

***United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
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***Agenda Item 4. Implementation of the Six Mandated areas of the Permanent Forum with
reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
(Indigenous Languages)***

*Statement of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), prepared by Chief Willie Littlechild,
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Presented by Chief Willie Littlechild

Thank you Madame Chair,

Let me first offer my congratulations to your re-election to this august UN Permanent Forum, it's a testament to your previous leadership. Also congratulations to your colleagues and thank them for their on-going interests in the advancement of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Secondly, I want to also thank UNESCO for its central leadership on the development of an international action plan to celebrate the very important and long overdue focus on Indigenous Languages. Our delegations look forward to further engagement on this essential topic. We all look forward to next year when we all come together to uplift the International Year of Indigenous Languages. I was very honored to participate in the preliminary meetings in Paris to ensure the inclusion of a fulsome perspective that includes an international legal framework with a particular focus on Treaties, Agreements and other constructive arrangements.

While it is important to use the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a foundational framework it is also equally important to include the complimentary Organization of American States' (OAS) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Often, the importance of recognizing and including language in ways that also honors the importance of protecting, preserving and integrating our spiritual practices is left out or ignored. However, the OAS declaration for the first time, in a regional legal framework underscores the very important connection between Indigenous languages, our lands and our Indigenous spirituality in Articles 14, 15 and 16¹. In particular Article 16 (1) states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to freely exercise their own spirituality and beliefs and, by virtue of that right, to practice, develop, transmit, and teach their traditions, customs, and ceremonies, and to carry them out in public

¹ Article XIV. Systems of Knowledge, Language and Communication (1) Indigenous peoples have the right to preserve, use, develop, revitalize, and transmit to future generations their own histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, systems of knowledge, writing, and literature; and to designate and maintain their own names for their communities, individuals, and places. (2) The states shall adopt adequate and effective measures to protect the exercise of this right with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples. (3) Indigenous peoples have the right to promote and develop all their systems and media of communication, including their own radio and television programs, and to have equal access to all other means of communication and information. The states shall take measures to promote the broadcast of radio and television programs in indigenous languages, particularly in areas with an indigenous presence. The states shall support and facilitate the creation of indigenous radio and television stations, as well as other means of information and communication. (4) The states, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, shall make efforts to ensure that those peoples can understand and be understood in their languages in administrative, political, and judicial proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other effective means.

and in private, individually and collectively.”² This is especially important in matter of education. Article 15 of the OAS Declaration reaffirms that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning”.³ To honor this right of self-determination in education and tribal schools should not be impeded from exercising this right by education standards, including teacher accreditation requirements, imposed by states.

The transference of traditional and cultural knowledge to our younger generations is important for our survival and continuance of our Peoples. The interconnection of Indigenous Language and Spirituality is vitally important for the preservation of biodiversity, and so has an important relevance to meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promoting peace, reconciliation, prosperity, sustainability and resiliency, in all countries around the world.

We recommend that any dialogues or consultations on the action plan for the International year of Indigenous Languages ensures the inclusion of Indigenous spirituality as guiding principles for ensuring the protection, revitalization and continuance of Indigenous Languages.

² Article XVI. Indigenous spirituality (1) Indigenous peoples have the right to freely exercise their own spirituality and beliefs and, by virtue of that right, to practice, develop, transmit, and teach their traditions, customs, and ceremonies, and to carry them out in public and in private, individually and collectively. (2) No indigenous people or person shall be subject to pressures or impositions, or any other type of coercive measures that impair or limit their right to freely exercise their indigenous spirituality and beliefs. (3) Indigenous Peoples have the right to preserve, protect, and access their sacred sites, including their burial grounds; to use and control their sacred objects relics, and to recover their human remains. (4) States, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, shall adopt effective measures, to promote respect for indigenous spirituality and beliefs, and to protect the integrity of the symbols, practices, ceremonies, expressions, and spiritual protocols of indigenous peoples, in accordance with international law.

³ Article XV. Education (1) Indigenous peoples and individuals, particularly indigenous children, have the right to all levels and forms of education, without discrimination. (2) States and indigenous peoples, in keeping with the principle of equality of opportunity, shall promote the reduction of disparities in education between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples. (3) Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (4) In conjunction with indigenous peoples, the states shall take effective measures to ensure that indigenous persons living outside their communities, particularly children, may have access to education in their own languages and cultures. (5) States shall promote harmonious intercultural relations, ensuring that the curricula of state educational systems reflect the pluricultural and multilingual nature of their societies and encourage respect for and knowledge of the different indigenous cultures. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, promote intercultural education that reflects the worldview, histories, languages, knowledge, values, cultures, practices, and ways of life of those peoples. (6) States, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, shall adopt necessary and effective measures to ensure the exercise and observance of these rights.