

20<sup>th</sup> UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations

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Statement by the Association of Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus

Miss Kozue ARAKAKI    Item 5    Education



Thank you, Chairperson

I am Kozue ARAKAKI. I am from Okinawa, which is located between Taiwan and Japan. First of all, I celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this WGIP and I would like to pay a tribute for what you have done in this 20 years, especially the Permanent Forum, which was held in last May. By the way, we sometimes treat the languages and educational problems, but still now, our languages are in danger of becoming extinct. So I reconsider the value of the indigenous peoples' languages this time and I suggest that the written symbol of "Death Languages" for our languages should be changed into "Sleeping Languages".

The consciousness, that Okinawan languages (Uchinaguchi) are languages, not just dialects, has been lacked, especially in the young age. After the invasion by the Japanese government in ~~1972~~<sup>1872</sup>, we have been incorrigibly implanted the idea that we are Japanese, so that we were forced to learn Japanese customs, the culture, and the language. In particular, the spoken language controlled strongly by the Japanese government. The people in higher education were required to speak in Japanese instead of using Okinawan languages, and if the people had spoken Okinawan language, a teacher gave them "Hogen Fudas." "Hogen Fuda" is a sign that Japanese teacher would force students to hang around their necks. On it was written, 'I used forbidden dialect 'The students have to hang the 'Hogen Fudas' for a punishment, and it made itself the laughing stock. We can see clearly the reason why the worth of Uchinaguchi as a language was discounted.

Nowadays, after passing more than a hundred years, the Okinawan language speakers have been fewer and fewer because the young are likely have the idea that Okinwan languages are inferior to Japanese so the young seldom speak our own languages. However, the languages still remain in the senior. They speak Okinawan languages in daily life. The senior people have different languages from the one of the young. If we think languages are tools of communication, the two generations cannot communicate each other, even worse we have difficulty with inheriting our own identities. In fact, there are many problems, which are caused by the reason above. It is so sad that the grandchildren can't talk with their grandparents.

Furthermore, the problems happen in the medical scene and the welfare scene. For example, if the patient only can speak Okinawan language and the young doctor can not speak any Okinawan languages, how he could give the medical treatment to his patient? The patients, who speak Okinawan languages, have a lot of disadvantages.

Languages are the important parts of its culture. We must be proud of our language for being proud of our culture. Otherwise, we might look down on our people and the culture by ourselves.

Some time ago, I had a volunteer work for people who have disability, and I faced the language problem. The caretaker was old, so she could only speak Okinawan language. So that I wasn't able to understand her son's condition and what they wanted me to do. I was wondering if the caretaker passed away, and the person who has disability was left, then, who could know the best way of caring. The own way of communication that they have made has to be initiated.

To conclude I ask Japanese government to set the institution that works for improving the state of Okinawan languages in society, and found classes of Okinawan languages for students who study at medical schools and welfare facilities in Okinawa. And I would love to ask UNESCO to certificate not only the Okinawan languages but also any indigenous peoples' languages as the Intangible Cultural Property.

It has been 5years passed since we asked Japanese government to protect our languages. However, nothing has been done yet. Japanese government should take the responsibility for what they discounted the values of our languages. As I said, languages are the core part of our culture; in other words, the language is our spirit itself. To protect the own language plays the important part for inheriting our culture. Finally, I hope you will pick the subject of languages and education as the one of main themes of this conference. And I believe the languages of indigenous peoples around the world will be treated as the respectable languages.

Thank you very much Chairperson.