



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indigenous languages celebrated at conference June 24-26 in Victoria, B.C.

Global gathering organized by and for Indigenous people to support language revitalization

JUNE 24, 2019 – COAST SALISH TRADITIONAL TERRITORY / BRENTWOOD BAY, B.C. – Indigenous language experts and champions from all over the world are gathering in Victoria, B.C. today for an international conference focused on advancing global Indigenous language revitalization efforts.

The three-day *HELISET TFE SKÁL* (pronounced ha-LEE-sut-te-skwayl) – ‘*Let the Languages Live*’ – 2019 International Conference on Indigenous Languages is co-hosted by the First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation (FPCF) and the First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC), in partnership with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

British Columbia is a leader in the revitalization of Indigenous languages in Canada and around the world. The conference will bring attention to the issues facing Indigenous languages globally and highlight the successful strategies developed in B.C. and beyond that are making the reclamation of Indigenous languages possible.

To celebrate the United Nations 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, more than 1,000 attendees from over 20 countries will attend the conference. Delegates and Indigenous leaders, language experts and advocates will gather to share their knowledge and experiences and gain practical skills and knowledge to apply to their Indigenous language revitalization work in their home communities at over 55 workshops and presentations.

Speakers at the conference, which runs from June 24 to 26, include **Perry Bellegarde**, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations; **The Honourable Carolyn Bennett**, Canada’s Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; **Dr. Lorna Williams**, University of Victoria Professor Emerita of Indigenous Education; **Dr. Kevin Lowe**, a Scientia Indigenous Research Fellow at the School of Education, University of New South Wales; **Dr. Te Taka Keegan**, Senior Lecturer Computer Science, University of Waikato New Zealand and authority on Māori language technologies; and **Dr. Larry Kimura**, Associate Professor of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawaii Hilo, among others. The keynote addresses will be webcast live at: <http://video.web.gov.bc.ca/public/fpcc/letlanguageslive.html>.

The United Nations declared 2019 as the Year of Indigenous Languages to raise awareness about the current state of Indigenous languages across the globe and to highlight the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, promote and mobilize national and international actions to protect them.

Around the world, Indigenous languages continue to disappear at an alarming rate. Approximately 40 per cent of the estimated 6,700 languages spoken globally are facing threats to their vitality. The fact that most of these are Indigenous languages also puts the cultures and knowledge systems to which they belong at risk.

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Canada has an incredible language diversity with more than 60 Indigenous languages, all of which require revitalization efforts for them to thrive into the future. British Columbia is home to more than 50 per cent of all Indigenous languages in the country (34 unique First Nations languages and more than 90 dialects). Despite B.C.'s rich diversity of Indigenous languages, just three per cent (or fewer than 4,200 people) of First Nations people in the province consider themselves to be fluent in their ancestral language.

However, in recent years, positive changes have been supporting a significant language shift. There is a growing level of interest in Indigenous language revitalization in B.C. First Nations communities and an increasing number of people, especially younger individuals, are learning and speaking these languages. Research by the First Peoples' Cultural Council has shown that younger fluent speakers (aged 0–24) are on the rise, and new fluent language speakers are being created in communities through immersion-based learning initiatives at all age levels. In 2018/19, FPCC and FPCF delivered a historic number of grants in partnership with communities leading language revitalization in B.C.

The *HELISSET TFE SKÁL* – 'Let the Languages Live' conference will offer numerous workshops across multiple topic streams, including practical training in language immersion, archiving and documentation techniques; language policy and legislation; language revitalization program planning; models for language revitalization and education; language and technology; and storytelling.

QUOTES:

Wanosts'a7 (Dr. Lorna Williams), Lil'watul, Member of the Board of the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and Professor Emerita of Indigenous Education, University of Victoria

"This conference is bringing Indigenous people together to tell their stories about their languages and how they are keeping them alive. It is our hope that delegates will be inspired by the many people they meet from around the world who are doing this work and reaffirm that we are together, that we can learn from one another, work in partnership and support one another to ensure the survival of our languages."

Tracey Herbert, Chief Executive Officer, the First Peoples' Cultural Council

"Indigenous languages matter because Indigenous people matter. Language is essential for all people to understand who they are, where they come from—their histories, culture, and values. Indigenous languages are part of our unique shared heritage in B.C. and Canada, but all are at risk. We must act now to ensure they are preserved and thrive into the future. The First Peoples' Cultural Council is proud to be co-hosting this important international conference that is bringing together the world's top experts in Indigenous languages to share information, build skills and experience practical hands-on workshops, while we celebrate some of the incredible initiatives being led by Indigenous people in their communities around the world."

