



# Economic and Social Council

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## Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

**Eighteenth session**

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### Draft report

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## Chapter I Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

### B. Matters brought to the attention of the Council

#### Recommendations of the Permanent Forum

#### Discussion on the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (item 5)

1. Indigenous languages represent complex systems of knowledge that have been developed over thousands of years and are inextricably linked to lands, waters, territories and resources. Each indigenous language represents a unique system and framework for understanding the world in all its complexity and is a repository of traditional knowledge that is vital for sustaining the Earth's biological diversity, finding effective responses to the challenges presented by global climate change and providing important contributions to sustainable development, peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

2. Indigenous languages are key to ensuring the continuation and transmission of culture, customs and history as part of the heritage and identity of indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples reflects the importance of indigenous languages and provides for indigenous peoples to have the rights to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages (art. 13), to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages (art. 14), and to establish their own media in their own languages (art. 16). In the Declaration, States are requested to take effective measures to ensure that these rights are protected (art. 13).

3. The Permanent Forum expresses concern for the state of the world's indigenous languages. It is estimated that there are between 6,000 and 7,000 oral languages in the world today, most of them spoken by very few individuals. The Forum recommends the adoption of a rights-based approach towards indigenous language



issues that considers the full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Declaration. The Forum further recommends that Member States, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, indigenous peoples organizations and other stakeholders share initiatives and strategies undertaken for, with and by indigenous peoples in order to recover, use, revitalize and disseminate indigenous languages, including through the use of information and communication technologies.

4. The Permanent Forum thanks the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its efforts as the lead United Nations agency for the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages.<sup>1</sup> The Forum recommends that UNESCO prepare a strategic outcome document of the 2019 International Year.

5. The Permanent Forum further requests that UNESCO present a report to the Forum by 2020 on the implementation of the International Year, on the basis of the action plan for organizing it (see [E/C.19/2018/8](#)).

6. The Forum welcomes the global launch of the International Year on 28 January 2019 in Paris, led by UNESCO in cooperation with the steering committee. It also welcomes the organization of the high-level informal-plenary meeting of the General Assembly thereafter on preparations for the International Year, convened in response to resolution [73/156](#) by the President of the seventy-third session of the Assembly at United Nations Headquarters on 1 February 2019.

7. The Permanent Forum takes note of national, regional and international initiatives, including the establishment of the Ibero-American Institute of Indigenous Languages by the XXVI Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government. The Forum recommends that similar initiatives be implemented in other regions.

8. Considering the rapid rate of disappearance of indigenous languages and the fact that their reclamation and revitalization will require a sustained effort by indigenous peoples, Member States, and organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, the Permanent Forum recommends that the General Assembly proclaim an International Decade on Indigenous Languages, to begin in 2021 or as soon as possible.

9. The Permanent Forum recommends that Member States formulate evidence-based policies, long-term strategies and regulatory frameworks, in cooperation with indigenous peoples, to ensure their support and the protection and revitalization of indigenous languages, including adequate, sustained support for bilingual, mother-tongue education. Furthermore, the Forum recommends that Member States facilitate the mainstreaming of indigenous languages. Allowing indigenous peoples to access health care and other public services in their own languages will help to ensure their overall well-being.

10. The Permanent Forum urges UNESCO to develop an indigenous peoples' platform within the agency to ensure that UNESCO language programmes provide tangible benefits to indigenous communities and ensure that indigenous peoples are active in all aspects of the work of UNESCO.

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<sup>1</sup> The steering committee for the organization of the International Year is composed of Member States; representatives of indigenous peoples and institutions from the seven sociocultural regions; designated members of the three United Nations mechanisms (one member of the Permanent Forum, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and one member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples); and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (advisory role). UNESCO serves as the secretariat of the committee.