



**United Nations  
New York, United States of America  
High-level meeting  
Closing of the International Year of Indigenous Languages  
December 17, 2019**

*Uqausivut Sanngijjutivut  
Uqausivut atausiujjutivut  
Uqausivut pilirijjutivut  
Uqausivut ilagiitsiarutivut  
Uqausivut qanuingitiarutivut*

*Our Language provides us with strength  
Our Language unites us  
Our Language is our medium of work  
Our Language strengthens our relationships  
Our Language is the foundation for our well-being*

These are the words of the late Henry Isluanik from Arviat, Nunavut.

It is important that the United Nations General Assembly adopt a resolution proclaiming an International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

As Arctic Peoples, our languages rights must be recognized and protected.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council passed a resolution supporting the proclamation of an International Decade of Indigenous Languages between 2022-2032.

We have much work to do to address the language inequities.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that human dignity is considered to be the foundation for all human rights.

Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly states our Indigenous Language rights.

I am the President of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated - an organization that represents Nunavut Inuit. Nunavut is one of three Territories in Canada. There are 25 communities spread across 2 million square kilometers. If Nunavut was its own country it would be the 13th largest country in the world.

In Canada, our language is considered to be one of the stronger Indigenous languages.

In Nunavut, Inuit make up 85% of the population and 70% identify Inuktitut as their mother-tongue.

Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a majority language that is not one of the federally recognized official languages – French or English. In fact, the 2016 census identifies the following mother tongue speakers in Nunavut - 11,745 English speakers, 640 French speakers and 24,050 other.

Despite this, Inuktitut is not the working language of government nor the language used to provide essential public services.

It concerns me that unilingual Inuktitut speakers are not receiving equitable public services similar to those of other Canadians. It is a safety issue.

During the International Year of Indigenous Languages, as Canada was about to enact a federal Indigenous Languages Act, I had reasonable expectation that our language, at last, would receive the recognition and support that it requires to continue to thrive – the commitment that the public majority Inuit population in Nunavut would receive essential public services in Inuktitut.

Despite the legislation's fundamental shortcomings, Inuit are pleased that the Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated announced the joint intention to support, revitalize and strengthen Inuktitut in Nunavut through a pathfinder agreement under the *Canadian Indigenous Languages Act*.

This would allow the Uqqariksainiq initiative to focus efforts on drastically increasing the number of Inuktitut-speaking Inuit educators in Nunavut schools to reverse the teacher shortage crisis within 10 years. Indeed, during the Decade on Indigenous Languages.

With a focus on rights, a decade dedicated to Indigenous Languages would provide us with the opportunity to draw needed attention to Arctic Indigenous languages and the urgent shared need to do more to help protect, strengthen, revitalize and promote our languages.