

17th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Agenda item 4: 2019 – the International Year of Indigenous Languages

Delivered by:

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The Sami Parliament of Norway

*Li mihkkege
Nu čiekŋalit
Seaillo olbmuid luhtte
Go eatnigiella
Mii jurdagiid luvve
Lebbe miellamet
Ja liniidahtta
eallinvuogi*

Mr/Mdm Chairperson

This poem was written by Paulus Utsi, born in 1918. He was a Sámi poet, reindeer herder, teacher and artisan. The poem is about one's first language and what a profound and healing force it has on people. Language has the ability to embrace and define a nation with all its wisdom, and is a prerequisite for the survival of cultures. If a language dies out, the culture and the lifestyle of the people who spoke it will also die out over time.

We have studied the Plan of Action for the International Year of Indigenous Languages with great interest, and we have identified several areas in which we would like to contribute to the common good of the world's indigenous languages.

Every language is dependent on having a sufficient number of users. To increase the number of users, it is crucial that there are good, comprehensive school programmes, accompanied by strong and genuine efforts to recruit teachers with both language- and subject-related expertise.

We are now introducing a Sámi language reform as a comprehensive tool to promote the Sámi languages, that will embrace all levels of society. There will be a need to implement good measures that address public institutions, municipalities and local communities, as well as the individual language user and children and young people. It is necessary to have

reliable information about the Sámi languages in the community, to have guidance provided by language institutions, and to upgrade language skills in all areas of society, and thereby provide a powerful boost for the Sámi languages.

Mr./Mdm Chairperson,

I would like to tell you about a unique project that the Sámediggi in Norway, Sweden and Finland have been collaborating on for about five years. Sámi languages do not follow national borders, but rather transverse these three countries, as well as Russia. The goal of the project is to establish common terminology and language standards to ensure that the Sámi languages do not develop in different directions in their respective countries. The project has shown us how vital it is to work with language together across national frontiers. Now we need for the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish states to provide funding, and for all the Sámediggi to turn the project into a permanent facility. I dream that this will be a reality in 2019, as that would coincide perfectly with the International Year of Indigenous Languages.