

**General Assembly Third Committee
(SOCHUM)**

Research Reports



Forum:	SOCHUM
Topic:	Preservation of Indigenous languages and cultural heritage
Written by:	Daniel Mehany and Nadine El Banna
Position:	Deputy Chair/Chair

Introduction

With the speed at which the world is becoming more interconnected and technologically advanced, protecting indigenous languages and cultural heritage has gained international attention. These languages and cultural practices, which have long been suppressed due to colonization, forced assimilation, and economic pressures, are now much more in danger due to urbanization, the dominance of global media, and educational systems that prioritize national or colonial languages. The elimination of indigenous languages has a significant influence on cultural identity and human rights in addition to eradicating distinct worldviews and knowledge systems. Despite these obstacles, successful revitalization initiatives—like those of the Hawaiian people in Hawaii and the Maori people in New Zealand—showcase the value of community-led efforts, supportive policies, and technological innovation in preserving this essential aspect of humankind's cultural diversity.

Definition of Key Terms

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples are ethnic groups who are the original inhabitants of a given region, having distinct cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics that set them apart from the dominant society. They often maintain traditions and knowledge passed down through generations and have a unique connection to their ancestral lands.

Indigenous Languages

These are languages spoken by indigenous peoples, often with unique structures, vocabularies, and cultural significance. Indigenous languages are crucial for the transmission of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and identity within indigenous communities.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of tangible and intangible cultural assets passed down through generations. This includes traditions, customs, artifacts, language, folklore, music, dance, and other cultural expressions that define the identity of a particular group.

Cultural Assimilation

Cultural assimilation is when a minority group adopts the customs, language, and practices of a dominant culture, often leading to the loss of their original cultural identity and language.

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity refers to the variety of cultural expressions, languages, traditions, and practices that exist within a society or globally..

Major Parties Involved

1. Australia

Australia has implemented policies for the recognition and support of indigenous languages and cultures, such as the National Indigenous Languages Policy. Indigenous communities and organizations are actively involved in language revitalization programs and cultural heritage preservation.

2. Canada

Canada has passed legislation like the Indigenous Languages Act to support the revitalization and preservation of indigenous languages. The country also has Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action that emphasize the importance of cultural preservation.

3. United States

The U.S. has various initiatives, such as the Native American Languages Act, to protect and promote indigenous languages. The Smithsonian Institution and other organizations work on preserving indigenous cultural heritage.

4. Mexico

Mexico recognizes its indigenous languages in the constitution and has created institutions like the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI) to promote linguistic and cultural preservation.

5. Brazil

Brazil has established the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) to protect indigenous rights and cultural heritage. There are ongoing efforts to document and preserve the diverse languages and cultures of Brazil's indigenous peoples.

6. Russia

Russia has policies for the protection of indigenous languages and cultures, although challenges remain. Various organizations work to preserve the languages and traditions of Russia's indigenous peoples.

7. India

India has constitutional provisions and various programs aimed at protecting the languages and cultures of its numerous indigenous groups.

8. Norway, Sweden, and Finland

These countries have established policies and institutions, such as the Sami Parliaments, to support the preservation and development of the Sami language and culture. Efforts include cultural festivals, media, and educational programs.

Timeline of Events

<p>Pre-Colonial Era</p>	<p>Native American languages and cultures are widely spoken, with a vast range of oral traditions, artistic expressions, and knowledge systems.</p> <p>Colonial Era: Colonization causes a great deal of repression of native cultures and languages.</p>
<p>20th Century</p>	<p>1920s–1950s: Assimilation programs, such as language bans and residential schools, are implemented in several nations, further weakening indigenous languages and traditions. 1957: With an emphasis on the</p>

