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## **I. Introduction**

1. The year 2008 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Languages. Responding to the need for concrete public policies for the protection and promotion of indigenous languages, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, at its sixth session, recommended that the Economic and Social Council authorize the convening of an international expert group meeting on indigenous languages. At its regular session in July 2007, the Council approved the Forum's recommendation in decision 2007/244 to hold the meeting, which was organized by the secretariat of the Permanent Forum.

## **II. Organization of work**

### **A. Attendance**

2. The following members of the Permanent Forum attended the workshop: Carlos Mamani Condori, Hassan Id Balkassm, Paimaneh Hasteh, Tonya Gonella Frichner and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz.

3. The following invited experts from the seven indigenous sociocultural regions participated in the workshop: Lydia Nyati Ramohobo (Africa); Carl Christian Olsen (Arctic); Anne Lasimbang (Asia); Luis Montaluisa Chasiquiza (Central and South America and the Caribbean); Fenya Likhanova (Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia); Priscilla Settee (North America); and Jeanie Bell (Pacific).

4. The workshop was attended by observers from departments, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, observers from other intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Member States. The list of participants is contained in annex II.

### **B. Documentation**

5. The participants had before them a draft agenda and programme of work, a background paper and documents prepared by participating experts. In addition, a number of documents were submitted to the meeting by observers. The documentation is available on the website of the secretariat of the Permanent Forum at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/EGM\\_IL.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/EGM_IL.html).

### **C. Opening of the meeting**

6. At the opening of the meeting, the Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development made an opening statement on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

### **D. Election of officers**

7. Ms. Tauli-Corpuz was elected Chairperson of the workshop and Ms. Gonella Frichner was elected Co-chairperson of the workshop. Ms. Andriamiesza of the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was elected Rapporteur.

**E. Adoption of the conclusions and recommendations**



20. The creation of schools in the Russian Federation for children whose parents lead nomadic lives is another example of attempts to meet the educational needs of indigenous children, as are some bilingual education programmes in North Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation.

21. Language movements have been successful when the promotion of linguistic diversity has been promoted as a national responsibility, such as with the movement for the Amazigh language in Morocco.

22. The struggle of indigenous peoples in Ecuador has led to the State recognition

28. The importance of languages cannot be undervalued, as they reflect the world views of indigenous communities. For example, customary laws of indigenous communities are often in their languages, and if the language is lost the community may not fully understand its laws and system of governance. Loss of language also undermines the identity and spirituality of the community and the individual. The meeting emphasized the importance of looking at language rights from a holistic perspective, and that language rights cannot be fully enjoyed in the absence of other basic human rights, health, decent work or self-determination.

29. In many countries, discriminatory language policies from the colonial era continued after independence, favouring languages that the majority of citizens do not speak as the first language in their homes. Policies, legislation and their implementation often discriminate against indigenous languages in a number of ways, including attaching special privileges in terms of participation in governance, territorial privileges or representation in the media, to speakers of certain non-indigenous languages. The prevailing situation in the world today is that certain languages are given official status and recognition while the majority of languages, and, in particular, indigenous languages, are denied legal recognition. This deplorable imbalance weakens indigenous languages and contributes to views that portray indigenous languages as inferior and give room for discriminatory and corrupt practices that are difficult to combat through legal or political means.

30. An overwhelming majority of all countries have more than one language spoken within their borders, and governments frequently cite a lack of resources as a major obstacle in protecting indigenous languages. Although this is sometimes a valid concern, it is important to view indigenous languages not as a financial drain but as a valuable resource, that language diversity is a major contribution to the wealth of the country's cultural heritage and therefore there is a need for more political will to provide the resources needed to preserve and develop this heritage. It should also be stressed that the promotion of indigenous languages does not undermine national unity; on the contrary it is a positive contribution to national heritage. Furthermore, indigenous languages often do not coincide with national borders and they should therefore be dealt with at the national level and in the context of cross-border cooperation.

