

#20 May 12, 2004

U.N. PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Theme: Culture, Item 4 (e)

Recommendations on Indigenous Languages

May 12, 2004

Joint Statement from:

Indigenous Peoples Programme World Council of Churches



Honorable Chairperson:

I am from the Yuchi nation, now with only 6 remaining fluent speakers of our language on the planet, We are working to revitalize our language in the state of Oklahoma, where only 4 of the remaining 27 Indigenous languages are being learned by the children,

For the region now covered by Canada and the USA over 70% of our languages are only spoken by the grandparent's generation

Globally, as much as half our original languages are facing immediate loss in the next 20 years,

as high as 90% of our languages will be lost, at present rates of decline, by the end of this century

In light of the inestimable value of our Indigenous languages to our communities and to the store of human knowledge,

And in consideration of the extremely endangered status of our Indigenous languages,

We make the following recommendations. We:

+ Propose that "Indigenous Languages" comprise the **theme for the Forth Permanent Forum** on Indigenous Issues in 2005

(along with preparatory regional meetings and other appropriate activities)

+ that the UN sponsor an "**International Year of Indigenous languages**" for 2006

(which would celebrate our languages and highlight the critical status of our languages providing both education about the value of our languages and effective strategies for revitalization)

+ call for **funding from states for language revitalization programs**

(especially in light of the history of sustained and systematic assault on languages with enormous amounts of funding spent through boarding school programs and other government agencies)

+ request that an **Indigenous Language Fund** be established to receive monies for vital language work

(probably placed within UNESCO)

+ call on member states to affirm linguistic rights by **repealing any discriminatory legislation and opposing linguacidal policies and practices**

+ urge the **development of clear strategies for effective intervention** in the processes of Indigenous language loss and establishing **priorities and goals** for the states that would be **additive** rather than subtractive language learning and responsive to the early start and maximum exposure fallacies pointed out by Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas at this present session

(so that our languages can continue to be spoken by our grandchildren and future generations)

+ appeal for **greater coordination among UN agencies** and related bodies in sharing of information on Indigenous language work (including UNICEF and UNESCO)