



Office of the Commissioner of

**INDIGENOUS  
LANGUAGES**

## About The Commission

On June 21, 2019, the *Indigenous Languages Act* (the Act) became law. The Act responds to Calls to Action 13, 14, and 15 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and is intended to promote and support the reclamation, revitalization, strengthening, and maintenance of Indigenous languages in Canada.

The Act recognizes and affirms that Indigenous language rights are Aboriginal rights under the *Constitution Act, 1982* that must be protected and preserved.

The Act establishes an Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (the Commission), with a Commissioner and up to three Directors appointed by the Governor in Council.



The Commission is an independent organization and is not part of the federal administration.

## Vision

All Indigenous languages in Canada are safe, vibrant, and thriving.

## Mission

The Commission promotes and champions all Indigenous languages in Canada and supports Indigenous peoples in the reclamation, revitalization, strengthening, and maintenance of their languages so that no language is left behind.

## Guiding Principles

- There is an urgent need for concerted efforts and investments toward the revitalization of Indigenous languages to arrest and reverse the erosion that has already occurred. Research shows that no Indigenous language in Canada is safe and that all are in varying stages of endangerment.
- Indigenous languages are fundamental to the identities, cultures, spirituality, relationships to the land, worldviews, and self-determination of Indigenous peoples.
- Indigenous languages have and continue to contribute to the strength of Canada as a whole, including biodiversity and the richness of linguistic and cultural heritage. The Commission is committed to protecting the vitality of all Indigenous languages, including sign languages and sleeping languages.

## Commission Mandate

Under the Act, the Commission is mandated to:

- Help promote Indigenous languages;
- Support the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain, and strengthen Indigenous languages;
- Facilitate the resolution of disputes and review complaints to the extent provided by the Act;
- Promote public awareness and understanding in respect of:
  - the diversity and richness of Indigenous languages,
  - the inseparable link between Indigenous languages and the cultures of Indigenous peoples,
  - the rights of Indigenous peoples related to Indigenous languages,
  - the significance of those rights for Indigenous peoples, as well as for the general public,
  - the negative impact of colonization and discriminatory government policies on Indigenous languages and the exercise of those rights, and
  - the importance of working toward and contributing to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; and
- Support innovative projects and the use of new technologies in Indigenous language education and revitalization, in cooperation with Indigenous governments, other Indigenous governing bodies, Indigenous organizations, the Government of Canada, and provincial and territorial governments.

## The Commissioner and Directors

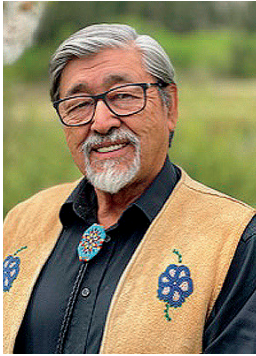
The Commissioner of Indigenous Languages and up to three Directors are appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister of Heritage.

Prior to recommending the appointments, the Minister must consult with a variety of Indigenous governments and other Indigenous governing bodies and a variety of Indigenous organizations.

The first Commissioner of Indigenous Languages and Directors took office on July 12, 2021.



## Commissioner Ronald E. Ignace




Stsméłqen, Ronald E. Ignace is a member of the Secwepemc Nation in Interior British Columbia. He was the elected chief of the Skeetchestn Indian Band for more than 30 years since the early 1980s. He also served as Chairman of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council and President of its cultural society where he initiated a broad program of research and reclamation on

Secwepemc language and culture, including an innovative university partnership with Simon Fraser University (SFU).

He holds a B.A. and M.A. in Sociology from the University of British Columbia, and completed his PhD in Anthropology at SFU in 2008, with a dissertation on Secwepemc oral history. He has (co-)written numerous articles and book chapters on Secwepemc history, ethnobotany, language, and culture, including the epic *Secwepemc People, Land, and Laws: Yerí7 re stsqéy's-kucw*, a journey through 10,000 years of Secwepemc history.

From 2003-2005, he chaired the Ministerial Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, and from 2016-2021, co-chaired the Assembly of First Nations' Chiefs Committee on Languages, where he played an instrumental role in the development of Bill C-91, the *Indigenous Languages Act*.



