

UNESCO

# Preserving Indigenous Languages



# JACKRABBIT MUN VII

L.B. POLY - MAY 24th, 2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Chair Letters.....	3
Topic Synopsis.....	7
Committee Description.....	8
Background.....	9
United Nations Involvement.....	14
Bloc Positions.....	16
Questions to Consider .....	21
Works Cited.....	22

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# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTER

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Hello Delegates!

My name is Jack Park, and I will be one of your Co-chairs for UNESCO. I am a senior at Long Beach Poly High School, and this is my second year in MUN. Model UN has been such a great experience for me, and I have had so much fun interacting with fellow delegates, I couldn't be more excited to be vice chair for the first time for everyone here. I hope you guys will grow and learn from this room and have fun!

Some things that I enjoy are cooking (though I'm not the best at it!), playing board games, practicing tennis (Novak Djokovic > everyone), playing piano (Frédéric François Chopin > everyone), and going to the gym. I also enjoy camping and enjoy the wilderness by hiking, swimming, and rock climbing. My favorite spots are Big Bear, Joshua Tree, Sequoia, and Yellowstone!

I hope that you have enjoyed reading a little bit about me and that I have gotten to know you better as well. I cannot wait to meet you all and am so excited to chair for you all. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com](mailto:jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com).

Best Wishes,

Jack Park

UNESCO | Co-Chair

[jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com](mailto:jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com)

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# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTER

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Hello delegates!

My name is Simone Millsap and I will be one of your Co-Chairs for UNESCO. I am currently a Senior at Long Beach Poly and have enjoyed being a part of Model UN for three years. I have loved practicing diplomacy and being able to connect with students from around the world in spheres of nuanced conversation. I am incredibly excited to hear all of your positions and lead this room as a Chair!

Outside of Model UN, I play for the Varsity Beach Volleyball team and play the violin for Poly's Chamber Orchestra. Though we usually play classical at school, I enjoy working on more "fiddly" songs that I play and perform with friends. On the topic of music, I love Big Thief, Wilco, Yo La Tengo and would use a genie's wish to see Fleetwood Mac live. I have always had a hard time answering the "Beach or Mountains" question because my favorite things in the world are to be swimming in the Ocean or Skiing on the Mountains. Mallorca, Spain has topped my list of beaches and Aspen, Colorado my list of Mountains. I also love a captivating book, a recent favorite: *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt.

I look forward to seeing each and everyone of you (and your countries) this May! If you have any questions do not hesitate to reach out, my email is linked below.

Sincerely,

Simone Millsap

UNESCO | Co-Head Chair

[simone.millsap@gmail.com](mailto:simone.millsap@gmail.com)



# VICE CHAIR LETTER

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Hello delegates!

My name is Amira Young and I will be your Vice Chair for UNESCO. This is my second year participating in Model UN and my first time as part of dias staff. I am currently a senior at Long Beach Polytechnic High school. I love expanding my world knowledge on the world, its policies, and diplomatic relations and history through MUN, and have been presented with an abundance of enriching experiences since joining Model UN one of them being this conference.

Outside of MUN I play varsity basketball for my school and am vice president of my school's school site council. I love animals (especially my dog Snickers), edgy music, cooking, anime, and staying active: swimming, running, weight lifting (about to hit a new PR), and archery. I love the outdoors and the natural world and work towards a better understanding of it through physics, the field I wish to pursue a career in. I enjoy dancing despite not having much rhythm, and spending time with family and friends.

Can't wait to meet you in person throughout the duration of this conference, and I am so excited to act as one of your vice chairs.

Best Regards,

Amira Young

UNESCO | Vice Chair

[amirayoung2007@gmail.com](mailto:amirayoung2007@gmail.com)

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# POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

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- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 18th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers will be submitted through a google form:
  - <https://forms.gle/jkenWafGEAL6hJay9>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
  - United States
  - First Last
  - School Name
  - UNESCO
- Papers should be submitted as a PDF file
  - Please name the file [Committee\_Country]
    - Ex. **UNESCO\_United States**
- Papers should be minimum 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
  - Background & UN Involvement
  - Position of your Country
  - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



# TOPIC SYNOPSIS

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Language is the strongest form of connection we have as humans, providing us with the ability to understand each other emotionally, logically, culturally, and most importantly historically. The rapid loss of indigenous language has been on the forefront of many countries' hearts and minds as it is a way for unique cultures to remain distinct from the dominant societies they are a part of. In 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming the period of 2022–2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

However, there are many steps to combating the loss of language. Disagreements regarding monetary funding met with multiple viewpoints of the idea of “linguistic progression” have influenced much conversation over the preservation of indigenous languages in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

It is incredibly important to note that the revival of many Indigenous languages requires immense effort by Indigenous peoples, Member States, and the United Nations system to ensure the most effective treatment of this issue. Bearing that in mind, there are important questions that must be asked in these vital years– What methods of preservation can be implemented into society? How can partnerships between indigenous communities, NGOs, governments, and academic institutions enhance language preservation efforts? And, with country disagreements on the necessity of preservation, what can be done culture by culture without the changing of large scale country policy?

