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Panel on International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032

Statement by Aili Keskitalo, president of Sami Parliament in Norway, representing the Arctic socio-cultural region in the IDIL Global Task Force.

Madam/Mr Chair.

I am Biehttar-Heaikka Elle Máreha Áili, or Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sami Parliament in Norway. I have had the honour of representing the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic region in the IYIL2019 Steering Committee, also serving as co-chair for the Steering committee. I am now one of the Arctic representatives in the Global Task Force.

On behalf of the Sami and the Inuit, the two Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic region, I would like to express our dedication to the Decade of Indigenous Languages. The International Year was a promise of lasting change for our languages, and we are committed to working on a local, regional and global level to make that change during the Decade.

The Sami languages are all threatened languages, with varying numbers of speakers, varying official status, institutional and legislative support. The borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, cross our homeland and language communities, with all the practical challenges that entails. The IYIL gave us an opportunity to boost our plans for establishing a joint cross-border language institution, Sámi giellagáldu, but we are still waiting for all the states to support this effort financially.

The Sami peoples needs span from support to revitalization efforts in areas where the language is almost extinct because of harsh assimilation policies, to provision of public services in our languages in our majority Sami communities. We also want to make sure that our languages do not get left behind from the digital leap the worlds languages are facing. Language technology should support Indigenous Peoples languages.

The IDIL 2022–2032 was proclaimed through the General Assembly's resolution A/RES/74/135 Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The declaration of the Decade might be the biggest result of the International year, and it is very important to remind us all that the context and the aim of the Decade is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' languages.

Last week the external evaluation of the IYIL was published, and I would like to thank the evaluation team and their informants for providing us with lessons learned in the preparation of IDIL. The first, and probably most important recommendation from the evaluation is to ensure the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in structure and implementation. This might seem like a no-brainer, but the evaluation shows that the message and the opportunities of the IYIL did not reach all Indigenous Peoples regions, and that IP participation varied.

We are pleased with the broad interest from different stakeholders and allies in taking part in the year, but looking forward we must not lose focus of the context of the Decade. Even if Indigenous Peoples languages share the challenges of many lesser-used languages of the world, we must not forget the special historical, socio-economic and political situation of Indigenous peoples. That is why we need to make sure that Indigenous Peoples and our languages get the space, the focus and the resources we need leading up to and during the decade. Many others might find our challenges interesting and engaging, and they are welcome to contribute to the work, but if Indigenous Peoples ourselves are not in the lead, all efforts will be meaningless.

I urge the UNPFII to look into the evaluation of the IYIL, especially the recommendations regarding Indigenous Peoples participation, when engaging in the preparations for the Decade.

Finally; I am immensely grateful take part in the preparation for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages together with other Indigenous leaders and language activists both here and all over the world, together with the UN and UNESCO member states and with the support of the UNESCO secretariat and other UN partners.

Giitu. Thank you.