

17th session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

8-12 July 2024, Geneva, Switzerland

Joint Statement on

Agenda Item 7: International Decade of Indigenous Languages

Presented by: Amanda Mojilip Walter on behalf of Asia Indigenous Peoples Caucus

We appreciate the EMRIP, UNESCO and other UN bodies for their significant role in the implementation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Indigenous Peoples have been contributing to this agenda even before the decade was adopted and continues to work in partnership towards the achievement of the objective of the decade to preserve, revitalise and promote Indigenous languages, as this forms the foundation of our well-being.

There are several initiatives undertaken in this direction by the Indigenous Peoples, including advocating for mother tongue-based education, developing curriculum and pedagogies rooted in our indigeneity, research analysis of the situation, to mention a few.

The Endangered Languages Project have documented 3,054 endangered languages so far and nearly half are in Asia. Therefore, the agenda for protection and revitalisation remains urgent and critical.

To mention some examples, Mok language of the Shan people is now only spoken by 10 people, Red Gelao spoken in Vietnam has 20 speakers, *Dupaninan Agta* has now only 1,000 native speakers, *Rengmitcha* language in Bangladesh, has only 6 speakers left and they are over 60 years old. In Malaysia, 80% of the Indigenous Languages documented are said to be endangered.

The assimilation of the Indigenous Peoples, followed mostly by most Asian States are rapidly contributing to the loss of our language, on which our cultural, spiritual identity is rooted in.

This Decade provides a platform to continue our resistance towards any assimilation forces and reclaim our identity and we continue to pledge our commitment to the realization of this goals.

We therefore place our recommendations to EMRIP, UNESCO, UNPFII and 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 by initiating National Action Plans 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, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples
- 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 provide enabling conditions for Indigenous Peoples to create and manage their own educational institutions and systems that deliver education in their mother tongues in a way that is conducive to their cultural teaching and learning techniques

I thank you.