	<p>integration and protection of indigenous peoples, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopts the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention (No. 107). With its founding, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) rises to prominence as a major global advocate for indigenous rights. 1982: The Working Group on Indigenous Populations is established by the UN, a major step toward the international recognition of indigenous issues. 1989: The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) is adopted by the ILO, acknowledging the rights of indigenous peoples to their languages, practices, and cultural identities.</p> <p>1990s</p> <p>1993: The UN declares the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, raising awareness of indigenous issues worldwide.</p> <p>1994: The UN declares the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1994–2004), emphasizing indigenous rights and cultural preservation. 1995: The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is established, offering a forum for indigenous voices at the international level.</p>
<p>2000s</p>	<p>The United Nations General Assembly adopts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), affirming indigenous peoples' rights to preserve their languages, cultures, and traditions. 2008: The Canadian government formally apologizes for the Indian residential school system, acknowledging its detrimental effects on indigenous cultures and languages. 2001: UNESCO adopts the Universal Declaration on</p>

	<p>Cultural Diversity, emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity, including indigenous languages and traditions. 2020s</p> <p>2020s: In an effort to increase awareness and encourage the preservation of indigenous languages, the United Nations General Assembly proclaims 2019 to be the International Year of Indigenous Languages.</p> <p>2019: Numerous international events and activities to encourage language revival are held in conjunction with the International Year of Indigenous Languages.</p> <p>2019: The International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) is proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, emphasising international initiatives to conserve, rehabilitate, and advance indigenous languages.</p>
2020s	<p>2020: With a global action plan to address the issues faced by indigenous languages, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) is formally started.</p> <p>Ongoing: To assist the preservation of indigenous languages and the safeguarding of cultural heritage, numerous nations continue to put regulations, educational initiatives, and programs into place.</p>

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

1. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations, 2007: The importance of preserving indigenous languages and traditions is highlighted in this declaration. It encourages nations to take the necessary steps to safeguard the

preservation and promotion of these languages. It recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to safeguard and defend their unique languages, traditions, and identities.

2. Cultural Diversity: A Universal Declaration of UNESCO (2001):The declaration highlights the value of cultural diversity for mankind as a whole. It acknowledges the role that languages play in preserving cultural identities and customs and makes the argument that cultural variety is vital to human flourishing.
3. UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003):
This convention acknowledges the importance of language as a source of cultural expression and communication. It emphasizes that languages and other cultural resources that are intangible are essential to a community's identity and survival and need to be protected in several ways.
4. The 2016 Expert Group Meeting Report on Indigenous Languages:The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs hosted this conference, which was centered on the revival of native tongues. In addition to outlining best practices for language preservation, the paper underlines how technology may help with language revival initiatives.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The Inuit Language Protection Act (2008) ,Canada aims to increase the number of Inuit language speakers, ensure its use in government and public services, and require private businesses to display constant Inuit text alongside English and French.

The Myaamia Heritage Program, in partnership with Miami University, focuses on revitalizing the Myaamia language among the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma through educational resources and tuition waivers for tribal students.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) works extensively to safeguard cultural heritage through its Intangible Cultural Heritage program, which aims to protect practices, expressions, and traditions including Indigenous languages. The UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger highlights endangered languages, fostering global awareness and support for their preservation. UNESCO also designates World Heritage Sites that often include significant Indigenous cultural and natural heritage.

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) provides a platform for Indigenous peoples to discuss and seek solutions for issues affecting their communities, including the preservation of their languages and cultural heritage. It offers expert advice and makes recommendations to improve the protection and promotion of Indigenous cultures and traditions at national and international levels.

The UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) supports Indigenous communities through development projects that integrate and respect their cultural practices and languages. It works on initiatives that enhance community resilience and empower Indigenous peoples, ensuring that development efforts contribute positively to the preservation of their cultural heritage.

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme aims to promote sustainable development through the preservation of ecosystems and cultural landscapes, which often include Indigenous territories. It recognizes the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in maintaining ecological balance and cultural heritage.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) programs support Indigenous children by promoting their rights and protecting their cultural heritage. This includes efforts to ensure the teaching and use of Indigenous languages and to safeguard traditional cultural practices within educational and community settings.

UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Programme focuses on recognizing and integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices into sustainable development policies. It aims to respect and preserve Indigenous ways of life, including their languages and cultural traditions, as integral components of global sustainability efforts.

UNESCO's Global for Cultural Diversity alliance fosters cultural diversity and supports efforts to preserve and promote Indigenous cultures and languages. Through various initiatives, it works to ensure that diverse cultural expressions are recognized and protected in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization.

UNESCO's Creative Cities of Media Arts initiative celebrates cities that excel in media arts and cultural innovation, often including Indigenous artistic expressions and traditional knowledge. It provides a platform for showcasing and preserving Indigenous cultural practices through creative and media arts.

International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) Observed in 2019, was a global initiative aimed at raising awareness about the importance of Indigenous languages and mobilizing efforts to protect and revitalize them. It highlighted the critical role of languages in cultural identity and heritage.

UN Treaty Bodies and Human Rights Council address the rights of Indigenous peoples, including the preservation of their languages and cultural heritage. These bodies review compliance with international human rights standards and advocate for policies that support the cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous communities.

Possible Solutions

Intergenerational Language Transmission

For Indigenous languages to survive, it is essential that the elder teach younger generations about them, as it is a great way to embrace the origins of one's culture. Programs that encourage participation from families and the community in acquiring a language can establish settings where language usage and practice occur on a regular basis. Programs that teach children and guarantee that they learn traditional languages in contexts that suit them, such as storytelling sessions, cultural festivals, and language camps,

Mother Tongue Education

Introducing mother-tongue education into schools helps children connect to their cultural background while also improving language proficiency. This approach can strengthen identity development and academic success. Making a curriculum that is productive and culturally relevant through the provision of instructors with training in Indigenous languages will help guarantee that kids receive a well-rounded education that honors their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Community-Driven Language Programs

Language courses, cultural workshops, and local media projects that support the use of indigenous languages are examples of community-driven efforts. Community members can ensure that the initiatives are culturally appropriate and address the particular requirements of their communities by participating in the design and execution of these programs. Platforms for participatory archiving can also enable community members to actively participate in the preservation process.

Cultural Heritage Digitization

Digitalizing heritage items like music, traditional stories, and historical records with cutting-edge technology increases their accessibility and keeps them from deteriorating. High-resolution scanning, 3D modeling of artifacts, and the creation of interactive digital exhibitions that emphasize indigenous languages and cultures are some examples of this solution.

Works Cited

- “Endangered Languages Project.” *Endangeredlanguages.com*, 2024, www.endangeredlanguages.com/. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- “Home Page | National Museum of the American Indian.” *National Museum of the American Indian*, 2024, americanindian.si.edu/. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- Nations, United. “Protecting Languages, Preserving Cultures | United Nations.” *United Nations, United Nations, United Nations*, 2022, www.un.org/en/desa/protecting-languages-preserving-cultures-0. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- . “Protecting Languages, Preserving Cultures | United Nations.” *United Nations, United Nations*, 2022, www.un.org/en/desa/protecting-languages-preserving-cultures-0. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- “Redirecting.” *Google.com*, 2024, www.google.com/url?q=www.languageconservancy.org/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1722462048966485&usg=AOvVaw1n_vJaP_t_h4TW1ZFdgUA3. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- “Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Synergies in the Transmission of Indigenous Languages, Dance and Music Practices in Southern Africa.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2023, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2023.2193902, <https://doi.org/10.1080//13527258.2023.2193902>. Accessed 31 July 2024.
- “United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD).” *Un.org*, 2024, social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii. Accessed 31 July 2024.

“Ways to Support the Preservation of Indigenous Languages: How We Can All Benefit! - CanTalk Canada.” *CanTalk Canada*, 17 Jan. 2024, cantalk.com/ways-to-support-indigenous-language-preservation/. Accessed 31 July 2024.