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## Protection and Promotion of Linguistic Diversity of the World

### Yuelu Proclamation

International Conference

**“Role of linguistic diversity in building a global community with shared future:  
protection, access and promotion of language resources”**

19 - 21 September 2018

Changsha, The People's Republic of China

## Introduction

We live in a society that is comprised of differing languages, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and social systems, rendering it a mutually inclusive community. Language is one of the fundamental preconditions to human development, dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, and the peaceful existence of human society.

People need language to communicate with one another and pass along from one generation to the next generation knowledge, ideas, beliefs and traditions, which are essential for survival, dignity, well-being, evolution and peaceful co-existence. We are reminded that language is best taught to and learned by each generation through children early in their lives.

Moreover, language is one of the essential characteristics of culture enabling people to socialize and form a joint future through shared patterns of behaviors, interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding. It is the main carrier for recording and inheriting the unique culture of a group of people, region and world. Furthermore, language encodes human traditional knowledge built over centuries of development and application; and stored as a repository to further human development as well as seen as human ability to modify, adapt and make necessary adjustment to the changing environment.

**We the participants from around the world** representing governments, national language harmonization institutions, academia, representatives of cultural, information and memory organizations, public and private sector, and speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects, and other experts **gathered** at the International Conference “Role of linguistic diversity in building a global community with shared future: protection, access and promotion of language resources” in Changsha, China, from 19-20 September 2018 **adopted the following Proclamation,**

**Committed** to the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other internationally recognized legal instruments,

**Recalling** the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO affirms, “that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men and women that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (16 November 1945) and **reaffirming** that UNESCO is one of the UN system agencies actively involved in the promoting linguistic diversity and multilingualism,

**Building on** other international human rights instruments that support language rights, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), as well as the work of international human rights treaty and other bodies in this field.

**Also recalling** other international instruments, including the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and its Action Plan (2001), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace (2003)<sup>i</sup>.

**Affirming** that linguistic diversity policies must first and foremost recognize the dignity of peoples and communities that are the guardians of languages, respect their rights and build genuine collaborations with them for language protection and promotion, and **having discussed** efforts for language revitalization, protection and promotion, and also heard of cases of continuing threats to indigenous and other languages,

**Considering** that languages and the traditional knowledge they carry are fundamental both for cultural and for biological diversity and especially critical in the face of climate change and environmental degradation, **as well as considering** that having a distinct language is one factor that qualifies distinct indigenous peoples for the right to self-determination,

**Recalling** that the overwhelming majority of threatened languages are indigenous peoples' languages, **and supporting** the sense of urgency expressed in UN General Assembly resolution 71/178 that proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages,

**Reasserting** the commitments reached in the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly in resolution 69/2 on 22 September 2014 and the System-wide Plan of Action<sup>ii</sup> as well as national action plans that followed, and the recommendations of the relevant studies of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>iii</sup> and the conclusions and recommendations of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its 2016 session (E/2016/43) on the theme "Indigenous languages: preservation and revitalization (articles 13, 14 and 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)",

**State the following:**

- The international community has adopted important international instruments and other policy documents emphasizing the protection of linguistic diversity. In particular, the global attention to language-related issues has been renewed by the United Nations General Assembly in its Resolution 71/178 on the "Rights of Indigenous Peoples" proclaiming 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages.
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has further advanced the normative content of language rights in its articles 13, 14 and 16.
- There are good examples, where special attention is paid to the protection and revitalization of the languages and cultures of indigenous peoples, and also the protection and inheritance of endangered languages, minority languages, non-official languages and dialects.

- A number of international expert meetings on indigenous languages in recent years that can serve as an inspiration in this field. These special international gathering brought together people across disciplines, policy-makers, academics and practitioners. The Action Plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages prepared by UNESCO is another important document in this area<sup>iv</sup>.
- The concept of Knowledge Societies, built on the key principles of inclusion, openness, diversity and pluralism. Cultural diversity and multilingualism have a key role to play in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open and inclusive knowledge societies and are pillars of education for all, access to information and freedom of expression.
- Adopting the human rights-based methodology, namely: non-discrimination; interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights; attention should be placed on the most vulnerable; participation; and accountability of duty-bearers based on international human rights norms.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusion I. The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity is crucial to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### Recommendations:

- 1.1. ***The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to promote Human Development.*** The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity is about people's and groups' equal opportunities to quality education and other basic public services, employment, health, social inclusion and participation in society; it is about stopping perpetual illiteracy, unemployment, difficult medical conditions, discrimination and other injustices. Linguistic diversity helps us realize the human development goals such as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, and Good Health and Well-Being. Linguistic diversity is also fundamental to the passing down of distinct and often ancient cultures from older to younger generations.
- 1.2. ***The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to improve the human potential, action and local initiatives of native speakers in endangered languages, minority languages, indigenous languages, non-official languages and dialects.*** This includes use and inheritance of mother tongue from childhood, mother tongue education, access to the internet and other public spaces, and sign languages and braille as the medium of communication among people with disabilities, actions that will improve the chances of Quality Education and Gender Equality.
- 1.3. ***The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to improve the Environment.*** The maintenance of linguistic diversity is closely related to the understanding of the natural ecological environment, to biodiversity, and the way of production and life, that language relies on. In the context of globalization, the protection of linguistic diversity should be closely combined with the protection of societies and communities living both in cities and villages, providing necessary environmental conditions and services for the protection of linguistic diversity, and exploring a win-

win sustainable development model for linguistic diversity, environmental protection and economic growth.