31. Although language loss has happened in the past, humanity is today facing an unprecedented threat to linguistic diversity and this threat is most acutely felt by indigenous peoples. Although language loss is attributed to globalization and migration, it is also a result of systemic and deliberate efforts to destroy languages using racist and discriminatory policies and laws.

32. Past and current experiences have shown, for example, that whole generations of indigenous children who were placed in boarding schools away from their communities lost their language. A number of experimental programmes are attempting to create culturally appropriate and bilingual schools that may reverse this trend.

33. Some States seek the revitalization, preservation and promotion of indigenous languages, but language programmes are frequently underfunded, while smaller language communities struggle to receive any funding at all. Where some funding becomes available, the sustainability of such programmes becomes a challenge.

34. The meeting was concerned with the fact that a lack of funding (especially predictable funding) and political will to promote and protect indigenous languages remains a major challenge.

35. It is another challenge to produce a curriculum for indigenous children that is relevant to them and their communities, while also following national curriculums prescribed by the government. Funding, teacher training and support are needed to develop these programmes that respect and promote indigenous cultures and languages, while also providing indigenous



**policies and laws related to the promotion and strengthening of indigenous languages;**

(c) **Take adequate constitutional and other legislative measures for the**

- (1) **Respect the wishes of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation**

**language policies are implemented directly at the level of indigenous communities and seek government support where possible;**

- (f) **UNESCO should, in collaboration with States and indigenous m173521**

agencies such as UNESCO, and equip themselves to use them to protect and promote their language and cultural rights;

(d) Cooperate with other indigenous peoples on language matters, exchanging experiences and good examples;

(e) Promote awareness among speakers of indigenous languages of the impending loss and inherent value of their languages in the face of assimilation policies and educational institutions which have imposed hegemonic ideologies that devalue indigenous languages.

#### **Other recommendations**

44. The following actions are recommended:

(a) States, indigenous peoples and international organizations should collaborate in translating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into indigenous languages and disseminate these widely;

(b) Funding agencies and donors should support revitalization programmes that endeavour to produce new speakers — not just documenting or archiving — for the most critically endangered languages, whose most urgent need is the immediate development of new fluent speakers to carry forward the words and knowledge of the ageing elders;

(c) States, United Nations agencies, donors, research institutions, religious organizations, the media and NGOs should ensure the proper and correct identification of the names of indigenous languages;

(d) Increasing the number of fluent speakers should be the main objective of these language revitalization efforts, while indigenous languages that are not necessarily under immediate threat of extinction face different challenges, such as promotion and to be used in full equality with other national official languages. Moreover, efforts of individual experts to salvage and promote indigenous languages will not be effective unless the concerned community desires such efforts and takes action in that direction. Indigenous peoples themselves must claim ownership of their languages and direct revitalization efforts of their languages.

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through the drafting of its documents and implementing its outcomes. It is equally important that this world conference be a United Nations world conference, ensuring the active participation and commitment of Member States, thus increasing its impact on indigenous languages.

47. The conference might be organized through the close cooperation of the Permanent Forum and UNESCO and other relevant United Nations agencies. Its preparation would require regional preparatory meetings of experts and the active use of other international conferences for awareness-raising and input into the conference.

48. Finally, for this world conference to become a reality, it is essential to ensure the political and financial commitment of a Member State or States to champion the idea of the conference, while funding may include inter-agency efforts, in addition to voluntary funding from States, indigenous peoples' organizations, foundations and others.

49. The agenda of the conference could include the following subjects: constitutional and other juridical protection of indigenous languages; democratic policies in the promotion of indigenous languages; actions by indigenous peoples for the protection and promotion of indigenous languages; and promotion of indigenous languages in the media.