Sébastien Goupil, Secretary-General, Canadian Commission for UNESCO

"We know how languages and the concepts, teachings and wisdom they carry are essential to the cultural security and well-being of Indigenous peoples across the globe. Protecting, maintaining and revitalizing these precious languages is a fundamental right and an absolute necessity. We cannot let the entire burden be placed on the individual nations and communities. This is why the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is advancing the spirit of this International Year and proudly supporting the First Peoples'

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Cultural Council and the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation in their efforts to enable language keepers and experts from across the world to share approaches and experiences that make meaningful and impactful differences for current and future generations."

National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations

"Language is foundational to Indigenous peoples' self-determination in Canada and around the world. Too many of our languages are in danger of disappearing, but we know that when countries, such as Canada, uphold Indigenous languages their likelihood of survival increases. This is why we pushed for the passing of an Act respecting Indigenous languages by Canada's parliament, and why I'm so proud it is now part of Canadian law. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes our right to speak, teach and revitalize our languages, and nation states must take effective measures to support Indigenous language champions and experts in this work. Gatherings like this are essential so we can learn and share the wise practices taking place globally. This joint work is essential as we all move forward."

The Honourable Scott Fraser, B.C.'s Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

"Language is at the core of identity. It is essential that Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to reclaim and revitalize their languages. Language revitalization is one of the corner stones of reconciliation and I hold up my hands to the First Peoples' Cultural Council, the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and all the conference delegates who are bringing this vital work to the world's attention in this International Year of Indigenous Languages."

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Government of Canada

"Together at this conference and at the UNESCO regional meeting on the International Year of Indigenous Languages, we are exchanging ideas about the importance of preserving Indigenous languages. Through meaningful investments, raising awareness and finding practical solutions with partners, the Government of Canada can help to ensure the survival of Indigenous languages for the generations of today and tomorrow."

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Government of Canada

"Language is a vital part of our culture. It defines who we are, our identity and our place in the world. By declaring 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, UNESCO is shining a light on the fragile state of this living heritage. Today, most of the Indigenous languages spoken in Canada are endangered. Our Government has undertaken action to support Indigenous Peoples in their efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen their languages. On June 21st, a very important step towards reconciliation was made as the Governor General of Canada granted Royal Assent to the Indigenous Languages Act. I'm very proud of the collaborative work that guided the co-development of this legislation, whose positive impact will be felt by many generations to come."



Note to media

Please be advised that two brief photo opportunities and media availabilities are scheduled for June 24, 2019.

Who: **Perry Bellegarde**, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations
Tracey Herbert, CEO, First Peoples' Cultural Council
Wanosts'a7 (Dr. Lorna Williams), Member of the Board of the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation

Time: The photo opportunity and media availability will follow the end of Perry Bellegarde's keynote address and a panel on State Investment in Indigenous Languages. **Approximately 10:35 a.m. - 10:55 a.m. (PST), Victoria Conference Centre, View Royal Room, Level 2**

Notes: Media must receive accreditation prior to this event: media@fpcflanguageconference.com

Who: **The Honourable Carolyn Bennett**, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
Tracey Herbert, CEO, First Peoples' Cultural Council

Time: The photo opportunity and media availability will follow the end of a panel on Nationwide Planning/Large Initiatives. **Approximately 3:05 p.m. - 3:20 p.m. (PST), Victoria Conference Centre, View Royal Room, Level 2**

Notes: Media must receive accreditation prior to this event: media@fpcflanguageconference.com

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About the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation:

The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation is a First Nations-led not-for-profit charitable organization that supports grassroots efforts to revitalize Indigenous arts, languages and cultures unique to British Columbia, Canada. Over its 19-year history, the Foundation has worked closely with the First Peoples' Cultural Council, delivering millions of dollars to Indigenous and First Nations artists and First Nations communities, cultural organizations and educational organizations for Indigenous languages, arts and cultural heritage initiatives. For more information, visit: fpcf.ca

About the First Peoples' Cultural Council:

The First Peoples' Cultural Council is a First Nations-led provincial Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages, arts, cultures and heritage in British Columbia. The organization provides funding, resources and training to communities, monitors the status of First Nations languages, develops policy recommendations for First Nations leadership and government and collaborates with organizations on numerous special projects that raise the profile of arts, languages, cultures and heritage in B.C., Canada and internationally. For more information, visit: fpcc.ca

About Canadian Commission for UNESCO:

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO connects Canadians with the work of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It aims to create a society in which Canadians share knowledge and learn from each other, locally and globally, in order to build peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures. It does so by supporting collective reflection, identifying priorities and facilitating concerted action in the fields of education, sciences, culture, communication and information to address some of the most complex challenges facing humanity. Recognizing that this mandate can only be fulfilled by engaging a broad range of partners, a spirit of cooperation is at the core of the Commission’s work. For more information, visit: ccunesco.ca

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