

Statement by
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Statement by Denmark-Greenland on agenda item 3(b)
“Indigenous languages: preservation and revitalization”

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Thank you Madame Chair,

I have the honor of making this statement on behalf of the Government of Greenland.

The Greenlandic language, Kalaallisut, belongs to the Inuit group of languages and is spoken by approximately 44,000 individuals in Greenland. The total population of our country being just under 57,000. If we include Greenlanders living in Denmark then there are around 55,000 people in total speaking the Greenlandic Inuit language.

The Greenlandic government emphasizes the importance of preserving our language. Practicing our language is a way of manifesting and developing our cultural heritage and is of outmost importance to cultural identity and our self-determination as indigenous peoples.

Acknowledging this, we seek to strengthen the Greenlandic language in administration as well as in education and, to a larger extent, as a culture bearer via literature.

Madame Chair,

Educational policies of the 1950s and forward that have favored Danish over our native language, has presented challenges for the preservation of Kalaallisut, but with newer developments of Self-governance and subsequent strong language policies, we are working towards revitalizing our language.

As stated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and provide education in their own language.

The Act on Greenland Self-Government, which was implemented in 2009, recognizes the Greenlandic people's right to self-determination under international law, with the Greenlandic language as the official language of the country, cf. official letter from the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General February 8, 2010 (A/64/676).

One of the first actions of the Government of Greenland following the inauguration of Self Government was to introduce new legislation on language policy. The act on language policy was passed in the Parliament of Greenland in 2010.

The purpose of the act is among other things to ensure the Greenlandic language as a complete and community building language that seeks to strengthen the Greenlandic language as the mother tongue and as a second language for some inhabitants in Greenland. Private companies, public authorities and institutions are required to adopt language policies.

Madame Chair,

To retain our language and to ensure its continued role and use in all spheres of society, the government of Greenland is seeking to strengthen the educational system. The teaching of Greenlandic as a first language is being modernized and made more result-oriented so that its status amongst pupils is raised.

Within the sphere of language technology, attempts have been made to write programs for transliteration between the old and the new orthographic systems. Spellchecks, syntax checks and word divisions have been introduced.

Our language remains important for our cultural heritage and identity, and preserving and revitalizing kalaallisut will continue to play an important part of our nation-building process, as we move forward.

Qujanaq – Thank you.