

**17<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
(EMRIP)**

8-12 July 2024, Geneva, Switzerland

**Joint Statement on**

*Agenda Item 7: International Decade of Indigenous Languages*

*on behalf of the IDIL Observance Committee in Bangladesh, DUHAR and Pax Romana  
International Movement of Catholic Students*

*Presented by William Nokrek*

The Indigenous Language Activists in Bangladesh are deeply concerned about the urgent need to preserve and revitalize our endangered Indigenous languages. We have witnessed some effective initiatives, including an action plan during the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL). Out of 41 languages in Bangladesh, 14 are endangered, and other Indigenous languages are at risk. The country's state language and education media is Bengali.

On the occasion of the IDIL, 2022-2032, the country's Indigenous language activists voluntarily formed a Decade Observance Committee across the country in 2022 to work on several initiatives towards the same objectives as the decade. The committee has organized seminars, workshops, Indigenous Language fairs, and advocacy campaigns in different regions of Bangladesh over the last two years. We work at the local and national levels with the local Indigenous language activists and their organizations to make them aware of the decade and the importance of revitalizing the endangered languages.

Our lobbying and advocacy activities will continue between Indigenous Peoples and Government bodies to implement mother tongue-based education for all Indigenous children in Bangladesh, which was mandated in the National Education Policy 2010. We appreciate that the Bangladesh government has already taken the initiative to provide primary education to children of five Indigenous communities in their mother tongue. The chosen languages were Chakma, Marma, Kokborok (Tripura), Garo, and Sadri. However, we have not seen any initiative for other Indigenous languages in the country, which is a must.

At the country level, the state and other stakeholders should take the appropriate initiatives to preserve, develop and revitalize Indigenous Languages with the effective participation of Indigenous communities. To revitalize the endangered languages of the country, practising mother languages and documenting the language's vocabulary are very important.

**We urge the EMRIP, UNESCO and other UN stakeholders to encourage the Bangladesh government to:**

- Implement the mother tongue-based education for all Indigenous children, ensuring the recruitment of linguist teachers from Indigenous communities and conducting proper training;
- The state must take action to preserve and revitalize the endangered languages;
- State and relevant UN organizations must pay attention to the community initiatives on the revitalization of Indigenous languages and provide technical and financial support;

- EMRIP, UNESCO, and other stakeholders can provide scholarships for Indigenous youth and language activists to build their capacity in the digital or technical language movement.

**Our particular recommendation to UNESCO**

To work closely with Indigenous activists and their organizations in Bangladesh to promote, protect and revitalize Indigenous Languages.

Thank you!