



International Indian Treaty Council
Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios

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United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
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Agenda Item: 7 International Decade of Indigenous Languages

International Indian Treaty Council Intervention presented by Ruth Anna Buffalo

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are thankful that EMRIP has joined the efforts led by UNESCO and Indigenous Peoples to take action regarding the critical situation of Indigenous languages, following the proclamation by the General Assembly of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (Resolution 74/135, para. 24).

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition and the International Indian Treaty Council express our sense of urgency to protect and preserve our Indigenous languages which carry our knowledge, identity, and world view.

One of the goals of the Boarding Schools in the US, Residential schools in Canada and similar programs in other states including Australia and New Zealand, was to sever the connection that Indigenous children had with their Peoples, cultures, and lands through destroying their ability to speak and understand their languages.

My mother was taken to a boarding school when she was 5 years old where she was severely punished for speaking her Hidatsa language. My grandparents were also forcibly removed from their homes and sent to a boarding school.

The genocidal impacts are still felt today. This multi-generational assimilation program enforced under US law, whose stated purpose was to “Kill the Indian, Save the Child”, resulted in many Indigenous languages in the US being on the verge of extinction with few surviving fluent speakers.

We request that EMRIP advise the Human Rights Council to call upon all states that carried out such forced assimilation programs to address the ongoing impacts, including the loss of Indigenous languages, and to collaborate with and support impacted Indigenous Peoples to establish language restoration and fluency programs without delay.

Macigiraac (thank you)