

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – 18th Session

Item 5: Discussion on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages

Australian Statement

Thank you Chair

Barayn Marrung

Dhangu nuwayi Craig Ritchie

Ngaya guri Dhunghutti, ngaya Dhunghutti guuyarr

Barayn, ngaya manhatinan Lenape guthunda barriya.

Ngaya baluwa, garrkung ngarran, nganhikurr nyinan barriya dhithiyndha ngun.ngun, barayn, ngundakang.

Speaking in my Dhunghutti language I pay respects to the Traditional Owners of this land.

“Language is more than just a means of communication: it is a repository for history, wisdom, identity, culture. Indigenous languages contain unique systems of knowledge that are valuable to our modern challenges.”

Research shows that knowledge of language is fundamentally connected to cultural identity and promotes health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Sadly, in Australia, more than half of the original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are no longer spoken. With around 120 languages still spoken, only 13 are being spoken by adults and learnt by children, which maintains and preserves these languages.

In 2019, Australia will be conducting its third National Indigenous Languages Report to understand the state of Australian Indigenous Languages to inform our initiatives.

Around our country, we see languages being revived and carried forward through education: eight Australian Indigenous languages are being taught at universities, many revival languages are being taught in primary and secondary school classrooms, and first language literacy development and bi-lingual teaching methodologies are supporting language use.

During 2019, the International Year of Indigenous Languages, Australia is putting a focus on the value and diversity of our indigenous languages, and celebrating different ways of incorporating traditional languages and knowledge in to the modern era.

Just this month our Mint released a unique coin which shows the word for ‘money’ in 14 languages, with significant blank space to signify the languages we have lost.

The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC) has developed, with Australian company Smiling Mind, a mindfulness app which incorporates Aboriginal language and cultural concepts of mental health.

We are embracing technology and modern culture through IndigiTUBE, a repository of language and cultural content, including music videos, documentaries and even comedy routines.

While we cannot step away from the fact that Indigenous languages have been lost, we can be encouraged by innovation and commitment that the International Year of Indigenous Languages is supporting world-wide, and how countries such as ours are striving to preserve our precious history.

Niyanang wuunggalu: Let's work together.

Thank you.