

**Future Item of Work for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

**May 26, 2011**

**Item 8**

**By**

**Mohawk Language Custodians Association and  
First Peoples Human Rights Coalition**

**Speaker**

**Ellen Gabriel**

Wa'tkwanonwera:ton akwe:kon tetawa:naron – Greetings all my relations  
Our elders teach us that our language is a gift from the Shonkwaia'ti:son – the Creator.  
It is unimaginable to think of self-determination to be fully realized without the  
perpetuation of our Indigenous languages.

Our languages are living, and as such should be used in our daily lives, not just on special  
occasions or to give a child a name. Oppression and colonization have eroded our use of  
our languages which we need for our health and well-being, our systems of governance,  
and to guide us in the “stewardship” of our lands and resources.

Nation building must simultaneously incorporate language and its revitalization to  
overcome the effects of colonization and assimilation. Our land is intricately linked to  
our identity. However, our identity is composed of many factors, not the least of which is  
language.

As one elder stated, it has taken over a hundred years to bring our nations, lands and our  
languages to the point of where it is in such a vulnerable state, that it will take many  
years and generations to overcome.

Everyday we lose Indigenous language speakers who carry with them our traditional  
knowledge. Therefore we would like to emphasize the statement of the **Permanent  
Forum on Indigenous Issues** stated in their report of the international expert group  
meeting on Indigenous languages 2008: “Language revitalization must go deeper  
than collaboration with various UN agencies, documenting and archiving is a  
necessity but should not be relied on solely to preserve, perpetuate languages in  
critical states” – Article 44(d) UNPFII E/C.19/2008/3

In our humble opinion, the majority of Indigenous languages are in critical states  
exemplified in the fact that in Canada, only 3 of the 52 Indigenous languages are  
expected to survive to the end of this century.

**We would like to recommend the following to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous  
Issues for their future programme of work:**

1. A process of implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is undertaken especially for **Articles 6, 8, 13, 14, 15, and 16.**
2. The full implementation by states on the recommendations of the UNPFII Report of the International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages, document E/c.19/2008/3 and that special efforts and focus be directed towards grassroots community efforts and its Indigenous language educators.
3. That the issue of Indigenous languages be incorporated in all programs of work of the UNPFII and that efforts be made to harmonize the implementation of the UNDRIP with the principles of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and related Conventions — notably the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
4. The UNPFII examine existing international research on Indigenous languages in order to expeditiously support Indigenous communities efforts.