

Statement by Finland

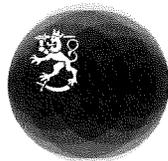
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Discussion on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages
Item 5

Statement by

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Permanent Mission of Finland
to the United Nations

Thank you Chairperson,

The International Year of Indigenous Languages raises a relevant and timely question: What can we do to prevent indigenous languages from disappearing? What should we do?

Some years ago, there were ten Sámi languages. After the last speakers of Akkala Sámi passed away, there are now nine Sámi languages.

In my own country Finland, there are three Sámi languages: North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. At some point, there were no children at all, that would have learned Skolt Sámi as their mother tongue. Now, gladly, we see a positive development.

The Sámi community has played a vital role, but also the Finnish Government has supported the revival of the Sámi languages. I give you two examples.

Language nest activities are probably the most efficient way of reviving languages at the risk of disappearing. Language nests resemble day care centres. The purpose is to accustom small children to a language and culture. Most of the children come from families, where parents have lost the connection with the language traditionally spoken in the greater family, in other words, a language shift has taken place. We have been able to increase these activities considerably in good cooperation with the Sámi Parliament.

Another important development is the teaching of and teaching in Sámi languages outside the Sámi homeland area. Today, the majority of Sámi children in Finland live outside the Sámi homeland area. There is a need to provide them an opportunity to learn their language and culture.

Last year in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, started the first class that operates in Sámi, namely North Sámi. Furthermore, there are more and more children that receive teaching of their mother tongue around the country. A new pilot project has started to develop distance teaching of the three Sámi languages. Via distance teaching, we can improve the accessibility of Sámi instruction.

The International Year of Indigenous Languages provides different actors a good opportunity to raise these important topics. In Finland, there is a special project operated by the Sámi Parliament to highlight the International Year. The aim of this project is to improve the situation and visibility of the Sámi languages especially amongst the youth and families with children. This is of utmost importance, if we wish to prevent more languages from disappearing.

Thank you for your attention.