

16th session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

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Joint Statement on

Agenda Item 7: International Decade of Indigenous Languages

By Rachana Sam At, Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA)

On behalf of Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus

Dear Madam/ Mr. Chair,

The Indigenous Peoples' in Asia appreciates the joint efforts of the EMRIP, UNESCO, OHCHR, IFAD and other relevant UN agencies in drawing global attention to the critical situation of many indigenous languages, following the proclamation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022 to 2032.

Language oppression leads to loss of language, which in turn impacts on the physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. It impacts on culture, erosion of identity, breakdown of social relations and other Indigenous ways of life.

The Indigenous Peoples and their organisations in Asia are working on initiatives towards mobilizing stakeholders and resources to resist the loss of Indigenous languages which aim towards for the preservation, revitalization and promotion of indigenous languages.

Some of the Indigenous languages in Asia are on the verge of extinction or critically endangered due to various threats (can provide some examples here) i.e. in Nepal, 10 languages were already extinct, 23 languages is nearly extinct. There is only one last speaker of Kusunda language after the death of Gyani Maya Kusunda. In Bangladesh, only 6 elders are left who can speak in Renmitcha language, 14 other languages are listed as endangered in Bangladesh by the International Mother language institute. In Japan, there are almost no native speaker of Ainu language. The situation is almost the same in other countries' in Asia.

To address the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples, some of the 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. This is in response to the initiatives and movement by Indigenous Peoples. We call on the UNESCO country offices to facilitate the Member States at national and local levels to intervene in more actions to meet the objectives of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The cultural diversity and richness have given the Indigenous Peoples a distinctive and enduring identity. The Indigenous Peoples' language who are a minority by number is more at risk of language loss. However, in most Asian countries Indigenous Peoples are still the victim of eviction by State-led development projects, which affect dislocation from ancestral land, out-migration, damage of the socio-economic system, and loss of rich Indigenous cultural diversity as a whole.

In most of the states the education is imparted in the language of majority, and the language of minorities are neglected and suppressed which affect the early education of indigenous children. The digitalization of education system, has also impacted the education of indigenous youth, leading to school drop out of indigenous youth.

Our recommendations to member states, EMRIP, UNESCO, other relevant stakeholders,

- To urge the government of the states in Asia to launch action plans for the localization, and operationalization of the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages with a full spectrum of human rights, legal recognition of indigenous language, and greater daily use of indigenous languages across all socio-cultural, economic, environmental, legal and political domains.
- Initiate and implement National Action Plans with budget allocations to protect, preserve and promote the indigenous languages at the country level
- To support and implement additional urgent action, particularly for the indigenous languages at most risk.
- To strengthen and build upon the affirmative actions for multilingual education and cultural preservation
- To create favourable conditions for knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practices concerning indigenous languages.
- Finally, to adopt a holistic human rights-based approach towards the protection of Indigenous languages.
- Recognize Indigenous languages as an official language or working language, preservation of oral tradition and development of language text to ensure access to justice, resources, information, all structures and affairs of state and non-state actors working in indigenous territory and mother-tongue speakers' area.