

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 Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Speaker: Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and Chief of the Neskonalith Indian Band

My name is Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, and I am Secretary-Treasurer for the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and Chief of the Neskonalith Indian Band, Skat'sin te Secwépemc. It is my honour and responsibility to present the following statement on behalf of the UBCIC which represents over a hundred and ten First Nations in British Columbia, Canada, which is mandated to advocate for the protection and revitalization of Indigenous Languages in BC and the establishment of a Nation-to-Nation process inclusive of First Nations legal systems. 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 the Permanent Forum call on Members States, to engage with Indigenous Peoples through a meaningful and substantive process to co-develop, fully fund and implement National Action Plans to revitalize and protect Indigenous languages in the pursuit of language fluency.
2. That the Permanent Forum call on Members States to co-develop, with the full participation of Indigenous peoples, fully funded National Action Plans to adequately, respectfully and necessarily consider the traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous peoples when reviewing industrial, commercial or residential projects impacting Indigenous Title and Rights.
3. That the Permanent Forum call on Member States, in the development of their National Actions Plans to provide Indigenous peoples the necessary resources and capacity to fully participate as equal partners.
4. That the Permanent Forum call on Member States to co-develop and implement independent *monitoring and reporting mechanisms for state's activities to safeguard, revitalize and incorporated* Indigenous Languages and Traditional Knowledge into legislation, policy and operational practices.
5. That the Permanent Forum call on Member States to provide permanent, on-going and sustainable funding to Indigenous Nations for the protection, revitalization and transmission of the Indigenous languages and knowledge systems.

Indigenous languages form the bedrock for the continuity, survival and well-being of our cultures, our knowledge and legal systems, our worldviews and our relational obligations to each other and the natural world.

Our Indigenous languages, teachings and expertise have been formed by our unique experiences as Indigenous peoples and our relations and responsibilities to the lands and territories to which we call home. As a result, our Indigenous experts, knowledge holders, and language speakers, are equipped with a keen understanding of our Indigenous legal systems, our territory's vulnerabilities, our peoples' needs, and the protections and safeguards necessary to ensure the wellness of our communities, territories and peoples.

With the growing recognition and implementation of Indigenous human rights and the ongoing and unaddressed climate change crisis which disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples, States can no longer dismiss or ignore our lived experiences, neither can States adopt a paternalistic approach to recognizing and accommodating our voices and expertise.

State supported initiatives, aimed at the revitalization and incorporation of Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge, must be developed collaboratively, with the full participation of First Nations. Such initiatives must not be performative in nature and must necessarily create space at decision making tables for the inclusion of Indigenous world-views and our lived experiences.

Our languages are critical to the survival of our Indigenous world-view. Our lived-experiences, responsibilities and ways of life are captured in the nuances of our languages. The death of our languages represents a significant risk to our way of life, culture and well-being. States have understood this, and as a result, have played a significant role in the intentional destruction of our Indigenous languages. States must be held accountable for their actions. It is a moral and legal imperative for States to support the revitalization of our languages and knowledge systems to the same degree by which they attempted to destroy them, this includes the provision of permanent, on-going, sustainable funding.

States must immediately adopt legislatively enshrined procedures to ensure that the principles of respect and recognition, as engendered within Article 19 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, are implemented, taking into full consideration Indigenous traditional knowledge systems.

The UBCIC maintains that it is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to conform with the colonial systems imposed upon us. It is for colonial governments to work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples to conform and reform their legal systems, their governance systems and their assumed jurisdiction to work with the traditional governance and legal systems of Indigenous Nations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.