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**Indigenous Languages:
Preservation and Revitalization: Articles 13, 14 and 16 of the
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
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LANGUAGE INITIATIVES FROM UP TO BOTTOM AND BOTTOM UP

The era of globalization, offers both new challenges to indigenous societies as well as new solutions to issues that these societies experience. As we know, this era did not bring many positive outcomes for sustainability of indigenous languages, rather it is most often associated with colonization, diseases, relocations, boarding schools, destructive language policies, children's separation from parents, and much more. Over the last decades, these human rights violations have become regulated by international agreements, which is a significant achievement of today's society. However, not all of the states chose to follow these regulations; but this practice proves to be changeable. History provides examples of governments that changed their views and policies in favor of indigenous peoples' rights and their development. We should continue working on this challenging process and utilize the most out of it. Today I would like to present on the positive outcomes of globalization and more specifically talk about the efforts of Itelmen people to revitalize their language in the contemporary realities.

Itelmen is a language of an indigenous group that lives in the eastern part of Russia on the Kamchatka peninsula, the so-called Russian Far East. It is a small group with the approximate population of 3000 people subsisting of fishing, hunting and gathering. There is no scientific explanation about the origin of Itelmens. Archeological excavations reveal the Itelmens as the first people on the peninsula. From the cultural anthropology perspective, our dances and some of our traditions tell of some connections with the cultures of the Pacific Islanders. Linguists, however, refer Itelmen to the Chukchi-Kamchatka language group.

The Itelmen language, as well as the rest of the language group is severely endangered. Currently, there are about five fluent speakers of Itelmen who can easily converse in the language and about ten/fifteen middle-aged knowledge holders who grew up hearing the language. Itelmen language, as well as other indigenous languages of Russia, survived through many challenges and now the academics, indigenous leaders, teachers, and some representatives of the local governments are working on finding ways to further develop this unique language.

In 2010 I participated in the Parliament Hearings of the State Duma on "Language Diversity of the Russian Federation: Problems and Perspectives" where they emphasized the following:

"The goal of contemporary State National policy in the Russian Federation lies in strengthening spiritual consolidation of a multinational nation of Russia into a unified civil nation which maintains ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity" (Komitet po Delam Natsionalnostey et al. 2010).

Russia is again working on building one consolidated nation, which shares the same values, language and culture. For the State, such policy is a safeguard measure in keeping the unity of the country and protecting its federative independence. For indigenous peoples of the North, policies of contemporary democratic Russia do not

introduce enough support for effective and productive sustainable development. In this context it is important to clarify that Russian legislation provides a specific term –Small-numbered Indigenous Peoples for the members of 45 federally recognized ethnic groups. Out of these 45 peoples, 40 are Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. Traditionally these groups lived and continue to live on the 60% of the contemporary Russian territory including Russian Arctic, Subarctic, Siberia and the Far Eastern part. According to the Federal Law “On the Guaranty of the Rights of Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation” each of these groups should not exceed 50,000 people in population and should live on their ancestral grounds maintaining traditional subsistence life style and identify themselves as an independent ethnic community. According to the All-State Census of 2002 the total population of Indigenous Peoples of the North was 252,222 people who lived in 28 subjects of the Russian Federation (Arefiev 2014:62) This status provides certain minor privileges in access to natural resources, traditional subsistence activities, health care, education etc.

In terms of legislation in relation to the languages of indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East, a number of acts regulate language policy in the Russian Federation. Among those are the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Constitution of the Subjects of the Russian Federation, Law on Education (1992/1996/2002), the Law “On Guarantees of the Rights of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of RF” (1999), the Law “On the Languages of the Peoples of RFSFR” (1991/1998), the Conception of National Educational Policy of the Russian Federation and a number of other documents” (Lekhanova 2008).

The Constitution of the Russian Federation was adopted in 1993 by the All-State referendum. Article 68 Part 1 identifies Russian as the State language of the Russian Federation on all its territory. Part 2 of the same article grants the right to the Republics in Russia to identify their own state languages. Finally, Part 3 of Article 68 guarantees all nations the right to preserve their native languages, and create an environment to learn those languages and develop them. In addition, Article 69 guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples in compliance with international laws and agreements of the Russian Federation.

