



**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT TO THE
18TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON
INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII),**

**DELIVERED BY THE
DEPUTY MINISTER OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND
TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MR OBED BAPELA**

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

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Madame Chair,

2019 significantly marks the international year of indigenous languages, It was Nelson Mandela, who once said that **"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."** These words should inspire us to heed to the plight of indigenous peoples globally with the aim of promoting and protecting indigenous languages and improve the lives of those who speak them. Indigenous languages are not only a tool for communication but at the very core of culture, tradition and heritage. The critical loss of these languages requires substantive and urgent efforts by both Member States and the international community in partnership with indigenous peoples, to preserve, revitalize and promote them.

Madam Chair,

South Africa is proud to convey the significant progress made on the Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Bill which was successfully passed by both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, and is currently before the President for final signature into law. This Bill will have constitutional imperatives which would ensure the integration of the Khoi and San, as one of South Africa's indigenous communities, who are the last of the communities to be officially recognized.

The language question in South Africa is one of the undigested features of post-colonial and apartheid South Africa. Notwithstanding, we pride ourselves in our rich cultural and ethnic diversity, where the Freedom of cultural, religious and linguistic expression is enshrined in the Constitution, with the recognition of both, eleven official languages as well as non-official languages, including; the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and sign language.

My Government has placed the development, revitalization, resuscitation and preservation of arts, culture and heritage in its various forms, as an integral part of our National Development Plan. For its part, South Africa has taken the following key measures;

- The South Africa Constitution establishes institutions aimed at promoting and creating conditions for the protection and development of all languages, cultures and religions.
- Significantly, on 21 March this year South Africa celebrated Human Rights Day under the theme; "The Year of Indigenous Languages: Promoting and Deepening a Human Rights Culture". South Africa, through PanSALB, has also launched "the year of indigenous languages" aimed at promotion and protection of indigenous languages.
- Government has made strides in codifying all indigenous languages, moving away from oral to written as a way of preserving these languages. Recently, the Nama language of the Khoisan people is being implemented regionally in primary schools in the Northern Cape, including the finalization of a language rule book.
- In addition, a regional and community based Khoi and San radio stations, under the national broadcaster, serves to further preserve and revitalize indigenous languages,

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its commitment to advancing the rights of indigenous peoples and communities and welcomes the deliberations at the Forum which will enhance our knowledge on best practices aimed at realizing the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, we look forward to the successful implementation of the UNESCO led Action plan for the international year of indigenous languages and commend them for their work done.

Thank You.