1.4. *The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps to improve Economic Development.*

Linguistic diversity strives for relatively equal rights for different language users in their educational background, social life and economic development, improves the opportunities of equal and high quality employment for native speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects, in order to promote sustainable economic growth.

1.5. *The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity helps improve Social Inclusion and Partnerships.*

It helps to reduce the gender and social inequality between different native speakers, guarantee the rights for native speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects to receive education, enhance the social inclusion level and social decision-making ability by encouraging them to participate in a series of actions to promote cultural diversity, endangered language protection, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage, such as oral culture, performing arts, social practice, religious folk-custom and festival activities, in order to create a more peaceful and inclusive society to promote sustainable development.

**Conclusion II. The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity requires the proactive, accountable and measurable participation of all sectors of the international community**

Recommendations:

2.1. *UNESCO has the important responsibility for advocacy, guidance, promotion, popularization and protection of linguistic diversity in the world.*

- It should monitor the current situation of linguistic diversity in the world, and formulate and implement relevant policies or measures accordingly. It should cooperate with governments and non-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples, public and private organizations, communities and individuals concerned, and support relevant partners in language capacity development.
- It should provide guidance to its Member countries, relevant academic institutions and companies to carry on the protection of endangered languages, actively establish connections with the users and communities of endangered languages including minority languages, indigenous languages and endangered languages overall.
- It should build city networks for the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity and further explores the feasibility of considering linguistic diversity as an important criterion of a sustainable city.
- It should support, encourage and communicate policy-oriented research into systematic approaches to linguistic justice for all, as an integral dimension of sustainable development.

2.2. *United Nations and other international human rights bodies and mechanisms have the responsibility to continue to monitor the human rights aspects of language rights.* This includes human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, such as the Committee on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity of the world should be included in the relevant development agenda of the United Nations to ensure it plays an irreplaceable role in building a global community with shared future, and in promoting equality, mutual learning, mutual understanding, exchanges, tolerance and peace and human rights around the world.
- It is recommended that the United Nations General Assembly proclaim an international decade of indigenous languages given that the revitalization of the world's indigenous languages requires a sustained effort by states, indigenous peoples and others.

2.3. *Governments play a leading role in the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity and encourage every Member State to formulate and integrate language policies, language resource management and implementation mechanisms.*

- It is recommended that Member States formulate plans of action according to their national language conditions, and carry out the research and protection of language resources in a timely and effective manner and with the participation of language communities concerned.
- Governments should carry out educational and cultural activities to promote language and cultural diversity and multilingualism, so as to raise people's language confidence and awareness of language protection and inheritance, by involving language communities concerned in the planning implementation and evaluations of relevant programs.
- Governments should involve their language policymaking mechanisms concerned in the planning, implementation and evaluation of language programs primarily with the national knowhow and methodological tradition.
- Action plans should be formulated and implemented on relevant international instruments at country level and with the collaboration of all relevant actors.

2.4. *National language harmonization institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations, public and private organizations and individuals should be encouraged to protect and promote linguistic diversity through scientific research, media, curricula, arts, cultural production and ICT.*

- All relevant stakeholders, including national language harmonization institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations, public and private organizations and individuals, are encouraged to recognize and raise awareness of the term and value of "language protectors/champions/promoters", whether they are communities, organizations, institutions or individuals who strive for the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity through scientific research, media, curricula development, arts, cultural production and ICT among other means.
- The public, especially the youth including socially marginalized, should be supported to carry out educational and cultural activities of language protection, revitalization and heritage.
- The establishment of a youth organizations and networks is encouraged which will aim at protecting linguistic diversity nationally in the world. We should strengthen talents training for language resources by holding youth forums, sessions and volunteer activities, etc.
- Cities are encouraged to promote local linguistic diversity and transform it into knowledge or

productivity, in order to achieve the goal of promoting and protecting linguistic diversity in the context of globalization.

