

## UN Launches International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019

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On February 1, 2019, the United Nations officially launched the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019) at the UN Headquarters in New York. The IYIL2019 aims to promote and protect indigenous languages and improve the lives of those who speak them. There are 770 million indigenous people across 90 countries, constituting 6 percent of the global population.

As mentioned on the UN News website, in the article “Call to Revitalize ‘Language of the Ancestors’ for Survival of Future Generations: Indigenous Chief,” Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock, a Mohawk community Bear Clan Chief from Kahnawà:ke, said in his inaugural remarks, “We lose our connection and our ancient ways of knowing of the earth when our languages fall silent,” stressing, “For the sake of future generations, we must ensure they too can speak the language of our ancestors.”

UN General Assembly President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés underscored the close connection between indigenous languages and ancestral culture and knowledge, saying, “They are much more than tools for communication, they are channels for human legacies to be handed down. Each indigenous language has an incalculable value for humankind,” she said, calling each “a treasure laden with history, values, literature, spirituality, perspectives, and knowledge, developed and garnered over a millennium.”

Indigenous languages also open the door to ancestral practices and knowledge in subjects like agriculture, biology, astronomy, medicine, and meteorology. Although there are still 4,000 languages in existence across the globe, many are on the brink of extinction. Indigenous languages represent complex systems of knowledge and communication and should be recognized as a strategic national resource for development, peace building, and reconciliation.

More information about IYIL2019 can be found on the event’s webpage.