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United Nations Permanent Forum on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Item 5(g): Thematic dialogues: a) International Decade of Indigenous Languages

INTERVENTION by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, delivered by Councillor Anne Dennis for the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, Councillor for the North Western region, member of the Gamilaraay Nation.

Thank you Chair,

We pay our respects to the Elders and Ancestors, past and present, and extend our appreciation to Indigenous experts and participants at this session.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council recommends that in genuine partnership the Governments must:

- Value and respect Aboriginal language and culture.
- Empower and resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to take full ownership of our culture and heritage, including our languages. Government can never own or control our languages. Its role must be to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal peoples.
- Have confidence to empower and resource our Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to not only protect and preserve Aboriginal languages, but to ensure a revitalization and sustained increase in Aboriginal languages being spoken, starting with our children.

Indigenous Peoples rights and freedoms to speak our own language is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 13, 14 and 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

While the Australian Government endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2009, governments in Australia have been **slow** to practically implement the Declaration in laws, policies and programs.

In Australia there are more than 250 Indigenous languages and around 800 dialects. The Australian Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program supports **only** a network of 20 Indigenous language centres across Australia. These language centres with limited funding and resourcing are trying to preserve, revive and maintain over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

To ensure the preservation, revitalization and maintenance of Aboriginal languages there needs to be support from all levels of government across Australia. Government's must recognise Aboriginal community controlled organisations and structures throughout Australia. Our peoples have the knowledges and expertise to preserve and protect our culture, but without government confidence, adequate resourcing or support our languages will not be preserved but lost forever.

Languages are vital and alive, we know they connect people to Country, culture and our ancestors. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council calls on the Australian Government and states to be genuine and adequately resource Aboriginal community controlled organisations, so that our Aboriginal languages are seen and heard in everyday life. The unique contribution that Aboriginal languages bring to the identity of Australia must be promoted, celebrated and sustained.

Always was Always will be Aboriginal Land