

Interregional Public Organization
«The Union of Indigenous Peoples «SOYUZ» (IPO «KMNSOYUZ»)

Side event
on the sidelines of the 21st session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Role of Language Activists and Communities in Preservation of Indigenous Languages

May 3, 2022
12.00 – 13.30 (New York), 19.00 – 20.30 (Moscow)
Languages: English and Russian
Registration link: <https://kmnsoyuz.ru/kmns2>

Description of the event

The expert seminar “Preparing the International Decade of Indigenous Languages: Sharing Experiences on Preservation and Development of Languages” pointed out that an important role is assigned to language activists in the context of the ongoing “language shift”. It was noted that the work of preserving, reviving and developing the languages of Indigenous Peoples often rests on the shoulders of this small group of enthusiasts.

At the same time, activists often face uncertainty about their language skills and criticism from other members of their language communities. Being asked by researchers, language leaders emphasize high workload and burnout, disproportionate effort, insufficient financial and emotional support. These crisis phenomena in the social well-being of language activists cause anxiety.

As a follow-up to the recommendations of the expert seminar, participants of the side event will discuss how to promote the involvement of language activists, representatives of clergy, native speakers and tradition bearers in the educational process. On the other hand, the discussion will be about the role of governments, Indigenous Peoples’ organizations and businesses by ensuring comprehensive and regular support to those who make consistent efforts on language revitalization. A possible support mechanism could be special programs for language activists, which include elements of psychological and methodological support preventing crises and burnout, facilitating formation of solidarity and overcoming difficult relationships within language communities.

Program

Introduction

Antonina Gorbunova, Executive Director of the Union of Indigenous Peoples «SOYUZ», Member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Presentations

Social well-being of Indigenous language activists

Yulia Litvin, Researcher at Ethnology Department, Institute of Language, Literature and History, Karelian Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia)

Decade of the Shawnee People language

Ben Barnes, Chief of the Shawnee Tribe (USA)

Role of digital language activists in formation of language communities' solidarity

Andrey Chemyshev, Researcher at the Laboratory of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History named after V.M. Vasiliev (Russia)

Role of digital language activists in promoting languages

Eddie Avila, Rising Voices Director, Global Voices (Bolivia)

Discussion «How to support language activists?»

Moderator: Antonina Gorbunova, Executive Director of the Union of Indigenous Peoples «SOYUZ», Member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Concluding comments and recommendations

Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues