

Arctic Caucus Joint Statement

April 22, 2019

18th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
On the occasion of the International Year of Indigenous Languages

Urgent action needs to be taken to ensure adequate resources are appropriately allocated to ensure Canada and other Arctic states are in compliance with the various domestic and international legal obligations to teach our children in their mother tongue.

The current education system is failing our Indigenous Arctic children.

For instance, we know that in Nunavut, Inuktitut is declining at 1% per year. At this rate, by 2051, only 4% of us will be using Inuktitut at home. For more detailed information on the case of Nunavut in Canada, we have released today, a report entitled, 'Is Nunavut education criminally inadequate?' The report provides an analysis of current policies for Inuktitut and English in education. Due to the interrelated, interdependent and indivisible nature of our rights, such conditions can be devastating. This report has analysed domestic and international law, and determines linguistic and cultural genocide and crimes against humanity are being committed. It is written by UN experts Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Robert Phillipson and Robert Dunbar.

Mother tongue medium education has been shown in large-scale studies to be more important than any other factor, more than the students' socio-economic conditions, in predicting and assuring the educational success of bilingual students.

Our languages are the foundation of our culture and identity. Legally protecting and revitalizing our languages is paramount. For our languages to remain strong, Inuit language schools and learning institutions need to be established and Inuktitut must be the primary language of instruction in our schools. Effective education requires new pedagogies that reflect our values, culture and languages. In addition, language and education support our cultural integrity. Inuit hunting, gathering and food practices are one way in which our culture is taught. The ICC and Saami Council supports Indigenous harvesting practice should sustain and enhance Inuit and Saami cultural practices.

Instead of continuing historical path of cultural genocide, UN member states must make concerted efforts to change the direction by replacing subtractive education – they must move away from capability deprivation and embrace the wealth of research and their obligations under the many international instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to ensure that the language rights of Indigenous peoples are be protected, supported and promoted.

Such actions will ensure that Arctic Indigenous peoples, who are often the public majority can live in dignity throughout their homelands.