

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

December 18, 2019

FNLC Reflects on the Closing of the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019 and Celebrates the Announcement of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Starting in 2022

(xw̓mæθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), s̓kw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̓l̓ ilwətaʔt̓/se̓l̓ ilwítulh (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC): As the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019) closes the First Nations Leadership Council (UBCIC, BCFN, FNS) commends and praises the efforts that have been made to revitalize and maintain First Nations languages in British Columbia. Ambitious goals and work have been accomplished and sustained through global and regional efforts with the implementation of the IYIL2019 to preserve and promote First Nations languages, but these efforts must go beyond initial commitments. Progress to reclaim and revive Indigenous languages will be accomplished over generations. There are many First Nations language champions, learners, schools, Elders, artists, and arts and culture organizations who are working to make the dream of thriving cultures and abundantly fluent language speakers come true, and who's work must grow and be supported. Yesterday, at the United Nations, there was a ceremony that marked the end of IYIL2019 and an announcement made that the International Decade of Indigenous Languages will start in 2022.

Important language milestones over the past year include, the Federal government's Bill C-91: *An Act respecting Indigenous languages* which will establish long-term, sustainable funding of Indigenous languages, support and promote the use of Indigenous languages, establish an Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous languages, and encourage collaboration to deliver supports. While in B.C. the provincial government invested \$50 million in government funding to the First Peoples' Cultural Council.

The legacy of IYIL2019 will continue to be advanced and new initiatives will be put forward, including the recently announced *International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032*. This proclamation will work to further raise regional and global awareness about the importance of Indigenous languages for sustainable development, capacity-building, and reconciliation.

In B.C. there are 203 First Nations and 34 First Nations languages with over 90 dialects which accounts for 60% of the First Nations languages that are spoken in Canada. In the past, government education policies have not supported First Nations children in their right to an education in their own Indigenous languages as determined under the *United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Much more resources and work must still be done to support this goal.



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