

Joint Statement to the 21st Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)
25th, April, 2022, 3pm - 5pm
Agenda Item 5 (f). Thematic dialogues: International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032

Statement on behalf of the Asia Indigenous People's Caucus, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)

Presented by: Jenifer Lasimbang

We, the Indigenous Peoples' organizations in Asia, welcome the efforts of UNESCO for the declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022 to 2032. This is a crucial step towards conserving and developing the language of minorities in the world.

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

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. 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.

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, as in the case of pandemic period, has also impacted the education of indigenous youth, leading to school drop out of indigenous youth.

We urge the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to call on States to:

1. Undertake language documentation program 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 productions to promote, preserve and revitalization of Indigenous languages;
3. Provide support in language preparedness process – documentation, publication and digitation of Indigenous languages to prepare them for usages in formal education system;
4. Take special and urgent measures for preservation, revitalization and development of the most endangered Indigenous languages which are spoken by less than one hundred speakers to prevent languages loss;
5. Introduce Indigenous languages in the education system and other public usages. To accomplish this, make necessary policy reforms to include the issues of Indigenous languages in the public mechanisms on academic research, teachers training program, curriculum reform, and pedagogical development;

6. 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, teachers training, and lifelong learning process;
7. Promote and provide support to community initiatives in preserving and practicing Indigenous languages and expand those initiatives through providing resources and technical support;
8. Take urgent steps to stop the forced and involuntary dislocation of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral territories;
9. Engage traditional leaders, Indigenous communities, Indigenous Peoples' led institutions and Indigenous scholars in the decision-making and implementation process regarding Indigenous languages;
10. Initiate and promote digitalization of indigenous language in education system for enhancing learning atmosphere for indigenous children and youths;
11. To help prevent structural discrimination of Indigenous language by the state and majority and develop mechanism to address the same;
12. Meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples and their organizations in the implementation of Global action plan of IDIL 2022-2032 at national level;

Thank you

Contact: Jenifer Lasimbang on behalf of the Asia Caucus Email: lasimbangjen@gmail.com