

**18<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**  
**22 April – 3 May 2019**

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

**EU Statement**

The European Union is founded on diversity of cultures, customs, beliefs and languages. Besides the 24 official languages of the Union, there are over 60 regional or minority languages, spoken by some 40 million people.

We celebrate this diversity and consider our many mother tongues as a source of wealth and a bridge to greater solidarity and mutual understanding. Linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union.

Accordingly, Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity; Article 21 prohibits discrimination based on a number of grounds, including language.

For all these reasons, the European Union is supporting the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The European Parliament, in its Resolution from 3rd of July 2018 on the violation of rights of indigenous peoples in the world, emphasised that culture is a factor for development, and invited all states - including the EU and its Member States - to contribute to the implementation and realisation of 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Investment at national, local and community level is needed to preserve and revitalise languages. We believe that the best investment is to promote bilingualism and multilingualism. In today's interconnected world there is an increasing pressure and need to be able to speak several languages.

For indigenous peoples this means that it is important to speak the national language of the country they live in. Unfortunately this might contribute in certain circumstances to the tendency to abandon the use of indigenous languages, which does not need to happen if there is a strong appreciation and emphasis on bi- and multilingualism in the language development of each child.

In this context, the European Union in 2008 has issued a strategy for multilingualism to help EU Member States develop new educational tools to ensure that school leavers have better language skills and master more than one language as a way to improving job prospects and to enabling people to move around within the EU.

In our external relations we are guided by the same values and principles on which the European Union is founded. This is why we support several projects in the world to promote mother tongue based multilingual education and the revitalisation of indigenous languages.

I thank you for your attention.