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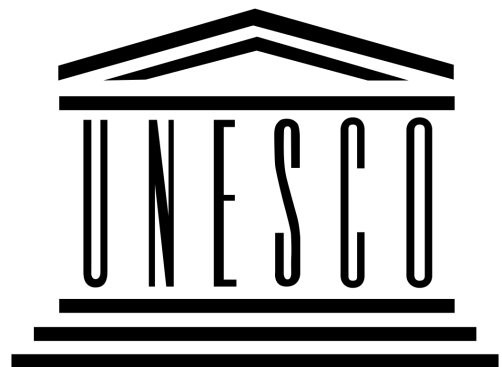


# COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), aims for international cooperation in education, science, culture, communication, and information to create peace and security. The organization encourages knowledge sharing and mutual understanding to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Originating in wartime efforts by European governments in 1942 through the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), UNESCO was officially established at a 1945 UN conference in London with 44 countries. The overall goal? Create peace through intellectual and moral solidarity, rather than just political and economic agreements.

UNESCO develops educational tools to promote global citizenship, free from hate and intolerance, and ensures access to quality education. UNESCO promotes cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures, while also strengthening international relations. The organization supports scientific programs as platforms for development and upholds freedom of expression as vital to democracy and progress. In the face of modern challenges, including attacks on cultural diversity and threats to human rights, UNESCO continues to promote education, science, and culture for peace and understanding.





# BACKGROUND

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## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LOSS

Currently, out of the world's 6,700 languages, indigenous languages make up over 4,000. Despite making up such a large percentage, they are in danger of eradication. Threats to indigenous languages are threats to indigenous identity, culture, and way of life. These threats are a direct result of colonialist practices that systematically decimated indigenous populations and erased their histories. Through policies of assimilation, dispossession of lands, and discriminatory laws, an extinction is being faced, evident in the small handful of culturally dominant languages present on the international stage.

Parents are also teaching their children global languages like English and Spanish rather than indigenous languages due to the prevalence—and oftentimes practical necessity—of knowing international languages to attain socioeconomic stability.

Furthermore, the actions of colonial powers impaired future and current restoration efforts through the erasure of history, indoctrination, and displacements rendering it harder for recovering nations to revitalize these languages.

## SUCCESS STORIES

There have been a few prominent case studies involving the revival of indigenous languages, a very important one being Hawaiian (Hawai'i). Hawaiian was nearing extinction in the 20th century largely due to English dominance in the

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Hawaiian islands. By the 1900's, fewer than 50 people spoke Hawaiian. However, the establishment of Hawaiian immersion schools (Kula Kaiapuni Hawaiian-language schools), intentional placement of the Hawaiian language in media, and native community support influenced a drastic shift in the language's trajectory. As of 2025, the Hawaiian language is thriving, taught to younger generations, and has official status alongside English in Hawaii.

In a similar way, Welsh, the language of Wales, UK, experienced a rapid decline during the 19th and 20th century as the Act of Union in 1801 declared English as the official language of England and Wales. The lack of the Welsh language was first recognized in 1993 when the Welsh Language Act made Welsh an official language, reintroduced Welsh language school courses, and dedicated television channels and broadcasting exclusively in the Welsh language. By 2011, the Welsh Language Measure was passed ensuring that public services provide information in Welsh. Though not as strong as it was hundreds of years ago, the Welsh language has been successfully integrated back into government and social spheres and the push for further progress is strong.

More cases of successful language revival that would inspire further research are: Hebrew Language, Māori (New Zealand), Quechua (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador), Irish (Ireland), Catalan (Catalonia, Spain), Cherokee (USA), Navajo (USA), Basque (Spain/France), and Inuktitut (Canada).

## **IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

For indigenous languages, technology is a double-edged sword. New digital

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platforms can make the path towards language preservation and revitalization far easier. Many apps, websites, and even social media outlets now teach or document indigenous languages, making these more accessible than ever to their younger generations. While online communities of language learners do form and help individuals around the world get in contact with speakers and teachers, technology also creates major risks to indigenous languages in particular. Global languages such as English and Mandarin dominate the digital world and most indigenous languages are not integrated into the digital sphere. This further limits their presence online and contributes to their decline. While technology can be a boon to language preservation, it often acts in line with the broader cultural zeitgeist—marginalizing these languages, and by extension the cultures and ways of being they represent, in favor of their more globalized counterparts.

