



## **Joint statement by AIPP, IMPECT and Ton-Kla on International Mother Language Day, 2023**

**Theme: “Our roots, our languages!**

**Mother tongue-based education for our future!”**

This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> International Mother Language Day, is being observed across the globe with the theme ‘**multilingual education - a necessity to transform education.**’ The International Mother Language Day is celebrated worldwide on 21 February every year, after it was first announced by UNESCO on 17 November 1999 and formally recognized by United Nations General Assembly with the adoption of UN resolution in 2002. This is to specially commemorate the importance of the mother language and its promotion, preservation and protection.

The overall aim of this year’s celebration is to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by recognizing the role of actors in education and in related fields in promoting multilingualism and multilingual education, and in fostering quality, inclusive and equitable learning. The IMLD 2023, especially aims to:

- Further sensitize actors in education, teachers, education policymakers of the transformative power of multilingualism and multilingual education;
- Support actors in education, teachers, education policymakers in the strengthening of multilingualism and multilingual education by highlighting and sharing promising and innovative policies and practices.

Language is the wheel of society; it is our identity and culture. It is through language the world communicates with each other. We preserve tradition, customs, history and memory in language. Through this, we build our future. The mother language holds a special place in heart of every individual as it entails spiritual attachment and belongingness to the roots, aptly corresponding to our theme of celebration;

**“Our roots, our languages! Mother tongue-based education for our future!”**

The study reveals that there are 7,117 known languages in the world, among them majority is spoken by the Indigenous Peoples. In Asia alone, 32% or 2,300 languages are spoken by people where most of the indigenous population live. They have greater cultural diversity and have created and spoken a larger number of languages existing in the world. The cultural diversity and richness have given the Indigenous Peoples a distinctive and enduring identity.

It is concerning to learn the revealing report by researchers that we are losing language at an alarming rate of one language per two weeks. It is estimated by linguists that if we allow the trend, by the end of the century it will fall to thousands or hundreds. The Indigenous Peoples’ language who are a minority by number is more at risk to language loss. This is because the Indigenous Peoples follow the oral tradition, lack a formal writing or education system, and often overwhelmed by mainstream languages.

The celebration of International Mother Language Day assumes more importance with the UNESCO declaring 2019 as [International Year of Indigenous Language \(IYIL\)](#) and the United Nations proclaiming the [International Decade of Indigenous Language \(IDIL\)](#) from 2022-2032. The declaration and proclamation are purposed with five basic objectives to commence the preservation and promotion of Indigenous Language.

1. Increasing understanding, reconciliation, and international cooperation.
2. Creation of favorable conditions for knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practices concerning indigenous languages.
3. Integration of indigenous languages into a standard-setting.
4. Empowerment through capacity building.
5. Growth and development through the elaboration of new knowledge.

The declaration is a ray of hope for the Indigenous Peoples across the globe in terms of preserving and promoting the vital aspects of their culture and identity. This can generate new ideas and help build a long-term strategy to counter language loss. This effort also contributes to the [2019 Cali commitment](#) to equity and inclusion in education and the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Language (2022-2032), which places multilingualism at the heart of Indigenous Peoples' development.

In many countries the multilingual education system is a common practice, but yet there are many countries who practice monolingual system education and consider the multilingualism as a challenge. It is proven fact that providing education in only one language that is not necessarily shared by all learners is detrimental to their overall development.

Thailand being in a geographically convenient place in Mekong basin has received many inflow of migration over the centuries making it a diverse country in terms of ethnicity, culture, traditions and most importantly, the language. It's 70 million citizens speak more than 70 mother tongues. But promotion of monolingual policy and disregards to ethnic and Indigenous Peoples' language has created stalemate to overall development of minority Indigenous Peoples who call Thailand their home. Research by the National Statistical Office and UNICEF revealed that only 65 per cent of ethnic youth aged 15-24 are literate—far below the national average of 98 per cent. The lack of policy to impart primary education in mother tongue impact the learning ability, and the development of socio-emotional and foundational literacy skills among the children of Indigenous Peoples. Although the community learning centre have been able to narrow this gap to some extent. But without the recognition and patronage of the state, the process will not yield substantive results.

The international normative instruments that cover the language in education dimension and are protective of population groups who are excluded from education, such as ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, girls and women, provide for right to quality, equitable and inclusive education. Under these frameworks, States have an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil such a right by ensuring that education is not only available, but also acceptable, accessible, and adaptable. The 'acceptability' component entails education that is culturally relevant and, according to the United Nations' independent expert on minority issues, available in [linguistic minorities' mother tongue](#).

Therefore, today, while commemorating the International Mother Language Day 2023, we emphasize on the importance of multilingual education, and basic education in mother tongue, and call upon each concerned government to promote, propagate and include Indigenous Language in national curriculum of their respective countries, commit and create enabling conditions, support the effort

and foster the multilingualism. The UN agencies and all the stakeholders must act in unison to achieve this goal for humanity.

**Give a chance to Indigenous Language to flourish!**