The rights of indigenous languages, granted in the Constitution, are supported by the Law on the Languages of the Peoples the RSFSR (1991/1998), according to which every citizen of Russia has a free choice in the language of communication, upbringing, and education. The Republics of the Russian Federation have the right to develop their own legislation in order to clarify the “functional correlation between the State language of the Russian Federation and State languages of the Republics” (Arefiev 2014:63). Nevertheless over the last years the course of the Russian-only policy became quite visible and felt in the remote regions of the Federation.

The current legislation of the Russian Federation refers solving indigenous language related issues mostly to the sphere of school. For the most part language revitalization is viewed through classic formal lessons. Nevertheless, there is no special law on education of indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. Moreover,

there is no department on the indigenous peoples affairs any more. Indigenous peoples became a small portion of work for the Ministry of Culture when we talk about native arts and festivals, Ministry of Education when we talk about languages, Ministry of Regional Development when we talk about socio-economic development. This dispersion is seen through the legislative acts and policies that are not as effective for the development of indigenous peoples as we deserve to see. Indigenous peoples need to be viewed as separate unique fragile cultures, which deserve careful attention and thorough treatment. However, it's important to note that Russian and indigenous cultures can coexist productively together without one dominating the other.

Russian legislation is continuously changing and each region of Russia responds differently to the developing legislation in relation to indigenous languages. While in many regions of Russia they have adopted their local laws on indigenous languages, in Kamchatski Krai the discussion of the Law on Indigenous Languages is still developing. Nevertheless in 2014 the Kamchatski Krai government adopted a “Complex of Measures on Preservation and Propaganda of Traditional Culture, Securing of Traditional Subsistence Environment and Traditional Land Use of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East Living in Kamchatski Krai for 2014-2018” (Pravitelstvo Kamchatskogo Kraya 2015a). In September 2015 Part of this Complex was supplemented with an additional section named “Preservation and Development of Native Languages, Support and Development of Printed and Electronic Means of Mass Communication which are Spread in the Languages of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East living in Kamchatskii Krai” (Pravitelstvo Kamchatskogo Kraya 2015c). This section requires a number of various State Agencies, Ministries, Educational Establishments and State Libraries in Kamchatka to conduct certain programs in relation to language development. In this Complex, Kamchatkan government is emphasizing the value of mass media, academic research investigations and discussions, publication of language and culture educational materials, organization of the competitions related languages and cultural events. All of these measures have the potential to work well with proper financial support, consistency and guidance. However, these measures are not new to Kamchatka. There is a long history of teaching indigenous languages and History of Kamchatka in rural schools and Pedagogical College of Palana, releasing publications of educational literature, issuing mass media products and organization of cultural events. However, when we talk about indigenous language classes at school – we are talking about only 40-45 minutes a week. This amount of time is enough only to introduce the language to the learners and by no means is it enough for language revitalization and development.

Broadcasting news in indigenous languages is a powerful tool. It helps the learner hear the language on a daily basis; it also helps the language develop to fit into the contemporary realities and create new words to describe the objects and worldview of the outside world. However, in Kamchatkan context the news broadcasts last less than 30 minutes a day and they are presented only in the Koryak language while Kamchatka is home for five more indigenous languages.

Research projects and discussion are also important for the languages of Kamchatka. Most of the research on indigenous languages in Kamchatka is conducted by

the outside world and often by foreign researchers. There are very few local researchers interested in language studies. Lack of research funding is a major part of this drawback. We certainly need more conference and round table discussions on indigenous languages, but practice shows that they mostly work on language preservation and documentation rather than language development. These circumstances make this Complex of Measures rather shallow. It offers important assignments that can bring positive results for the native languages of Kamchatka, but at the level of implementation these initiatives are not developed and supported enough to be able to provide serious effective outcomes.

Nonetheless, what this Program supports intentionally or unintentionally is the promotion of prestige of indigenous languages. No doubt publications of the works of indigenous authors and artists, organization of various cultural events and competitions promote the uniqueness, beauty, and richness of traditional cultures of Kamchatka. They encourage indigenous youth to study, middle-aged people to remember, and elders to teach their ancestral languages. These programs also promote international tolerance between the non-indigenous and indigenous population of Kamchatka. The popularization aspect of this Program educates non-indigenous people as well and tries to switch their attitude towards the indigenous peoples of Kamchatka from negative to respectful.

There are two recent language related initiatives that are directly promoted by the Government of Kamchatski Krai and they have good potential for developing the prestige of the languages. The Contest of Fairy telling in indigenous languages was initiated several years ago by a fluent Koryak speaker and then supported by the government at the regional level. This Contest offers indigenous representatives the opportunity to compete in their story telling skills. The main requirement is that the story must be told in an indigenous language.

