

Statement to the
United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
16th Session
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Item 4

Presented by: Shaldon Ferris

Thank you, Madame Chair.

We, the participants of the Project Access Capacity Training Workshop, including Indigenous Peoples from (Africa, Asia, the Americas, Pacific, and Europe), exchanged experiences of the challenges we face regarding our Indigenous languages and others.

One indigenous language DIES every two weeks. The revitalization of Indigenous Languages is a focus area of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. Language is an integral part of Culture, Education and Identity. When a language dies, the people of that culture lose an important part of their identity.

We believe States can be proactive at recognizing Indigenous Languages among their official languages, for example:

- The South African state, has 11 official languages. The Nama Peoples are indigenous to South Africa – but with 250,000 Nama speakers in the country, the language is still not recognized as an official language.
- The Naro language of the San has not been included as part of Botswana's National Languages. There are over 50,000 San People in Botswana.

How do states make a language official without considering the First nations of a State ?

Conversely in Paraguay, the Guarani Indigenous language, is one of the two official languages in Paraguay, it is spoken by approximately 90% of the population, including the non-indigenous, despite the fact that it was also a state colonised by the Spanish in the 16th century.

We also commend the State of Morocco for officially recognizing the Amazigh language and culture in the 2011 Constitution of Morocco.

Articles 13,14 and 16 of the UN Declaration state : Indigenous Peoples have the rights to: Revitalize and develop their languages, to receive education in their own languages and to establish their own languages in their own media.

We emphasize the importance of integrating all forms of Traditional Knowledge and equal participation and inclusion of knowledge holders in all aspects of the 6 mandates of the permanent forum, and the consistent exercise of the Free, Prior and informed Consent.

We look forward to the report from EMRIP and UNESCO, on the new Mechanism on International Repatriation of Ancestral Items and Human Remains.

States should consider closing the loophole in the Rotterdam Convention that allows the manufacturing and sales to other countries, of banned and restricted pesticides known to be toxic and harmful to humans, thus impacting Intergenerational Health, the Environment and the Reproductive Health of Women.

Madame Chair, we would like to present the following recommendations:

1- Encourage States to officially and proactively recognize indigenous languages as Official Languages of their respective States by 2019, which has been declared the Year of Indigenous Languages by UNESCO.

2- Urge States to fast-track the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the national level.

3- Encourage States to ban the manufacturing and sales of banned or restricted pesticides.

Thank you Madame Chair.

Or as they say in the ancient language of the San people of Botswana, Qae Tcao ra ko rra.