

Celebrating Language and Culture in the Northwest Territories

Mr. Speaker, when our connections to our languages and cultures are strong, our people are strong. Languages and culture play a crucial role in people's daily lives, as tools for communication, education, social integration and development. Language, cultural history and traditions shape us as people.

I will begin by announcing that upon recommendation of the official language boards, February has been declared the new Indigenous Languages Month in the Northwest Territories.

The theme of this year's Indigenous Languages Month, *We Love Our Languages*, serves as an invitation to all residents to take the time to show their appreciation and celebrate the 11 official languages we have in the NWT.

During this month, our languages are being promoted, a meeting of the Official Languages Board is taking place, the top entrants of the Elder and Youth Indigenous Languages Video Contest are being premiered and other events are being held throughout the regions.

Mr. Speaker, celebrations are important, however successful revitalization won't be accomplished through the efforts of just one month a year.

Despite their tremendous value, Indigenous languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate. In an effort to bring attention to this, 2019 has been declared the International Year of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations

Mr. Speaker, to combat the threat against them, this government is committed to revitalising and increasing the use of Indigenous Languages. We are actively promoting the nine Territorial Indigenous official languages on a continual basis, and working to preserve and revitalize them for future generations. Although there are challenges, we are seeing some progress. Initiatives like the *Our Languages* curriculum in schools, funding

Indigenous governments for language activities and providing Indigenous Language Coordinators in all regions are making a difference.

Mr. Speaker, We are extremely proud of our continued work to develop the *Our Languages* Curriculum. A large-scale pilot started in 40 of our 49 schools this past September, and the response already has been astounding. We have heard that it's been a positive experience, that it is exciting, that it's important and the right thing. We heard loud and clear that it's about time!

Just as Indigenous Languages Month draws to a close, the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie is beginning around the world. During the month of March, I invite my colleagues and the public to celebrate another of our official languages; French. Language and culture events throughout the NWT will promote the French language in the context of cultural diversity, and aim to bring people together by highlighting the importance of all official languages.

The government recently released the 2018-2023 French Languages Communications and Services Strategic Plan developed with input from the Fédération franco-ténoise. This is the second five-year plan focused on ensuring the government is providing services in French to communities with francophone populations of significant demand. Our partnership with the Fédération franco-ténoise is critical to the success of our Strategic Plan. We continue to work together to increase the use of the GNWT's French-language communications and services.

This June, we will also be celebrating an important anniversary, the 40th birthday of the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. Over the last 40 years, the institution has worked with communities across the territory to care for, research and celebrate NWT cultures, history and languages for the benefit of northerners and visitors. I encourage everyone to come out to the party, have fun and learn more about how the activities and work that occur in this building serve and represent all of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Hosting more than 60,000 visitors a year, the Centre plays a key role in preserving and showcasing our connection to our cultures, heritage and languages. The website for the

exhibit “We Took Care of Them: RCMP Special Constables in the NWT” is the first digital exhibit to be available in all 11 official languages, and I must credit my colleague, the Honorable Alfred Moses, for his work in bringing this incredible exhibit to fruition.

As well, the Centre is also soon launching an iPad program so visitors can view and experience exhibits in Indigenous and other languages.

Mr. Speaker, languages and culture together contribute to a strong sense of identity and pride. Our government acts as facilitator, steward and supporter of NWT languages and cultures. Our commitment is strong, we are doing more than ever to help all our languages thrive, and we are starting to see positive results. So I very much look forward to all these upcoming celebrations of the NWT’s languages and cultures. They showcase our past, influence our present, and lay the path for the future.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.