I was invited to be a judge at one of these fascinating competitions in 2012 and was impressed by the amount of indigenous youth that took the time learning the story with the elders and then sharing it with the audience on the stage. Curiously, all of the participants of the contest wore their native regalia and each of them created a small one-person play on stage: we heard a lot of drumming, singing and dancing together with the narration. It looked like an indigenous theatre, which is something very new for Kamchatka. There was no age limit for the participants. However, for the most part the contestants were fluent elderly speakers and young indigenous students. In preparation for this competition young students had fluent speakers as their mentors who guided them through the story and supported them on stage as well. There are very few circumstances in which an indigenous language is heard in Kamchatka, and this event succeeded in offering an immersion into the native languages and cultures that provided a deep breath from the ancient past.

History shows that the language and culture revitalization initiatives in Kamchatka usually are initiated from the bottom up. It was the community that introduced language projects, some of which were later supported by the Kamchatka

government. Moreover, those projects were and are implemented not by the government itself, but by the educational or cultural institutions.

However, the project I am going to present further was purely initiated and organized by the government of Kamchatski Krai. In 2015 they started conducting a Regional Contest of the Creative Works in the Languages of Kamchatka. It is planned to be an annual event aiming at preservation and popularization of indigenous languages of Kamchatka. The goals of this Contest are:

- Support of indigenous authors who write in the native languages;
- Familiarization with the native culture through learning indigenous languages;
- Development of the creative potential of children and youth;
- Creation of the environment for learning folklore of indigenous peoples of Kamchatka (Pravitelstvo Kamchatskogo Kraja 2015b).

An institution responsible for this Contest is the Agency for internal policy of Kamchatski Krai. The age of the participants was 12 years old and up divided into two age categories: pupils (12-17), and grown ups (17 and older). The government offered four nominations to compete: the best legend; the best story or essay about Kamchatka, its peoples and traditions, or its settlements; the best poetic work about Kamchatka or its peoples; and the best video trailer about Kamchatka, its peoples or traditions. The judging Committee consisted of 18 members – representatives of the government, indigenous teachers, indigenous writers and indigenous scholars. In organizing this competition the government stressed that a participant does not have to be an indigenous person in order to participate. It was open for all nationalities that live in Kamchatka, but the works had to be in one of the indigenous languages of Kamchatka peninsula (Itelmen, Koryak, Even, Aleut, Chukchi, Alyutor) with Russian translation. One person could present more than one work for the competition. In 2015, 55 participants presented 66 works from various settlements of Kamchatka where the winners received monetary rewards.

This program is a major step of the Kamchatkan government in their search for finding ways to effectively support the development of indigenous languages. The government widely advertised their project through the official mass media all over the peninsula. This definitely provided strong support from the government for increasing the prestige of indigenous languages among the indigenous and non-indigenous populations of Kamchatka. A large amount of scholarly research explains that when a language is more prestigious it has more chances to survive. I agree that “The attitudes of the larger, more dominant population are critical in language revitalization efforts” (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:30). Itelmen language and culture together with other cultures of Kamchatka has been associated with low-prestige for so many years that we have become shy in recognizing our identities. The contest offered to the learners of indigenous languages provides extra motivation for language learning which is always an essential component of effective language revitalization.

Presented are some practical examples that the local government has undertaken to move language revitalization forward in Kamchatka which lie outside the borders of

formal schooling. According to the work plan, these programs will be annually conducted by the Government. No doubt there is a need of more of such initiatives to occur in Kamchatka in a wider variety and with direct consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples of the region.

In the reports of previous expert group meetings on indigenous languages provided to this meeting we can see that a lack of funding is a major issue that holds language revitalization back. Even if the legislation is in favor of developing the language diversity of the countries often the mechanisms do not involve much financial investment from the part of the states. Therefore, I want to continue my presentation today with a few language revitalization initiatives that are implemented without special budgeted funding.

Itelmens have a rather strong indigenous identity and spirit and often we are not waiting for the government to decide what is better for us. In many cases Itelmens are not waiting to get financial support either in order to implement their language and culture revitalization ideas. Among the most recent language revitalization initiatives was the issue of an Itelmen DVD of songs with videos and subtitles. This DVD came as one of the results of a Gathering of Itelmen Speakers “Keepers of Native Hearth – 2012” which was organized by the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, University of Connecticut, Chiba University in Japan, Institute of Linguistic Research in St. Petersburg, Association of Indigenous Peoples in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski, and Kamchatka Branch of North Pacific Institute of Geography. The purpose of this meeting was language documentation for Audio-visual dictionary of Itelmen language. During the gathering, ancient songs recorded in 1960s were transcribed and translated by the elders and some contemporary Itelmen songs were recorded, transcribed and translated as well. This data was used for the community driven project on Itelmen DVD of songs.