“First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have a great heart. However, our spirit has been battered and bruised because the cradle of our spirit is in our languages. It is imperative we breathe life back into our languages.”

“Le7 pyin te sitqt te swumécwilstem re qweqwelténs re xwexwéyt te qelmúcw wel me7 yews. Ta7 me7 scú7tsems re snecwentém re qweqweltén-kt re stśeléwt.s ne swet.s k smenmenúlecws ne7élye ne tmicw-kt. Tikwemtús me7 sucwentwécwmentem re qweqweltén-kt.”

—Commissioner Ronald E. Ignace

## Director Joan Greyeyes



Joan Greyeyes is a member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation within Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan. Joan has a Bachelor of Education Degree, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration, and a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Saskatchewan. Her experience as a senior executive with significant knowledge working with corporate, government, and Indigenous relations at the post-secondary level, has contributed to her commitment to First Nations education.

Joan brings a wealth of knowledge as the former President of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Initiatives at the University of Saskatchewan. She negotiated with the Province of Saskatchewan to establish the first provincial Act in Canada (the *Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology Act*) to recognize a First Nations institution as a post-secondary institution.

In collaboration with SaskTel, Joan established a call centre to provide Indigenous language coverage to the province of Saskatchewan.

At the University of Saskatchewan, Joan's work centered on the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages. She has initiated programs and presented at an international level on various aspects of Indigenous language revitalization.





"I am looking forward to keeping our  
First People's languages alive."

"Nickīstēn kita pimācīhtāhk īyiniw pīkiskwēwina"

—Joan Greyeyes, Director

## Director Georgina Liberty




Georgina Liberty has devoted her life to preserving, protecting, and cherishing her Métis identity and spirit. In her teens, she worked as a researcher for the Manitoba Métis Federation, tracing the Métis land script. She has been an active member of the Manitoba Métis Federation since 1969 and served as Director of *Métis Nation 2020 – Manitoba 150* for the Métis National Council, which marked

Manitoba's 150th anniversary and the historic role of Louis Riel in bringing Manitoba into Confederation. This position allowed her to commit to her passion for educating others about the history of the Métis people and their important role in the building of Manitoba and its relationship with Canada.

Georgina's diverse work experience includes employing and engaging Métis, First Nations, and Inuit peoples in opportunities to build on their strengths and to progress in business, leadership, and governance opportunities.

Georgina has many years of experience in governance and policy, and acquired political acumen working for the Métis government for over 20 years, as well as with First Nations and other Métis organizations.

She believes that the desire to preserve, protect, and strengthen identities as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples is a thread that weaves all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people together in a fight to have their rights recognized, protected, and respected.



"It is my honour to be the representative to preserve, revitalize and strengthen our Michif Language. I am also honoured to serve with my fellow First Nations and Inuit partners."

"Si te moon oneur shi piikishkwetamaakeyaan chi kenawehihtamihk ,pimatishitamihk pi shoohkihitaak notr Laang Michif. Meena si te aen oneur chi pamihihweyaan avek mii naasaayii Indigene. "

—Georgina Liberty, Director

## Director Robert Watt



Since his early career, Robert Watt has been involved in promoting, protecting, and preserving Inuktitut. He organized and facilitated terminology workshops, created databases for translators and interpreters, and personally helped develop and teach the Adult Education Translator/Interpreter Program. His vision is shaped by his determination and his

Inuit heritage at the Kativik School Board Adult Education Department.

As President of the Avataq Cultural Institute from 1998 to 2001, Robert co-created and initiated the commercial production and marketing of Avataq's five blends of herbal teas.

