

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Statement by Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests) [9.06 am]: Today is the International Mother Language Day. Proclaimed by the United Nations in 1999, International Mother Language Day is now observed in Western Australia and across the world annually on 21 February. The aim of International Mother Language Day is to preserve the world's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage, and to recognise and uphold the essential human right of being able to speak, express oneself and learn in one's own language, without fear of retribution. The date of 21 February was chosen, as it was the date in 1952 that students from Bangladesh—then East Pakistan—protested for their right to speak and learn in their own mother language of Bengali. In recognition of the critical importance of language to culture and identity, the United Nations General Assembly has also proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. In further support of this, the theme for International Mother Language Day 2019 is “Indigenous languages matter for development, peace building and reconciliation”. Western Australia is a state where language diversity flourishes. In Western Australia, from the population of our first peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to the early settlers and migrant communities originating from all over the world, more than 240 languages are spoken. The McGowan government recognises the importance and value of the diversity of languages spoken in this state, and is committed to maximising the benefits of language maintenance, teaching and learning for the social and economic benefit of the whole community. In Western Australia, we believe that everyone has the right to maintain their language. Our linguistic diversity increases our ability to communicate with the rest of the world, and promotes trade, business, academic and cultural exchange. I congratulate all Western Australians, in particular our Aboriginal and Bangladeshi communities, for the International Year of Indigenous Languages and the International Mother Language Day.