## Annex I

### Programme of work

<i>Date/time</i>	<i>Item/programme</i>
<b>Tuesday, 8 January</b>	
10-10.30 a.m.	Opening of the workshop by the Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
	Item 1 Election of Chairperson and Rapporteur
	Item 2 Adoption of agenda and organization of work
10.30 a.m.-1 p.m.	Item 3 Working towards concrete actions and legislative development aimed at eliminating discrimination against the current use of indigenous languages
	<i>Presentations</i>
	Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo Carl Christian Olsen
3-6 p.m.	Item 4 Developing programmes aimed at promoting the empowerment of indigenous languages through all mediums, including radio and television
	<i>Presentations</i>
	Jeanie Bell Hassan Id Balkassm
<b>Wednesday, 9 January</b>	
10 a.m.-1 p.m.	Item 5 Supporting and increasing the number of centres for the study of indigenous languages
	<i>Presentations</i>
	Anne Lasimbang
3 p.m.-6 p.m.	Item 6 Financing and supporting schemes for special projects that are formulated by indigenous peoples and are focused on revitalization and rescue of threatened languages
	<i>Presentations</i>
	Priscilla Settee Luis Montaluiza Chasiqiza Fenya Likhanova

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<i>Date/time</i>	<i>Item/programme</i>
<b>Thursday, 10 January</b>	
10 a.m.-1 p.m.	Item 7    Designing, in consultation with indigenous peoples and the Permanent Forum, the organization of a world conference on linguistic diversity, indigenous languages, identity and education, as a contribution to the programme of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People  <i>Presentations</i>  UNESCO
3-6 p.m.	Item 8    Adoption of conclusions and recommendations

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## **Annex II**

### **List of participants**

#### **Members of the Forum**

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz  
Hassan Id Balkassm  
Carlos Mamani Condori  
Paimaneh Hasteh  
Tonya Gonella Frichner

#### **Invited experts**

Jeanie Bell (Pacific)  
Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo (Africa)  
Carl Christian Olsen (Arctic)  
Luis Montaluisa Chasiquiza (Latin America and the Caribbean)  
Fenya Likhanova (Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia)  
Anne Lasimbang (Asia)  
Priscilla Settee (North America)

#### **United Nations and other international organizations**

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations  
Inter-American Development Bank  
International Fund for Agricultural Development  
International Labour Organization  
International Organization for Migration  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
United Nations Children's Fund  
United Nations Development Programme  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
United Nations Environment Programme  
World Intellectual Property Organization

#### **Non-governmental organizations**

American Association of Crimean Tatars  
Cultural Survival  
ERA-ONLUS/Transnational Non-violent Radical Party  
Ermineskin Cree Nation



First Peoples Human Rights Coalition  
Foundation for Research and Support of Indigenous Peoples in Crimea  
Fundación para la Educación en Contextos de Multilingüismo y Pluriculturalidad  
Habitat Pro  
International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development  
Inuit Broadcasting Corporation  
Inuit Circumpolar Council-Canada  
Kahnawake Education Center  
Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitóhkwa  
Loretto Community  
Mohawk Nation at Kahnawake  
NIU Development  
Universidad Católica de Temuco  
Programa de Formación de Maestros Bilingües de la Amazonia Peruana  
Red por los derechos educativos y lingüísticos de los pueblos indígenas de Chile  
Regional Assembly of First Nations of Treaties 6, 7, 8 (Alberta)

## Annex III

### List of documents

1. Draft agenda
2. Indigenous languages: background paper
3. Expert Group on Indigenous Languages: draft programme of work
4. Presentation to the Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages (Jeanie Bell)
5. Teaching indigenous language through early childhood care and education for indigenous children in Sabah, Borneo (Anne Lasimbang)
6. Lenguas indígenas vivas del Ecuador (Luis Montaluisa Chasiquiza)
7. Inuit language (Carl Christian Olsen)
8. Indigenous languages in Botswana (Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo)
9. Legal and constitutional status of the Amazigh language in Morocco and North Africa (Hassan Id Balkassm)
10. Qullasuyu: Lengua y cultura en los andes del sur (Carlos Mamani Condori)
11. Indigenous languages in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
12. The situation of small-numbered indigenous languages of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation (Fenya Likhanova)
13. Native languages supporting indigenous knowledge (Priscilla Settee)
14. The role of the International Labour Organization in the promotion and protection of indigenous languages (Morse Caoagas Flores)



## **Annex V**

[Original: Russian]

My Language

If I forget my native speech,