

Speech of Viliuiana Nikitina, the representative of Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Russian Federation at the 11th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations

July 9-13, 2018

Geneva

Dear chair and honorable leaders of the world's indigenous peoples!

Thank you for the opportunity to speak from the high tribune of the United Nations on the problems of Sakha people, living in the Pole of Cold in the northern hemisphere of the planet!

My name is Viliuiana Nikitina. I am a representative of the Sakha indigenous people. I am a philologist – linguist, who writes scientific articles. I have two children.

Sakha people are indigenous people in the northeast of the Asian part of the Russian Federation. However, Sakha peoples with a population more than four hundred thousand are not recognized as indigenous peoples under the Russian legislation, since in Russia, ethnic groups are officially recognized as “Indigenous” with special protective status only when they are fewer than 50, 000 individuals. Other native peoples whose populations exceed 50, 000 are not considered as “Indigenous”, even if they are within the scope of the UN-accepted definition of Indigenous Peoples.

We, Sakha people, want our children to know perfectly our native language. Since 2011, I have participated in the public activities for preserving our mother tongue: develop teaching and bringing up Sakha language in educational organizations in our Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). I am the head of the Republic social movement "Future of the mother tongue", that was created in 2018. This movement unites public organizations, that during the last 30 years explained to parents the necessity to educate children on their native language and has the aim to expand the education of Sakha children on Sakha language in preschools and schools. As a result of the cooperation of public organizations with authorities on various levels, we were able to open additional classes at schools and groups in preschools in Yakutsk city, where education is provided on Sakha language. However, this is only beginning, we are still very far from the desired result.

We also took an active part in public discussions in the process of drafting the law in the field of education on the national and federal levels.

These days only about 60 % of Sakha children learn Sakha language as a school subject. However, all other subjects are taught on the Russian language according to the all-Russian standards, using textbooks in Russian, take exams only in Russian language, watching cartoons on Russian and English languages. There is no government support for making cartoons on Sakha Language. As a result, the number of children who know Sakha language as their mother tongue decreases every year.

The language situation is worsened by the fact that the State Duma of the Russian Federation approved the bill about state languages of the national republics in the first reading on June 19, 2018, despite all disagreements from Russia's "Ethnic" Republics' societies. According to this bill, the state languages (indigenous peoples' languages) of Russia's national republics will be taught only on the voluntary basis at the request of parents. In our opinion, this bill has a restrictive nature, which implicitly dictating expectation of involuntary abandonment of the native language as unprovided in the state educational system and upbringing.

The civil society of Sakha Republic delegated me to the 11th session of the Expert Mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples to represent the interests of Sakha people and to express at the international level our concerns about the threat of losing our mother language in the education sphere.

In this connection:

1. We ask you to share successful examples of protecting language rights of indigenous peoples; also to give us advise what should we do in this situation in order to protect our rights, proclaimed in the 13th and 14th articles of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2. We ask you to assist in conducting a UN seminar in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

within the framework of the Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, in order to preserve and evolve indigenous languages in our Republic. Please note, that on May 2018, we sent a letter with the same proposal to Ms. Chandra Roy-Henriksen, chief of the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, but we didn't get any answer yet.

3. We ask in assisting in the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples of Sakha.

Thank you for attention!

Viliuiana Nikitina,

Phone +79644217932

e-mail: gviluyana@mail.ru

Russia, Republic of Sakha, Yakutsk, Khatyn-Yuryakhskoe highway, 6 km, 67A