

Statement by Ms. Yvonne Pearson, Toshao & Member Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana at the 21st Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues - Thematic dialogues: International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032

Monday April 25, 2022, United Nations, New York

Theme: ‘Indigenous peoples shall have the right to the protection, preservation and promulgation of their languages, cultural heritage and way of life’

Chair,

The Constitution of Guyana, our supreme law, expressly provides for the protection, preservation and promulgation of the languages, cultural heritage and way of life of our Indigenous Peoples.

In Guyana, Indigenous peoples are referred to as Amerindians. The two terms are used interchangeably. Importantly, our Amerindian people self-identify.

Central to our Amerindian peoples’ identity is our language. Nine indigenous groups co-exist in Guyana, namely the Wai Wais, Macushis, Patomonas, Arawaks, Caribs, Wapishana, Arecunas, Akawaios and Warraus, each with their unique language.

The Government of Guyana recognizes the importance of the preservation of Amerindian people’s culture and identity and, as such, continues to support and fund initiatives to advance the revival of indigenous languages for those groups whose languages are at risk of disappearing. The Ministry of

Amerindian Affairs has a Language Revival Programme, which emphasizes the importance of language as a transmitter of culture, traditions, and knowledge.

Under this program, young people participating in our Youth Entrepreneurial Apprenticeship programme are trained to become proficient in their languages. They will become trainers who will continue to teach others so as to keep the languages alive.

The task is challenging and requires personal responsibility to maintain the use of Amerindians languages, taking into account issues such as urbanization and integration. We recognize that modern technology can be a useful tool in the promulgation of indigenous languages, especially among the younger generation.

Dictionaries for 5 of the nine indigenous languages were produced which will assist in our efforts to promote these languages in school systems in Guyana.

Chair

Guyana reiterates our commitment in promoting the inherent rights of indigenous peoples, as set out in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular, to recover, use and pass on the languages to future generations. International cooperation and sharing of experiences will help in the realization of our initiatives which must continue beyond the 'International Decade of Indigenous Languages.'

Thank you.