



Universala Esperanto-Asocio, UEA
Address at the 7th session of the
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP),
Palace of Nations, UN, Geneva, 7-11 July 2014
Thursday, 10 July 2014.

Item 7 on the agenda: United Nations Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples

Mr President, dear representatives of indigenous peoples, ladies and gentlemen,

My Name is [Stefano Keller](#), and I represent the World Esperanto Association, the worldwide organisation of the speakers of Esperanto, the fair and neutral international language that allows equality in inter-ethnic communication.

Our project *Indiĝenaj Dialogoj* ("Indigenous Dialogues") was a contribution to finding a fair solution to the problem of communication between indigenous peoples.

With regard to the *language rights of indigenous peoples*, **Article 13** of the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** states:

"1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means." (end of quotation)

Like biological species, many languages are in danger of disappearing. Biological and linguistic diversity is being lost, as is ancestral knowledge of nature and life – things which are all interdependent. In order to preserve biodiversity, which is necessary for our continued existence, we must preserve all the languages of the world, but particularly those of the indigenous peoples, for the knowledge needed for preserving diversity is inherent in their languages and cultures.

But we have a duty to preserve this biocultural diversity not only because it is vital for our continued existence: *it is also a question of acting with respect for human dignity, and with mutual respect between all the world's peoples*, irrespective of whether an ethnic group consists of only a few members or of several millions, with more power, *and of preventing the more powerful from forcing their languages and cultures on the rest.*

The mother tongue plays an important, fundamental role in the life of every individual, yet the words "language" and "mother tongue" or "native language" are missing in various official documents of the United Nations.

In accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we call for the inclusion in the official documents of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) of recommendations in favour of the use and preservation of and support for the native languages - not forgetting sign languages - of indigenous peoples.

Thank you for your attention - and many thanks also to the interpreters for their efforts.