Respected Chair,

We, the Indigenous People in Asia, welcome the United Nations’ General Assembly’s declaration of 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022 to 2032. It is a crucial step towards conserving and developing the language of minorities worldwide.

Indigenous Languages give meaning to the well-being of Indigenous Peoples. According to the World Language Mapping System (WLMS) report, Indigenous Peoples speak most of the 7100 known languages of the world. Some of the Indigenous languages in Asia are on the verge of extinction or critically endangered due to various threats.

To address these challenges, some Member States in Asia have undertaken remarkable efforts such as officially recognizing Indigenous languages and scripts, introducing Indigenous languages in the education system, and using them in various creative media. However, many governments do not yet recognize or adequately support indigenous languages in formal education, particularly at the early primary level. This results in Indigenous children/youth losing touch with their cultural roots, including traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and climate issues. Excluding indigenous languages and cultures from the curriculum is a form of disrespect, which contributes to language endangerment, language death, and social marginalization.

In most states, education is in the language of the majority, and the languages of minorities are neglected and suppressed, which affects the early education of indigenous children. Digital education materials deployed during the pandemic were usually available only in majority languages, leading to learning loss among indigenous youth and higher drop-out rates.

We urge the Expert Mechanism, UNPFII, and UNESCO to call on States to:

1. Support language documentation initiatives at the national level to identify the existence of Indigenous languages, including the number of speakers, and recognize them as official languages;

2. Provide support to digital media producers to promote, preserve, and revitalize Indigenous languages;

3. Provide support for the language preparedness processes—including documentation, publication, and digitation of Indigenous languages to prepare them for use in the formal education system;
4. Take special and urgent measures for the preservation, revitalization, and development of the most endangered Indigenous languages, which less than one hundred speakers speak, to prevent languages loss/death;

5. Include Indigenous languages in the education system and other public spaces through academic research, teachers' training programs, curriculum reform, and pedagogical development;

6. Implement language revitalization and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education programs to provide a holistic context in which Indigenous language, culture, and traditional knowledge are respected, while also helping indigenous children to be proud of their roots and become strong voices in their local communities and countries. We call on UNESCO to facilitate dialogue between Indigenous Peoples and government on these issues and call on governments to endorse the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/bangkok-statement-language-and-inclusion)

7. Establish specialized public institutions at the national and local levels under the leadership of Indigenous scholars to deal with the issues of Indigenous languages, including research, language development, curriculum reform, teacher training, and lifelong learning process;

8. Promote and provide support to community initiatives such as Indigenous schools in preserving and practicing Indigenous languages and expand those initiatives through providing resources and technical support;

9. Take urgent steps to stop the forced and involuntary dislocation of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral territories;

10. Engage traditional leaders, Indigenous communities, Indigenous Peoples' led institutions, and Indigenous scholars in the decision-making and implementation process regarding Indigenous languages;

11. Initiate and promote digitalization of indigenous language in the education system to enhance the learning atmosphere for indigenous children and youths;

12. To help prevent structural discrimination of Indigenous language by the state and majority and develop mechanisms to address the same;

12. Meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples and their organizations in the implementation of the Global action plan of the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 at the national level;

Thank you
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