- The international standards on the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity should address an existing gap between encouraging practices that have developed in recent times and current standards.
- The development of a new international instrument with international standards or guidelines is recommended in order to capture the positive practices observed to-date nationally and internationally.
- The governments, private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia and other actors are encouraged to boost funding and other resources for the protection and promotion of indigenous and other threatened languages.
- Academic and indigenous organizations are key to help identifying and providing resources to help combat the loss of indigenous languages by establishing language programs and sharing of linguistic information collected and archived by universities and linguists, while the indigenous communities can advise the best ways to carry out these programs and create more fluent speakers.
- The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages is an opportunity to launch a global effort towards an intercultural world. A training-of-trainers program could be established for training of qualified trainers, who would be able to promote sustainable cultural development, working through public or private institutions or civil society initiatives.
- All the above efforts, both international and national, would be greatly helped by the collection and compilation of good practices and methodologies for language revitalization. UNESCO and the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues would be well-placed to lead this effort.

**Conclusion III. It is essential to combine the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity with the development of science and technology.**

Recommendations:

- 3.1. *Language is an invaluable, non-renewable socio-cultural resource.* The importance to the utilization of scientific and technological achievements should be attached to the promotion of collaboration and international cooperation among peoples and communities of various languages and cultures and to promote exchanges and mutual learning among cultures.
- 3.2. It is essential to *set up international standards to protect language resources*, including: (i) technical standards for collection, annotation and documentation of language resources; (ii) co-construction, sharing and utilization standards of language resources throughout the world. International standardization organizations (such as ISO) and professional organizations engaged in language protection, such as universities, research institutes, experts and other stakeholders should formulate and abide by the international standards together.

- 3.3. Member States, should *formulate inclusive policies and take active and effective measures making the development of science and technology benefit users of each language* to ensure that they have equal rights to be educated, inherit their culture and enjoy the service and convenience of technological products.
- 3.4. Member States, public organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations and civil society, UN entities and associated mechanisms, the private sector, language speakers and others, in collaboration with indigenous peoples and other language communities, should *promote linguistic diversity within the framework of the global knowledge societies* and create an internet space with uses and exchanges of multiple languages.
- 3.5. Member States, public organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations and civil society, UN entities and associated mechanisms, the private sector, and others, in collaboration with indigenous peoples and other language communities should *use technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to promote the creative transformation, innovative development and effective dissemination of language culture* and seek new ways for the protection and inheritance of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects. Language is one of the most important resources of Artificial Intelligence, and the development of Artificial Intelligence relies on language resources too.
- 3.6. Member States, public organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations and civil society, UN entities and associated mechanisms, the private sector, and others, in collaboration with indigenous peoples and other language communities should *develop advanced tools for collection and analysis of language data*, transliteration and annotation of multi-modal corpus and display and interaction of cultures; we can use speech recognition system and machine translation technology to improve the efficiency of language education and learning.
- 3.7. The UN entities, intergovernmental organizations, states, governments, non-governmental organizations, public and private organizations, indigenous peoples, communities and individuals coming from global, national to local levels concerned with linguistic diversity are encouraged *to give attention to linguistic diversity related initiatives and help put them into practice.*
- 3.8. *Participate in building the new "World Atlas of Languages"* in collaboration with language research institutes and relevant universities of China and other countries to establish expert working groups or partnerships, encouraging them to participate in or assist in the development of the regional and national Atlas of Languages within the context of the UNESCO World Atlas of Languages.
- 3.9. Member States, the private sector, academia and others, in collaboration with indigenous peoples and other language communities should *promote national infrastructure for the revitalization, reclamation and maintenance of distinct languages* that can include language revitalization institutes, language commissions, language museums and archival and digitization entities.
- 3.10. Museum is one of the best carriers to preserve, protect, display and share language resources.



International organizations, governments, public or non-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples, private sector, communities and individuals are encouraged to build language museums, especially eco-museums or language-culture experience areas, which are closely integrated with language communities. *Every information, memory, archive and cultural organization such as museums, whether physical or online virtual, has the potential to play a positive role in the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity.*

- 3.11. Member States encouraged *sharing standards, technical tools and advanced concepts*, including open, inclusive and free, for the protection of language resources through project cooperation, academic exchanges or other ways. In particular, the investigation, protection, inheritance and development of languages at countries and regional levels should be encouraged working with research institutions and experts engaged in the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity to visit to carry out visits, projects of cooperation and academic exchanges at country and regional level.

## Acknowledgement

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<sup>i</sup> Paragraph 15 of the Declaration of WSIS, see <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>, accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> System-wide action plan for ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, see [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.19/2016/5](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.19/2016/5), accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>iii</sup> Study on lessons learned and challenges to achieve the right of indigenous peoples to education (2009) , A/HRC/12/33, see <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/12/33>, accessed 23 September 2018 ; Study on the "Role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous peoples", 2012, A/HRC/21/53, see <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/21/53>, accessed 23 September 2018; and Study on the "Promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples with respect to their cultural heritage", 2015, A/HRC/30/53, see <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/30/53>, accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> E/C.19/2018/8.