

12th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Agenda item 5: Culture

by Kontinonhstats Mohawk Language Custodians Association, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Chiefs of Ontario, Indigenous World Association, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Canadian Friends Service Committee, AFN Alberta Regional Chief, Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)

Speaker: Ellen Gabriel

Wa'tkwanón:werà:tons - Greetings

Niawenhkó:wa for the honor and privilege to address the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues. Language is a pillar of cultural identity. Indigenous languages and cultures are inextricably linked and are mutually reinforcing to our distinct Indigenous identity. For that reason our languages and cultures require promotion, revitalization and protection for the perpetuation of our Indigenous identities and self-determination.

We support the numerous reports and recommendations made by various human rights bodies including:

- The UNPFII ***"Report of the international experts group meeting on indigenous languages" E/C.19/2008/3, dated January 8, 2008.***
- The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Study on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous peoples A/HRC/12/33,

As the UNPFII E/C.19/2008/3 report states in Challenges and Gaps, 31. "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."

These recommendations and conclusions should be reiterated and reaffirmed as the threats highlighted in these reports remain. Unfortunately, the lack of

improvement can often be attributed to lack of political will of states and their continued assimilation policies.

In 2008, UNPFII Recommendations: 13. "The protection of indigenous languages is therefore not only a cultural and moral imperative, but an important aspect of global efforts to address biodiversity loss, climate change and other environmental challenges."ⁱ

Supportive human rights instruments that promote and protect Indigenous cultures and languages are encouraging, however the actual process of implementation remains challenging. There is an "implementation gap", which is both distressing and intolerable.

There are many best practice reports and considerable research on how to regenerate threatened languages. However, each year we lose more speakers and holders of traditional knowledge. Time is working against us. It is imperative that we act now.

If education is valued and conceptualized as an "investment" by states, then Language and Culture must concomitantly be viewed as such. Recruitment and retention of new speakers creates employment, creates opportunities and promotes the self-worth of Indigenous peoples.

Access to financial resources is essential to engage the human resources required for indigenous peoples to rebuild their institutions decimated by colonial laws, policies and programs.

Controlling our own education to rebuild the pillars of Indigenous identity requires the retention of every available **human resource** person who is a fluent speaker and cultural knowledge holder.

What is desperately needed is a mechanism of implementation that invokes states to uphold their positive obligations in the promotion and protection of Indigenous peoples' collective human rights.

We therefore propose the following measures for the revitalization and perpetuation of Indigenous culture and languages:

1. Recreate relationships between states and Indigenous peoples to reflect the standards of the UNDRIP and respect the self-determining rights of Indigenous peoples.
2. Establish Indigenous language immersion programmes for children, parents and adults.
3. Access to financial resources that provide Indigenous communities with the ability to create a system of education based upon their culture, languages, customs and governance.
4. Indigenous education curriculum be in accordance with the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous peoples and their communities.
5. Protection and regeneration of our languages and cultures must be approached with a holistic view inclusive of food sovereignty, education, agriculture, customary laws, and land use.
6. Indigenous education standards and curriculum be developed and evaluated by Indigenous peoples, Indigenous language teachers and traditional knowledge holders.

End Notes

ⁱ UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Report of the international experts group meeting on indigenous languages" E/C.19/2008/3, dated January 8, 2008.