



United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples 18<sup>th</sup>  
Session New York, 22 April - 3 May, 2019

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

INTERVENTION by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, delivered by Councilor Anne Dennis for the North West Region, and member of the Gamilaraay People.

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Yaama Maliyaa Hello Friends. Anne Dennis ngaya, I am Anne Dennis. Murri Wiringah Gamilaraay ngaya, I am an Aboriginal woman Kamilaroi nation, Australia. Nginda ngaya wingangay-lay-nha, I am acknowledging you. Yaama United Nations delegates Dhaymaarr ngaya wingangay-lay-nha, I am acknowledging the lands of First Nations people and all the lands you have travelled from. Guuguu ngaya wingangay-lay-nha, I am acknowledging the Elders past and present and I extend that respect to all First Nations people here today.

I also acknowledge the work of those preserving and protecting our languages.

Gamilaraay is my mother tongue, it connects me to my ancestors, my culture, my Country, my identity. It is a language that my parents were denied to speak by Australian Government policy.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council is pleased to contribute to the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

With reference to **Articles 13<sup>1</sup>** and **16<sup>2</sup>** of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we make the following recommendations encouraging States to:

- Implement long-term national strategies, co-designed and implemented with local Indigenous peoples; to build capacity, revitalize, protect and promote our Indigenous Languages, consistent with our rights,
- Acknowledge, value and respect Indigenous Languages in national constitutions and expand public and governmental usage<sup>3</sup>; and
- Recognise and comprehensively resource our own peak community organisations to implement Indigenous-led programs to revitalize, protect and promote our Indigenous Languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures

<sup>2</sup> Right to establish their own media in their own languages and access non-Indigenous media

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) 2009 Social Justice Report. Sydney: Australia [Retrieved from: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social\\_justice/sj\\_report/sjreport09/pdf/sjr\\_nx3.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport09/pdf/sjr_nx3.pdf)]

Madam Chair, our Land Council makes these recommendations as our Indigenous Languages in Australia are at risk.

Prior to invasion, there were over 700 languages spoken across our lands<sup>4</sup>

Today, in Australia only 1 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak Language at home<sup>5</sup>

Of the 145 Indigenous languages still spoken, 110 are critically endangered<sup>6</sup> and only 69 have more than a 100 speakers<sup>7</sup>

Put simply, our Indigenous languages are at risk and it is no coincidence that Australia is one of the top five endangered language hot spots in the world<sup>8</sup>. This is consistent with previous government policies to eradicate our languages. It is also consistent with the Australian Government's lack of urgency to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Australian Constitution.

We understand our children need to get a western education and employment, but this cannot come at the cost of our language, our culture and our identity. It is vital that local people remain at the forefront of the revitalization of our languages. States have an obligation to support these measures under Articles 13 and 16 of the Declaration. These strategies however, must reflect our regional linguistic diversity and must be co-designed and delivered by our community. This support should at least match the effort of government's previous assimilationist policies.

Finally, in 2019, the International year of Indigenous Languages, we must be vigilant about the spiritual, cultural and physical relationship with Country that underpins our languages; we are calling for a resurgence of Indigenous languages and life ways, so our peoples and our cultures flourish.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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<sup>4</sup> Simpson, J. (2019, January 21) The state of Australia's Indigenous languages – and how we can help people speak them more often. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/the-state-of-australias-indigenous-languages-and-how-we-can-help-people-speak-them-more-often-109662>

<sup>5</sup> National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. (2012, May). *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*. Retrived from: <https://nationalcongress.com.au/advocacy/languages/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-languages-statement/>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) 2009 Social Justice Report. Sydney: Australia [Retrieved from: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social\\_justice/sj\\_report/sjreport09/pdf/sjr\\_nx3.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport09/pdf/sjr_nx3.pdf)]

<sup>7</sup> National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. (2012, May). *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*. Retrived from: <https://nationalcongress.com.au/advocacy/languages/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-languages-statement/>

<sup>8</sup> Archibald-Binge, E. (2018, February 23) Calls for national legislation to protect Indigenous languages in Australia. *NITV*. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2018/02/23/calls-national-legislation-protect-indigenous-languages-australia>