

**Intervention to the Seventh Session of the
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2008
Youth Caucus Statement - April 24, 2008
Revitalization of Indigenous Languages for Future Generations
Agenda Item 7: Indigenous Languages**

Good afternoon Madame Chair,

This intervention is submitted by the Indigenous Youth Caucus of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the Seventh Session, comprised of Indigenous young people from all over the world. With due respect, we would like to first acknowledge the traditional custodians of this region for allowing us to meet in their respective homeland. We would also like to give thanks to our relatives, the mountains, lakes, rivers, seas and all living beings that have inhabited this earth and provide us with the means to survive.

We, the indigenous youth caucus would like to address the UN PFI regarding the urgency of saving and revitalizing our languages. Language is identity, Language is history, Language is culture, Language is education and Language is a bridge between the past, present and future. Language is vital to the efficacy of our indigenous being; it gives us the knowledge of our ancestors.

Language is not used solely as means of communication, rather it encompasses intricate complexities of our identity. Language is essential in shaping our worldviews as indigenous young people, and we do not deserve, nor can we afford to walk this earth without the opportunity to embrace our own languages.

We recognize the continuing effects of assimilation, acculturation, colonization and its counterpart, genocide through the displacement of generations of indigenous children around the world, thus leaving our languages in many cases extinct or on the verge thereof.

Moreover, we recognize additional contemporary issues of globalization, modernity, industrialization, cultural imperialism, hegemony, various other aspects of capitalism and the list goes on and on of impositions that are preventing our languages to be revitalized and thus thrive in our respective communities.

Our languages are gifts from our ancestors and have evolved in accordance with our traditional philosophical understandings. Thus the efficacy of our spirituality is contingent upon the perpetuation of our indigenous languages.

The ongoing suppression and oppression of indigenous language by

government-states, school systems, and religious institutions must be eradicated and replaced with collective efforts to engage in a resurgence of our treasured languages. This is evident in societies of individuals among us such as those from Kmhre Khrom and Balochestan where people are forbidden to teach their languages, and right here in the United States where "English only" legislation denies our existence as Indigenous Peoples.

As you know, according to UNESCO, approximately 600 languages have disappeared in the last century and up 90 percent of the world's languages are likely to disappear before the end of this century. In many countries, 90 percent of Indigenous languages will be extinct within the next 10-50 years.

We recognize that traditional knowledge is often required to be passed down through the Indigenous language of a respective society, thus the discourse we have engaged in here regarding climate change and traditional knowledge of the earth, can simply be dismissed if the suppression of our languages continues.

With respect to our elders, we are not the leaders of tomorrow. We are the leaders of today. We accept that we will one day assume the leadership roles of the PFII. Without command of our languages, we will simply be inaccurate representations of Indigenous persons leading our peoples. We will be non-Indigenous minds trapped in Indigenous bodies.

Now is the time for our elders and leaders to work with our young Indigenous peoples to reinvigorate our languages, the gateway through which we can further explore our traditions and cultures.

We respectfully offer the following recommendations:

- 1) For Nation-States to affirm the validity of Indigenous languages
- 2) For culturally sensitive educational programs to be implemented in indigenous communities excluding imposed Western pedagogical curriculums and standards
- 3) For Nation-States to fully implement Article 13 and 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous peoples.
- 4) For the UN to recognize the indigenous youth caucus as effective and intrinsic parts of the discourse and developments of indigenous language revitalization efforts.