culture, but of the estimated original 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, around 120 are considered to be in use, of which, 90% are considered to be at risk of extinction.<sup>4</sup>

In its Action Plan for the 2019 Year of Indigenous Languages, Australia explicitly pledged to preserve and rejuvenate the languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and to ensure that these languages thrive, are celebrated and are considered across government services and policies.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the Action Plan recognises there is a need to facilitate career pathways for Indigenous Language teachers<sup>6</sup> as well as promoting the funding on language centres to ‘preserve, revive and maintain close to 165 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.’<sup>7</sup> These commitments, however, fail to recognise the simple solution of a national curriculum taught in indigenous languages.

Article 14 sub section 1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that indigenous people have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Article 14 subsection 2 requires State parties to facilitate this process. Australia declared its support for this instrument in 2009.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. President, Edmund Rice International along with Edmund Rice Centre, Sydney, call on Australia to honour its First Nations Peoples, honour their international commitments and listen to the Indigenous youth of Australia. Now is the time to enact policy change to ensure a better future for the indigenous youth of Australia.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/2019-international-year-indigenous-languages>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/2019-international-year-indigenous-languages/australian-government-action-plan-2019-international-year-indigenous-languages>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/2019-international-year-indigenous-languages/about-iy2019>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/2019-international-year-indigenous-languages/about-iy2019>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/projects/un-declaration-rights>

