



Statement by Universal Esperanto Association,
Universala Esperanto-Asocio (UEA)
at the 5th session of the
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
(EMRIP-5), Palais des Nations, 9-13 July 2012

Mr President, I would like first of all on behalf of my organisation to congratulate you on your election as president of this session of EMRIP.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Estimataj Gesinjoroj, karaj Ĉeestantoj, saluton!

My name is [Stefano Keller](#), and I represent Universala Esperanto-Asocio, the worldwide association of speakers of the neutral international language Esperanto, which has now been in use for 125 years for interethnic communication throughout the world, promoting clear mutual understanding on a basis of equality.

Indigenous peoples and minorities have often been subjected to education in the dominant language to the detriment of their native languages – and this continues to happen today. This deprives them of their languages and cultures, even of their identities, diminishes their quality of life and infringes their dignity.

Researchers in education, sociolinguistics, psychology, anthropology and sociology have shown that this kind of education forces the upcoming generations to abandon their roots, their culture and their language, which often gives rise to physical and mental problems.

According to renowned linguists, among them Professor Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, in accordance with the relevant international instruments education of this kind can legitimately be regarded as a crime against humanity.

Education is a fundamental human right that is essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Not using the mother tongues of indigenous, tribal or minority groups as the main language of instruction for educating the children of these communities violates their right to education, while at the same time perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Today, millions of children and adults are deprived of educational opportunities because of inadequate language policies.

The use of the languages of minorities or of indigenous peoples is often not allowed in national or local administration or as a medium of instruction in schools. It follows that people belonging to indigenous communities or minority groups may face obstacles to their participating fully in public life.

These processes are contributing to the increasingly rapid disappearance of linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. We are alarmed at the accelerating loss of language diversity.

It has been shown that biological and linguistic diversity are inseparable, interconnected and interdependent. The traditional knowledge relating to the natural

environment of indigenous peoples is often preserved in their languages. The loss of linguistic diversity leads to the loss of ancestral knowledge that is essential for maintaining biodiversity.

Article 4 of UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2 November 2001) states: "The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope."

UNESCO supports mother-tongue education, on the basis of a bilingual or multilingual approach. Our organisation, Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), similarly supports mother-tongue education. The aims of our movement have an ideal: mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples. Our action is directed at solving the language problem in international relations and facilitating communication. Universala Esperanto-Asocio, having official relations with the UN and UNESCO, works to defend the language rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, proposing a neutral and easily learnt interethnic language, Esperanto, a genuinely international means of communication.

Using one's mother tongue in all areas of life is a fundamental human right. UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (Paris, 20 October 2005) states that "linguistic diversity is a fundamental element of cultural diversity".

Under our programme of "Indiĝenaj Dialogoj" (Indigenous Dialogues), UEA has organised information technology courses and taught Esperanto in a number of meetings as a means of communication for the representatives of 27 different indigenous peoples, to enable them to discuss on an equal footing the problems they face, across all continents.

Dankon pro via atento / Thank you for your attention.

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