

**UN Permanent Forum on Issues**

**Eighteenth Session**

**Monday, April 22, 2019**

**Agenda Item 9: Discussion on the theme “Traditional knowledge: generation, transmission and protection;**

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

**Statement of the Urban Native Youth Association**

**Speaker: Matthew Norris, Vice-President of the Urban Native Youth Association, member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.**

My name is Matthew Norris, I am a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in Northern Saskatchewan and it is my privilege to serve as the Vice-President of the Urban Native Youth Association, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It is my honour and responsibility to present the following statement on behalf of the Urban Indigenous Youth Association and the urban Indigenous youth to which we serve and who are our members. The Urban Native Youth Association was formed in 1988 to address concerns facing Indigenous youth, at a time when growing numbers of young people began leaving reserves for the city. This statement addresses the themes of Indigenous languages and the generation, transmission and protection of Indigenous traditional knowledge.

Firstly, I would like to propose the following recommendations:

**Recommendations:**

1. That, as per Article 8 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Permanent Forum call on Member States, to engage with Indigenous Peoples, inclusive of Indigenous Nations and displaced Indigenous Peoples in urban contexts, to develop, fund and implement National Action plans to address the colonial legacies responsible for the creation of displaced Indigenous peoples;
2. That the Permanent Forum call on Member States to provide the necessary resources to jointly review their laws and policies, with the full participation of Indigenous peoples, to ensure that displaced Indigenous urban communities are accounted for and necessarily included;
3. That the Permanent Forum call on Members States to jointly develop, fund and implement National Action Plans to provide the necessary reparations and resourcing to Indigenous Nations to welcome back all previously displaced Indigenous people;
4. That the Permanent Forum call on Members States to jointly develop, fund and implement transitional National Action Plans to ensure that the human rights of displaced Indigenous communities living in urban contexts are recognized and affirmed, with particular attention paid to the circumstances of Indigenous youth, women and elders, as per Article 1 of the UN Declaration.

Colonization has had profound impacts on our Indigenous nations, fracturing nations, communities, and families by physically and culturally displacing our most vulnerable members from their territories and their people.

In the Canadian context, the Indian Residential School system, the forced removal of Indigenous children, the imposition of Band governments, the Indian reservation system and the imposition of state-regulated legally-defined Indigenous identity legislation, has effectively displaced thousands of Indigenous families, youth, women and elders, spatially, spiritually, and culturally from their nations and territories.

Though the Urban Native Youth Association holds our hands up to Canada for the collaborative work undertaken to develop Bills C-91, *An Act Respecting Indigenous languages*, C-92, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*, and Bill C-262, *An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, we need to ensure that our most vulnerable community members and those most impacted by colonial policies and laws, who now find themselves displaced from their communities, nations and territories, are not ignored or forgotten.

While Indigenous Nations develop their independent capacities, and continue to fight for the recognition of their title and rights, including the right to self-determination, self-government and free, prior and informed consent, we must acknowledge that there are thousands of individuals left in limbo, without a political voice, and relying on the program dollars which filter through the federal departments and Indigenous land-based organizations to urban Indigenous services providers.

The needs of these urban-based Indigenous organizations and service providers are acute. The Urban Native Youth Association is one such organization that has operated for 40+ years without guaranteed sustainable funding, providing services to displaced Indigenous youth, from across British Columbia and Canada, including the provision of services for youth without a legal connection to any federally recognized First Nation.

Indigenous youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada and one of the most transitory and mobile. The Urban Native Youth Association sees over 5000 visits per year from urban indigenous youth, who for the most part, lack access to the programs and services provided for and by Indigenous land-based communities and organizations. The transmission of our Indigenous languages and our traditional teachings, laws, knowledge, and relations to our youth is critical.

Our youth are our greatest hope and treasure, yet they are also the most at risk of issues surrounding substance abuse, physical and sexual violence, poverty, homelessness, and suicide. The transmission of the wealth of knowledge, pride and transformative practices as found within our languages and worldview is critical to the growth and development of our youth into the leaders of today and tomorrow. To accomplish this, Urban-based Indigenous organizations and the rights of displaced Indigenous peoples, need to be recognized, implemented and provided sustainable, long-term, resourcing until such a time that the capacity of our Indigenous Nations have been strengthened to the degree to which they are able to welcome back our displaced peoples into the community and the Nation where they once belonged.

As a beneficiary of the UN Voluntary Fund, I would like to thank the Fund for allowing me to be here today and to provide a voice at the UN for Urban Indigenous Youth in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Thank you, Madam Chair.