



Inuit Leaders push for strong measures that support the revitalization, maintenance and protection of Inuktitut as part of the International Year of Indigenous Languages launched at the United Nations General Assembly

February 1, 2019, Ottawa, ON and New York, NY-- Inuit leadership from the four Inuit regions in Canada: Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated President, Aluki Kotierk of Nunavut, Makivik Corporation President Charlie Watt of Nunavik, Nunatsiavut Government President Johannes Lampe of Nunatsiavut, and Inuvialuit Regional Corporation Chair and CEO, Duane Smith of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, along with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President Natan Obed and the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada President Monica Ell-Kanayuk, made the following statement today honouring the launch of the International Year of Indigenous Languages at the United Nations General Assembly:

“The government of Canada has recently acknowledged the harmful impacts that past government policies and Canada’s colonial history has had on the current status of Indigenous languages, including Inuktitut. This is a welcome acknowledgement and a critical part of the process to make meaningful and lasting systemic changes in Canada’s approach to revitalizing, maintaining and promoting our languages.

“The International Year of Indigenous Languages is timely for Inuit in that the Government of Canada has committed to co-develop national First Nations, Inuit, and Metis languages



legislation. Inuit participation in and support for this legislative initiative has been contingent on the expectation that any bill would be distinctions-based and include substantive Inuktitut-specific provisions that build on existing rights for Inuktitut. We continue to engage with the Government of Canada in an effort to ensure that the bill meets this expectation.

“Inuit in communities across Canada are working together, with support from our Inuit organizations, to keep our language alive and strong. There is so much positive work being done, but we can’t do it alone and we expect governments, and our public services, to respond with strong measures in support of Indigenous languages, beyond symbolic gestures.

“As Inuit leaders, we agree that national First Nations, Inuit, and Metis languages legislation must include substantive provisions that adequately support the revitalization, maintenance, and promotion of Inuktitut.

“Circumpolar Inuit hold a General Assembly every four years; our 2018 Assembly concluded with the Utqiaġvik Declaration which includes a section on *Education and Language*. This section states:

“Our languages are the foundation of our culture and identity. Legally protecting and revitalizing our languages is urgent and paramount. For our languages to remain strong, Inuit language schools and learning institutions need to be established...Effective education



requires new pedagogies that reflect our values, culture and languages. For our language to remain strong the Inuit language must be the primary language of instruction in our schools. Language and education support our culture and Inuit hunting, gathering and food practices are a way in which our culture is taught. ICC supports that indigenous harvesting practice should sustain and enhance Inuit cultural practices.”

The International Year of Indigenous Languages provides an opportunity to advance these and other priorities at the national and international levels.

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