The 2019 United Nation’s International Year of Indigenous Languages is an important event to raise awareness about the diversity of Indigenous languages spoken around the world.

The United Nations General Assembly decided in 2016 to make 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019). The UN International Year designation is a way to raise awareness about an important global issue or theme and inspire coordinated action between many contributors.

The International Year of Indigenous Languages has generated many kinds of events and activities focused on Indigenous Peoples’ rights, materials and training, and the inclusion of Indigenous languages in national policies and plans. The events range from policy-based negotiations on improving research and standard-setting tools for language retention to awareness-raising events such as conferences, festivals, and exhibitions like the one.

Globally about 40 percent of the languages spoken in the world are at risk of extinction, and a large share of those are Indigenous languages. In the words of the United Nations, “Indigenous languages add to the rich tapestry of global cultural diversity. Without them, the world would be a poorer place.”

Within the United Nations, there are three mechanisms to work on Indigenous issues:

- Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,
- Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and

One important outcome from IYIL2019 is a Strategic Outcome Document that defines future directions to mainstream Indigenous languages. Several entities including the Expert Mechanism have endorsed a proposal to expand IYIL2019 into a decade of Indigenous Languages.

You can read more about the IYIL2019 on the UN website: https://en.iyil2019.org or follow the hashtag on social media: #IYIL2019.