

# **The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

## **The 7<sup>th</sup> session**

### **Agenda Item 7 – Half-day discussion on indigenous languages**

#### **Statement by the Arctic Indigenous Caucus**

Thank you Mdm Chairperson,

This presentation is given by Arctic Indigenous Caucus. This is our response to the **Report of the international expert group meeting on indigenous languages**.

Inuit and Saami welcome the initiative taken by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to deal with the issues of linguistic diversity, the connection between language rights and all other fundamental rights; a concern for the lack of urgency while the majority of all indigenous languages are threatened with extinction, and proposals for revitalization, promotion and protection of indigenous languages.

Inuit and Saami also welcome the report from the international expert group meeting on indigenous languages which took place here in United Nations Headquarters in New York in January this year. This is a promising step forward to celebrate 2008 which has been proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Languages. We agree that there is a need for concrete public policies for the protection and promotion of indigenous languages as has been recommended by the Permanent Forum at its sixth session.

Mdm chairperson,

The Arctic Indigenous Caucus would like to express its agreement with the general overview, the conclusion and the recommendation of the expert group meeting.

The overview points out that Indigenous peoples and their languages are threatened around the world. The loss of indigenous languages signifies not only the loss of traditional knowledge but also the loss of cultural diversity and spirituality. We are concerned that among some Governments, indigenous peoples and the intergovernmental system there is still a lack of awareness of the urgency for policy measures to reverse this trend.

The expert group emphasized also the best practices which signify that there are serious initiatives among the indigenous communities to maintain the languages and revitalize those. The group also noticed challenges, gaps and concerns which include neglect in national legislation and policy and are often excluded from the realm of human rights and human rights implementation as part of cultural rights and also as integral parts of the self-determination and should be viewed within the context of the universal, interdependent and complementary nature of human rights.

It is crucial to recognize the indigenous peoples' language rights as pointed out by the report. Language rights must be implemented as a collective and individual right.

We confirm that the Nordic authorities accommodate the Saami to a large extent, and that in many respects, the Saami are less oppressed than many of the world's other indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, we meet challenges every day related to language rights, language use and education issues. We expect the Nordic states to set the best examples for an indigenous policy which, in all aspects, complies with human rights ideals and requirements. Thus there is a need for a rapid ratification of the proposed Nordic Saami Convention.

On this basis, among others, Arctic Indigenous caucus would like to submit the following **recommendations**:

- 1. The Nordic Saami Convention stands out as an example of good practice in empowering indigenous peoples to preserve and revitalize their languages. The Permanent Forum hence calls on the Nordic states to ratify the Saami Convention without further delay.**

- 2. We are concerned with the lack of funding and political will to promote and protect indigenous languages which remains a major challenge. We would therefore call upon the involved parties to develop funding through ways which involve the indigenous peoples.**
- 3. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and other relevant human rights standards should be utilized as the basis to develop policies and laws related to the promotion and strengthening of indigenous languages.**
- 4. The language standards and policies of the UNESCO may be difficult to implement at the local level since the organization primarily works through the governments level. We support the Experts group meeting in emphasizing that UNESCO needs to strengthen its relationship with civil society organizations so that language policies are implemented directly at the level of indigenous communities and seek government support where possible.**
- 5. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples to invite UNESCO to jointly call for a world conference on linguistic diversity, indigenous languages, identity and education. The UN Member States should commit themselves with political and financial support for such a conference.**
- 6. Loahpalaččat mii ávžžuhit buot máilmmi eamiálbmogiid ráhčat doalahit ja ealáskahttit iežaset gollegielaid!**

**Finally, we strongly encourage all indigenous peoples to make efforts to stabilize and keep their languages alive.**

**- Thank you Mdm Chair**