



Address by

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on the occasion of

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Ms. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, (distinguished guests),

It is my great pleasure to address this important Forum attended by more than one thousand representatives of indigenous communities, governments, policy and decision makers, international and UN experts and civil society.

May I first of all express my appreciation to all those who provided their valuable inputs for the preparation of the Report, and particularly to Ms. Jennifer Rubis who, on behalf of UNESCO, served as Rapporteur during the International expert group meeting in January 2016.

### **Importance of linguistic diversity for development**

Linguistic diversity is an integral part of cultural diversity. It reconciles ideas, emotions and values of people from different backgrounds as accumulated knowledge and heritage of humankind. Languages provide us a vantage point from which we can understand our past, knowledge to address the present and wisdom to equip us in addressing the challenges and opportunities for years to come. And they give us the opportunity to understand our fellow human beings, their backgrounds and visions. Languages are the foundations of dialogue through which we create mutual understanding, tolerance and peace.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights states in its Article 19, that the "*Universal access to information in own language is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression and [is] considered to be crucial for development, democracy, equity and delivery of public goods to all citizens.*"

Despite the fundamental importance of human rights and universal rights and freedoms, there are still many communities around the world, including indigenous peoples, which are not able to access information in their languages. Their diverse heritage is somehow documented, preserved and shared without taking into consideration their interests, ignoring key principles of information ethics, and the formulation of relevant policies and strategies is done with no association with them. For all these reasons, often the revitalization and preservation efforts in the area of linguistic diversity do not reach their objectives.

### **Role of ICTs for preservation and revitalization of languages**

UNESCO is convinced that the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a key role to play in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open and inclusive knowledge societies. Speakers of indigenous and lesser-used languages, need to be able to express themselves in culturally meaningful ways, create their own cultural content in local languages and share these in cyberspace.

However, many languages are not present on the Internet, media does not broadcast in lesser-used languages; public information services are not supported by key information providers, and many language tools and products are not available in local and minority languages.

In this regard, UNESCO argues that universal access to information and knowledge should be considered as an integral part of any sustainable development plans and goals and closely interrelated with the empowerment of indigenous communities.

### **Reference to the Item 3**

#### ***Multilingualism***

- The Report submitted to us today is a good starting point, while it requires more reflection and space for dialogue with an even wider range of stakeholders, as it concerns strategic future decisions and orientations for indigenous peoples around the world.
- Recommendations elaborated by UNESCO and outcomes of the international cooperation mechanisms such as the World Summit in the Information Society (WSIS) and the Information For All Programme (IFAP) as well as other UNESCO international conferences and experts meetings should therefore be integrated.
- More specifically, the UNESCO Recommendation on Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace (2003) is a core and the only document in UN system that requires Member States to take concrete measures to promote a multilingual cyberspace.
- Furthermore, UNESCO launched a global initiative on the development of the World Atlas of Languages in order to provide reliable and accurate information on language vitality and diversity as well as future opportunities for cooperation, content sharing and development of new initiatives to all interested partners and communities.
- I would like to thank Mr. Alvaro Pop, Vice-President of the UN Forum who personally attended the Regional Conference organized by UNESCO on “Multilingualism in Cyberspace: Indigenous Languages for Empowerment” in November 2015, in Costa Rica, and his contribution for the elaboration of the Roadmap for the World Atlas of Languages.

#### ***Digital preservation***

- UNESCO is also convinced that the digital preservation of documentary heritage of indigenous communities contributes to the preservation and revitalization efforts as well as provides access of future generations to this heritage. Documentary heritage is a major part of the memory of the world, reflects the diversity of peoples, languages and cultures.
- The issue of preserving this heritage has been a source of concern to specialists and relevant institutions and instances familiar with its fragility and the ensuing risks of losing important sources of information and knowledge. To address this problem, UNESCO's General Conference in 2015 has adopted a normative instrument “Recommendation concerning the Preservation of, and Access to,

Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form" (2015). It aims to support the efforts of Member States

- at national level through identification of documentary heritage and adapted policy measures ensuring preservation of and access to it, and
  - at international scale through bilateral or multilateral research projects and also by disseminating guidelines, policies and best practice models.
- UNESCO Memory of the World is a global programme that facilitates preservation of documentary heritage, by the most appropriate techniques.

*Ethical dimensions*

- UNESCO supports and promotes the ethical dimensions of society, which is one of the priorities of the Organization. Special attention should be paid making information and documentary heritage of indigenous communities accessible to all.

**Closing remarks**

I hope that this discussion in the Forum and just mentioned ideas will facilitate building thematic bridges to ensure the importance of preservation, revitalizations and promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the areas of UNESCO's mandate. This should undoubtedly assist governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions and professional associations to better understand « how and why preserving and promoting languages matters for development ». Consequently, they should take appropriate measures to improve the effectiveness of the existing legal instruments that protect and promote multilingualism.

I wish you all pleasant and fruitful days during this Forum.

Thank you for your attention.