

**Statement by the President of the Permanent Forum on  
Indigenous Issues, Mr. Dario Mejia Montalvo  
on the occasion of the High-Level event to launch the  
of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages**

**December 16, 2022**

President of the General Assembly,  
Assistant Secretary General for Policies Coordination and Interinstitutional  
Affairs of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Excellencies,  
Sisters and brothers,

Three years ago, in this very room, the Member States unanimously supported the emergency call of the Indigenous Peoples on the continued disappearance of their languages and established **the International Decade of Indigenous Languages until 2032** to preserve, revitalize and promote the linguistic diversity of Indigenous People.

This week is especially important, as both the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and the UN Headquarters here in New York hold high-level sessions on the launch of this decade. We appreciate the invitation that we have been extended to both events and it is an honor for me to greet you today.

In Paris, my colleagues were emphatic in pointing out that the risk factors for the extinction of indigenous languages still persist. From, in the middle of the 21st century, the widespread rejection of indigenous languages has been transferred from some governments to the mass media and digital platforms. They are the same ones that transmit messages to misinform, demonize or divide the

organizational processes of Indigenous Peoples or make their struggles invisible. My solidarity with the brothers of Ayacucho and throughout Peru.

Also, we wanted to remind UNESCO that the main reason why the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) recommended leading the Decade of Indigenous Language is because of its demonstrated capacity regarding education and culture. However, we note with concern, that now, the activities related to the decade are developed in one of its areas and not for all, which reduces the possibilities of a strong institutional deployment that we have seen in initiatives for other subjects of rights. For the Permanent Forum, this is a central issue.

In April of this year, The Forum recommended promoting synergies within the framework of all the international decades in progress namely: *the Decade of Ocean Sciences, the Decade of Action on Water, the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, and the Decade of Indigenous Languages.*

Coordination of actions is essential because the rights of Indigenous Peoples have an integral and holistic meaning. Also, it is necessary to move forward in a pertinent, progressive, and participatory manner to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Therefore, we must ensure that the well-being of our languages is also an indicator of the 2030 Agenda with some actions, for example: First, it is urgent to generate relevant data that facilitates adequate decision-making from the perspective of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, within the framework of this Decade. Second, the increase in the number of speakers of indigenous languages. Third, document and teach to protect and promote extremely vulnerable indigenous languages.

The approach that we must undertake is that languages of Indigenous Peoples are keys to open the doors of access to rights in a culturally appropriate way: to basic services such as health and education, to justice and other matters related to collective and individual well-being. This approach is especially relevant in urban contexts and immigrant indigenous populations throughout the world.

Dear sisters and brothers,

The decade should be viewed not only as a measure relating to Indigenous Peoples, but as an opportunity for UN entities to speak up when it comes to Indigenous Peoples. The language of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is not a minor issue.

Three decades after ILO Convention No. 169 was agreed, and 15 years after the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and after two of the Indigenous Peoples' mechanisms in the UN readjusted their names in line with the Declaration, even some UN agencies and platforms use concepts such as minorities, vulnerable groups, populations or indigenous communities, among others, to refer to indigenous peoples, or use terminology that confuses or assimilates indigenous peoples with other subjects, such as local communities.

This situation is not only inappropriate, but anachronistic and unacceptable. It reduces the legal status and rights that have cost so much effort to Indigenous Peoples. Definitely the UN entities should set the proper example.

I am now coming from Montreal from COP15, where I have been able to verify that even UN personnel are of the opinion that it is allegedly inappropriate to

accept a recommendation from the Permanent Forum regarding the adoption of adequate language in the post-2020 global framework of biological diversity.

I have also seen that Member States in these scopes are not assuming Indigenous Peoples as political actors with acquired rights. They find different types of specialized arguments about documents and procedures to ignore the enormous value of the knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples and their indisputable contributions to caring for the planet's biodiversity. I heard many declarative acknowledgments, but little clarity to translate said acknowledgments into actions for the fulfillment of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

However, there are also achievements worth highlighting. I take this opportunity to congratulate CEDAW for adopting Recommendation No. 39 on the Rights of Indigenous Women and Girls. With this, CEDAW has responded to the desire of indigenous women since the adoption of the Declaration. Congratulations sisters for your persistence. Now is the time for implementation and we must adequately disseminate it in our own languages and translate it into policies that reduce inequality and injustice.

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,

I come from an Indigenous People that more than two centuries ago were forced to lose their language. A people that, like many, have lost a large part of its history. But that does not make them less indigenous, but on the contrary, prouder, and worthy of continuing to survive despite segregation.

*Check Against Delivery*

From that premise, I can firmly say that no Indigenous People on earth should be destined to lose their language. That injustice must be outlawed, and the UN system must understand it in those dimensions.

Count on the continued readiness of the Permanent Forum to facilitate the effective implementation of the decade. From now on, in our annual session agenda, Member States and UN entities will have the space to report and exchange successful experiences, but also the challenges regarding the implementation of their action plans duly developed alongside Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you very much,