

Statement by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)
7th Session of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Item 7-Half Day Discussion on Indigenous Languages

Madam Chairperson,

Thank you for giving me another opportunity to address this august assembly. I am Legborsi Saro Pyagbara from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Madam Chair, this discussion about language is coming at a most opportune time in our history when we are at a major environmental crossroads where we need to call into assistance the profound relationship between cultural diversity and ecological diversity. Language forms one of the greatest expressions of our cultural identities. Our Language is connected with our spirituality, with our environment and with our social wellbeing. The loss of any language signals not only the loss of a civilization, it is the final funeral rite for the loss of a people.

It is against this backdrop, Madam Chair that we view with great concern the continued actions of the Nigeria government to decimate the languages of indigenous communities in the country while at the same time providing state support for the development and study of the three majority languages of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. These three majority languages have been made part of the national education curriculum and the state provides facilities and teachers for them to be taught from primary through universities. These three languages including English Language are the only ones recognised by the Nigerian constitution and can be used on the floor of the national assembly. This treatment cannot be said of indigenous languages like that of the Ogoni people.

Last year, the government took the further discouraging step of putting these three languages on the national currencies.

Coming on the heels of a recent report that many indigenous languages in Nigeria are on the path to extinction, unless urgent steps are taken to rescue them from imminent disappearance from the linguistic map, while almost twenty three have actually gone extinct (*Professor Matthew Omo-Ojugo*) you can only see why the present discriminatory language development actions of the Nigeria government is ***like a passport to the extinction*** of the language of the Ogoni people and other indigenous communities in Nigeria. This amounts to cultural genocide.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the Nigerian government set up a comprehensive language revival programme which will include the study of indigenous languages from primary schools to universities.
2. We recommend that since most of the injustices against indigenous people's language development are codified in the constitutions, there should be constitutional reviews in countries to deal with this anomaly.
3. We call on the Nigeria government to respect its international obligations by implementing international conventions/ agreements such as ICESCR, ICCPR and the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education which it has entered into.
4. We call on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in collaboration with other relevant United Nations agencies to develop indicators for monitoring language development and survival.

Thank you.

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