## **ROLE OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN LANGUAGE PRESERVATION**

Proper language documentation and conservation preserves valuable history, culture, and heritage. Institutions such as libraries, primary schools, universities, and cultural organizations are the primary contributors towards preservation and restoration.

One of the main educational systems fighting language erasure are multilingual education spaces. Multilingual education spaces, such as Dual Immersion schools, allow students to have a more comprehensive learning experience in their native tongue while, for some, also immersing themselves into a new language and culture. For example, UnidosUS—a nonpartisan organization that serves hispanic civil



rights—works in incorporating minority and indigenous languages into primary education while gradually adding lessons in the dominant language of the region, assuring that students maintain a strong link to their culture and language through education. While multiple languages being taught in schools is not new, it is still uncommon for it to cater towards indigenous languages.

Furthermore, higher education organisations not only teach a multitude of languages but also spread awareness. By encouraging open discussions, they hope to shift a largely monolingual mindset, generating openness to the idea of a multilingual society and thus supporting language preservation.

## **CHALLENGES TO LANGUAGE PRESERVATION**

As the efforts in language preservation expand, the challenges also rise. Currently there are many languages without a writing system and are solely oral, such as in Nigeria, where there are about 410 spoken indigenous languages with very few having written forms. Tools for the preservation of oral languages are far more limited than tools for languages with writing systems, and new technologies must be created.

Moreover, a major limitation of funds hinders restorative progression. NGOs and international organizations often face local-level corruption such as embezzlement and mismanagement, resulting in untrained personnel who are often illiterate in the indigenous language they are attempting to preserve. This is the case in many rural areas, where these untrained personnel are new volunteers rather than trained librarians and linguists with extensive knowledge regarding their respective communities.



Finally, it is difficult to make progress when the minority languages are being repressed by a government like Kurdish in Türkiye, and the historical efforts to eradicate Indigenous history and culture and language in the United States. If any meaningful progress in indigenous language preservation is to be achieved, the authoritarian repression of those languages and cultures must be stopped.



# UNITED NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

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The UN has been actively involved in preserving indigenous languages, with many programs and initiatives being put into place. Recently, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) was announced globally. Also known as the IDIL, this project aims to protect and support the wellbeing of indigenous languages globally. Additionally, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), the central body for any matters relating to indigenous issues, reached out to over 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. With the help of Expert Group Meetings funded by the PFII, linguistic experts and indigenous people are able to meet to share their traditional languages and practices and develop cultural preservation strategies.

*SDG 4 (Quality Education)* has specifically guided the preservation of indigenous languages. The introduction of Mother Tongue–Based Multilingual Education (MTB–MLE) revolutionized the passing down of languages to children. Providing a space where multilingual education is appreciated, MTB–MLE has influenced many young students to understand the process of learning indigenous languages. The organization also promotes the creation of linguistic resources such as dictionaries, literature, and electronic materials to raise the usage and accessibility of indigenous languages. Furthermore, advocacy efforts by UNESCO are geared towards enabling indigenous persons to have the legal and cultural rights to speak, teach, and transmit their languages, thus mitigating the effects of political and social marginalization. This approach not only helps maintain the indigenous language, but also their identity and

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culture for many future generations.

UNESCO has been the heart of preserving indigenous languages. Serving as the forefront for global unification and cooperation, the organization launched the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYL) in 2019, which helped launch awareness campaigns and spread resources to help support endangered communities from South America to Asia. UNESCO also collaborated with digital stakeholders like Meta Platforms and the No Languages Left Behind platform, which has led to numerous successes. For example, in Colombia, the UNDP and UNVMC have worked with UNESCO to create the *Jxa'h Wejxia Casil* ("Wind's Net" in Nasa Yuwe), a major communication network that provides internet access to remote and rural areas.



# BLOC POSITIONS

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## **African Bloc**

The African Bloc refers to a mix of African nations that often collaborate on political, economic, and social issues, more specifically within the framework of the African Union (AU), and other regional organizations. Established in 2002, the African Union supports Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as ECOWAS in West Africa, SADC in Southern Africa, and EAC in East Africa, focusing on regional specific issues. This focus on the region helps with cooperation and more integration, both economically and politically. Through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), (which aims to create a single market for goods and services across 54 countries) the African Union overall aims to promote regional diversity, peacekeeping, and political stability for all regions of Africa. Regarding indigenous languages, Africa is home to over 2,00 indigenous languages, with Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Zulu, and Amharic all being widely spoken throughout the regions. However, with many indigenous languages that are being less and less recognized, the African Union also faces challenges such as political instability and economic issues, which both hinder the process of preserving indigenous languages.