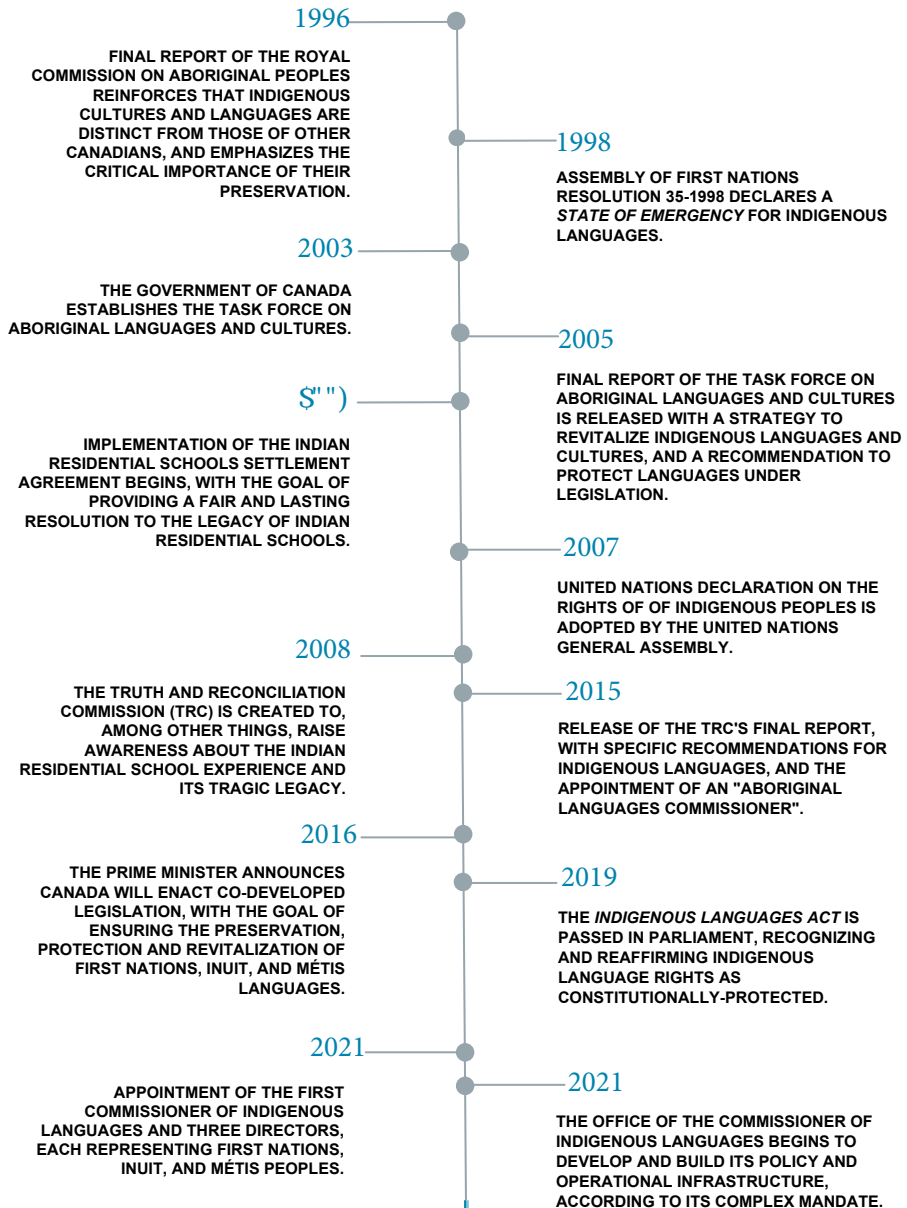
Robert also facilitated the first-ever national gathering of Canadian Inuit throat singers, organized by the Avataq Cultural Institute. This event paved the way for the Government of Québec to grant throat singing special cultural heritage status.

