

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



Te Māngai o Aotearoa

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Item 7 : Half-Day Discussion on Indigenous Languages

 Statement by

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 New Zealand

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Check against delivery

Ko Papa Tūanuku e takoto nei
 Ko Rangi Nui e tu nei
 Tena korua
 Tena korua
 Tena korua

Ki nga mana whenua o ia rohe, o ia rohe;
 He mihi nui tenei, ki a koutou katoa i raro i te kaupapa o tenei hui

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Madame Chair, I greet you in Māori, the language of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand and one of New Zealand's three official languages, together with English and New Zealand Sign Language.

I have paid respects to Mother Earth and Sky Father and formally greeted all of the indigenous peoples, States and UN representatives here at this important hui or gathering.

Madame Chair, Māori is a Polynesian language that was introduced to New Zealand by settlers about 1000 years ago. There are a number of tribal variations within the language, but these do not affect the mutual intelligibility of the language throughout New Zealand.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Māori lived in homogenous rural communities. The Māori language was the principal language of these communities, and it was the language used almost exclusively in Māori homes.

Following the Second World War, there was a large-scale movement of Māori into urban communities where English was the predominant language of daily life, education and broadcast media. English was also the sole language of instruction in the primary and secondary schools that Māori children attended. This resulted in Māori people becoming bilingual in Māori and English.

Faced with these new realities, Māori parents began raising their children through the English language. This break in intergenerational language transmission resulted in rapid language loss. By the 1970s, leading sociolinguists were predicting the demise of the Māori language within a generation.

These predictions spurred the Māori community into action, with support from the New Zealand government. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were significant developments in Māori language education and broadcasting. Some of these I will now highlight:

- Māori language early childhood centres and full immersion primary and secondary schools were established, together with three tribal universities;
- various tribes established radio stations to promote Māori language and culture;
- the Māori Language Act was passed in 1987, which established a Māori Language Commission and declared Māori an official language of New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Madame Chair,

In 1998, the New Zealand government greatly increased its practical support for the revitalisation of the Māori Language, and this was reflected in the release of the Māori Language Strategy. This strategy:

- established goals for the future of the Māori language;
- identified the roles of government and Māori in pursuing these goals; and
- prioritised the government's investment in existing and new instruments to support the revitalisation of the Māori language.

The strategy has a strong focus on strengthening intergenerational language transmission. I would now like to highlight some of the key achievements arising from the strategy:

- a. the establishment of the Community Based Language Initiatives programme, which provides support and funding for tribal language plans, and the Whanau Language Development Programme, where trained mentors work on a one-to-one basis with participating families to support intergenerational language transmission;
- b. the establishment of the *Mā Te Reo Fund* in 2001, which provides contestable funds for one-off projects on Māori language;
- c. the establishment of the Māori Television Service in 2004 which broadcasts 50-60% in Māori. I am proud to update the Forum that the Māori Television Service launched a second channel that broadcasts 100% in the Māori language when it hosted the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters conference in March this year;
- d. the redevelopment of Māori Medium Curriculum (Te Mārautanga o Aotearoa), starting in 2005 and scheduled to finish in 2007. This Curriculum has been a part of the school system since 1993;
- e. a significant increase in government funding for tribal radio stations over the last three years, following on from a large capital injection in 2005, together with an annual training fund;

- f. the production and publication of a monolingual children's dictionary, *Tirohia Kimihia*, in 2006 and the Online Encyclopedia of New Zealand (Te Ara) in Māori and English languages;
- g. the establishment of bilingual forms for key citizenship documents, for example, Birth, Death and Marriage Certificates, Passports, and Census Forms;
- h. the establishment of the *Language Line* service to provide translation on demand for clients of various government agencies.

Madame Chair, the New Zealand Government continues to monitor the health of the Māori language with large-scale sociolinguistic surveys having been undertaken in both 2001 and 2006. These surveys show significant gains in the health of the Māori language.

- By 2006, the percentage of Māori people with some level of speaking proficiency had increased from 42% in 2001 to 51%. Listening proficiency increased from 58% to 67% during the same period.
- 15% of those surveyed in 2001 indicated that they spoke Māori to their primary school children regularly. By 2006, this figure had increased to 26%. A further 48% made some use of the Māori language in their interaction with their infants. This is a critical development as it indicates potential for intergenerational transmission, an important component of language revitalisation, to occur.
- Attitudes towards the Māori language among Māori and non-Māori have become more positive. Of those surveyed, some 94% of Māori and 80% of non-Māori agreed that Māori people speaking Māori in public places or at work was a good thing.

The findings of this research show progress towards the goals of the Māori Language Strategy and inform future government investment.

Madame Chair, the Māori Language Strategy will be reviewed in 2008 after five years of implementation. The review will assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the Māori Language Strategy to date and make recommendations on how the government can continue to strengthen its implementation, and will form the basis of the next iteration of the strategy for the period 2009/10 - 2014/15.

We hope this update on New Zealand Aotearoa's progress and experience in the revitalisation of Māori language will add value to your consideration of this important issue for indigenous peoples.

No reira, tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa.

Further Information

The Māori Language Survey Factsheet (2006) www.tpk.govt.nz

The Māori Language Strategy (2003) www.tpk.govt.nz

Māori Language Commission www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz