

## **Statement on the threat to indigenous languages in Ukraine and Russia, made at the launch event of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages**

Today we launch the International Decade of Indigenous Languages as a major practical step in advancing the aims of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages draws attention to the critical loss of oral, written, and signed indigenous languages, and subsequently the loss of indigenous identity, culture, and diversity of our humanity. UNGA Resolution 74/135 also invites Member States to take necessary and concrete steps to advance its goals. UNDRIP also refers to the right of indigenous peoples “to revitalise, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their ... languages”, and notes that “states shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected”.

The Russian Federation’s attempted illegal annexation of Crimea prevents Ukraine from fulfilling its commitments to preserve, revitalise, and promote the language of indigenous peoples in Crimea, including the Crimean Tatars, Karaites, and Krymchaks. During Russia’s mobilisation campaign, at least 1,500-2,000 court summonses were handed to representatives of the Crimean Tatar community, and many Crimean Tatars remain detained and imprisoned by Russia on politically motivated charges. Russia has banned the representative body of the Crimean Tatars, the Mejlis, as a so-called “extremist” organisation, and continues to repress its leadership. Russia has closed or forced off the peninsula all independent Crimean Tatar media outlets, reduced the availability of minority languages in schools, and refused permission for public gatherings to mark events of cultural or historical significance to minority communities. These actions further restrict the rights of indigenous peoples in Crimea in the exercise of their cultural, religious, and linguistic rights, as recognised in UNESCO’s monitoring.

Within the Russian Federation itself, the status of Indigenous Languages has been significantly challenged. There has been a significant decrease in education in minority languages, and an increasing drive for cultural homogenisation, and the education of indigenous children in Russian. The Russian state has taken actions to repress indigenous languages, through the purposeful targeting of unwritten indigenous languages in Dagestan, and the forcible closure of the Centre for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North. Furthermore, the unprovoked, unjustified, and illegal full-scale invasion launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, has further endangered the future of several indigenous languages, including through the disproportionately high rate of conscription of indigenous people into the military units of the Russian Federation due to their lower socio-economic status.

We reiterate our calls on the Russian Federation to end its war of aggression against Ukraine, and completely to withdraw its forces beyond Ukraine’s internationally recognised borders and its territorial sea. We call on the Russian Federation to stop practices that restrict the rights of indigenous peoples and that place them, and their indigenous languages at risk.

*Statement by the following countries: Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United States, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*