## **Asia-Pacific Bloc**

The Asia-Pacific Bloc has been a strong leader in the preservation of indigenous languages. The Asia-Pacific Centre for Education for International Understanding

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(APCEIU) has played a major role in developing sustainable education systems for indigenous languages. The Regional Policy Dialogue and Launch of the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development held in Bangkok in June of 2024 brought nearly 150 participants from over 20 countries to discuss strategies for preserving indigenous languages. Additionally, the *Centres of Asia-Pacific Excellence* (CAPEs), in collaboration with the *New Zealand Centre for Global Studies* and *Sophia University* in Japan, have provided support and funding for such events. The Asia-Pacific Bloc is linguistically rich, with some of the popular indigenous languages being Tagalog, Javanese, Burmese, Samoan, Maori, and Hawaiian. However, many of these languages are endangered due to the sheer dominance of Mandarin, English, and Hindi in this region.

### **Eastern European Bloc**

The Eastern Bloc historically encompassed regions rich in indigenous culture, specifically in Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, in the Soviet era, Russian was promoted as the lingua franca, leading to the mass marginalization of many indigenous languages. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there has been some resurgence of interest in preserving these indigenous languages, such as Kazakhstan implementing policies to strengthen the use of their native language, Kazakh. They are also committed to eradicating discrimination against the speakers of Saami languages, ensuring that their languages will be in active use within public services, healthcare, government, and the labor market without marginalization. Further, they encourage the Saami people themselves to take responsibility for leading



the processes related to the revitalization of their languages and intergenerational dialogue. Finally, this bloc calls for UNESCO's role in supporting research and funding efforts toward safeguarding indigenous languages, such as those spoken by the Saami, moving forward.

### **Western European Bloc**

The Western European and Others Bloc have, in stark contrast to their historical predisposition towards expressions of indigenous culture, recently consistently encouraged the protection and revitalization of indigenous languages. As a collective, this bloc strongly advocates for international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which emphasizes that preservation and promotion of indigenous languages are essential to the identity of the cultures. They indicate that there is a need to have both governmental and private sector participation in the formulation of legal frameworks and policies that favor linguistic heritage protection. Western European countries, on this basis, are for the development of cultural programs that allow the sharing of history, language, and tradition between governments and indigenous communities.

### **Middle Eastern Bloc**

The Middle Eastern Bloc is generally supportive of the preservation of indigenous languages. There are many indigenous languages in the Middle East, such as Kurdish, Aramaic, and various Berber dialects, that are actively at risk of extinction due to political instability, unavailable education, and globalization. The initiatives and

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programs led by UNESCO in this region, such as the Arabian Peninsula Indigenous Languages Initiative have highlighted commitment towards this area emphasizing their desire to preserve these lost or endangered languages. The dominance of global languages has been a topic of conversation in the Middle East for some time now. In fact, the Middle Eastern Network for Indigenous Knowledge and Languages (MENIKIL) has also played a major role in facilitating the spread of these languages, as well as education and spreading general awareness of this issue. The overall bloc is committed to the preservation and protection of indigenous languages as well as international collaboration and funding through UNESCO to accurately revitalize these languages. They believe it is not just a cultural matter, but a human rights issue.

### **Latin American and Caribbean Bloc**

The Latin American and Caribbean Bloc has been steadfastly supportive of the rights of indigenous peoples. They have publicly supported the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous peoples that declares the right to preserve and revitalize the languages of the indigenous peoples as part of their identity and culture. They are committed to the importance of establishing cultural programs aimed at connecting government and people to inspire sharing culture, history, and law. The Latin American and Caribbean Bloc opposes discrimination against indigenous language speakers and promotes the use of such languages in public services, health, government, and labour without marginalization. It also encourages community-led initiatives in the implementation of revitalization plans that foster human rights to speak native languages and intergenerational communication as the countries of Latin



America and the Caribbean work on their implementation. They also believe UNESCO should help fund technological research toward the preservation of indigenous languages.



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. In what ways are Indigenous languages permeated with traditional knowledge of spirituality and historical worldviews?
2. With globalization often resulting in the dominance of major languages like English, Spanish, and Mandarin, how should countries balance the tension between global communication and local language preservation?
3. How might the United Nations promote the integration of Indigenous languages into the national education system without interfering with the cultural and political situation of every country in the world?
4. How should financial resources be allocated to support the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, considering infrastructure, digital archiving, and community-based initiatives?
5. What steps should the UN take to discourage further attrition of Indigenous languages by global corporations and mass media and encourage their appropriate, sustainable use in contemporary life?



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