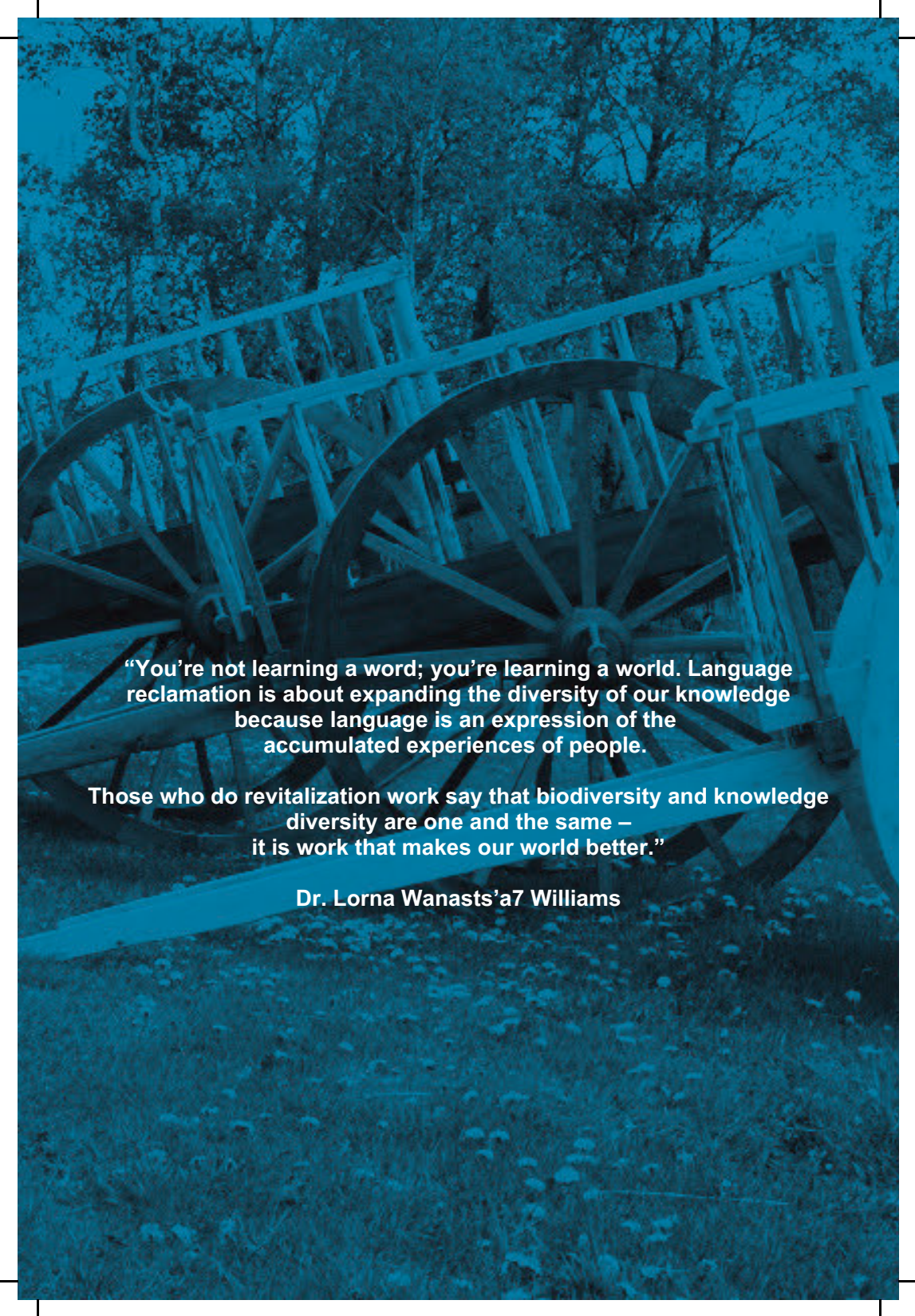
Co-Director of the Inuit Sub-Commission at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he visited numerous Canadian communities, collecting almost 800 statements from residential school and intergenerational trauma survivors.

More recently, Robert was President and Commissioner of Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, a school board created under the James Bay Northern Québec Agreement. In this role, he actively supported initiatives to advance the protection, strengthening, and development of the Inuktitut language through educational programming rooted in the Inuit identity and worldview.



# TIMELINE





**“You’re not learning a word; you’re learning a world. Language reclamation is about expanding the diversity of our knowledge because language is an expression of the accumulated experiences of people.**

**Those who do revitalization work say that biodiversity and knowledge diversity are one and the same – it is work that makes our world better.”**

**Dr. Lorna Wanasts’a7 Williams**



For more information about the Commission please visit our website at:

<https://commissionforindigenouslanguages.ca>

or scan the QR code below.

For all other inquiries please contact us by email at:

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