



**Statement by Assembly of First Nations
National Chief Perry Bellegarde**

**2019 United Nations International Year of Indigenous
Languages Launch Event**

February 1, 2019

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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Tawaw kahkiyaw,
okimâwak, nâpewak, iskwewak, kêhtêak, oskâyak. Okimaw piyasiw awasis
nitisihkason. Miyo kisikaw anoch.

I am honoured to be speaking at the United Nations for the International Year of Indigenous Languages. Thank you especially to the President of the General Assembly for ensuring we have this day, here in the GA Hall.

In Canada and around the globe Indigenous peoples' languages are not safe. We all know this. Despite this fact, there is hope. Language revitalization experts believe that with adequate support, all Indigenous peoples' languages in Canada are sustainable.

Soon, the Government of Canada will table legislation toward the reclamation, revitalization, recovery and maintenance of the Indigenous peoples' languages. I fully expect the Prime Minister to live up to Canada's promise to implement the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action for this legislation and include sustainable, long-term funding and an Office of Commissioner of Indigenous languages.

Since 2016, Canada has repeatedly declared its unqualified support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We hope this legislation can become a positive example of how the UN Declaration can be incorporated into laws to ensure respect for our human rights. States need to be advancing legislation that moves us away from the damaging effects of colonialism. We worked hard in a multi-year process to ensure that our perspectives, priorities and rights were included in this legislation.

We need legislation to ensure sufficient, sustainable and long-term funding toward the revitalization of our languages. We need the schools to create and implement effective immersion education programs beginning with pre-school age children. And we need programs that inspire all of our people to speak our languages, regardless of age to renew the vibrancy of our communities as our cultural places. Our languages are living languages—sourced from our lands, expressing our creation stories and alive in our ceremonies and daily lives.



Preservation of languages through digital means must be undertaken to make our languages available. We must strive to make our languages available for our Indigenous peoples to learn.

I urge nation States to take up the call for regional meetings during this international year, and I urge States to come forward with a plan for a global meeting. I recommend that we now move to set up an Indigenous Peoples' platform within UNESCO. We must ensure that Indigenous peoples are front and centre during this year.

In December 2018, our Chiefs-in-Assembly, passed a resolution calling for an International Decade for Indigenous Languages. We need this year to continue for ten years to build the momentum and keep the focus as we make our people of all ages 'language learners'. And this way, we can inspire our young people to take pride in the languages and traditions sacred to Indigenous peoples.