This DVD includes 15 songs. Each song is presented in the form of a short video movie with the introduction of the singer and credits to transcriber, translator, editor of the video, photographers and others so that copyright issues do not occur in the future. Since there are no video recordings of the singers, the songs are followed with the videos of nature from Itelmen lands or archival and contemporary photographs of the Itelmen life. The videos also include the words of the songs and translation. This way the learner has an opportunity to hear the singer, follow the words and understand what the song is about and further improve Itelmen language skills through learning Itelmen songs. Sometimes this DVD is called Itelmen karaoke; however, it offers more than simple song learning. Many singers whose songs are presented in the DVD are gone, but through this tool their descendants gain access to this knowledge and opportunity to learning the ancient singing of their fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers. While these songs were mostly in the archives of the linguists (and we are thankful to them having recorded these songs and saving them for the future generations) now they became accessible to the wider community not only to hear, but also to learn. The DVD comes with a booklet consisting of texts of the songs and translation.

This DVD was created based on a free iTunes program. It was at the final stage when several sources decided to fund the production of the DVD. The first was an

Itelmen businessman, which brought even more pride to the process since businessmen usually do not support projects of this kind. Indeed, the fact that an Itelmen businessmen offered help added value to the Itelmen karaoke DVD since it was solely a community-driven project. When the DVD was ready, the Regional Ministry of Culture also offered support for the publication. At the end 250 DVDs were published and spread among Itelmens. It was a free product for the community and now it is also available online as an Itelmen karaoke channel (<https://vimeo.com/channels/990935>). It is important to clarify that these songs do not imply sacred nature and Itelmens traditionally have been rather public about sharing their immaterial heritage, such as dance, festivals and rituals, therefore uploading songs online is viewed by Itelmens as a positive thing that is bringing more attention to our small aboriginal tribe. Although in Kamchatka our Internet connection is not good and many cannot access things online, the Itelmen Karaoke Channel can be easy accessed by Itelmens who live outside of Kamchatka offering a reunion with their tribe.

The outcomes of this initiative were seen a year later during the annual Itelmen traditional thanksgiving to nature celebration. People presented songs they learned from this DVD as part of their performances or various competition assignments such as song competition or a competition of a true Itelmen housewife. Among them many were young representatives, which is the most significant indicator that shows the effectiveness of the initiative. While Itelmen language is not spoken on a daily basis and conversations occur in Itelmen seldomly, this project involving contemporary technologies offers the young generation a fascinating and easy way to learn their ancestral language. We all know from many examples that a song in general is one of the effective tools for learning any language, therefore Itelmen karaoke also might be a good tool for language lessons at school.

Another contemporary initiative that does not require much financial investment is the use of the Whatsapp application for smartphones. This application has become popular in rural Kamchatka since it does not require a good Internet connection and investment from the part of the user. Recently people started organizing groups of interest in Whatsapp. Japanese scholars developed an Itelmen keyboard for smartphones using Keyman Free application and now there is an opportunity to have Whatsapp conversations in Itelmen. I live in a small Itelmen village of Kovran with the population of 300 people. In Kovran we have our own Whatsapp group, which we use to share information about cultural events and important announcements. This fall we started using this group as a platform for language learning as well. We send out mini lessons on Itelmen where we learn a word or a sentence. This method provides a space for discussion related to Itelmen language. All generations in Kovran use Whatsapp and often such discussions teach more than actual language lessons. It also serves as a reminder to people about their language. Since mini lessons are small and include a few lines of text it is most likely that people will read this information and some will even try to remember it. Sometimes these mini lessons encourage the participants to respond. Even though many Itelmens might be shy to respond publicly because of a fear of making a mistake, there is an assumption that this exercise stimulates the participants of the group to think about Itelmen and solve the task offered in the group discussion.

This initiative does not require funding. Almost everyone has a smartphone in Russia nowadays. All this project needs is the consistency and time of the facilitator. This is a crucial indicator to remember for language revitalization. Often people who are interested in language revitalization are doing it outside of their regular jobs during their free time. For the most part it is teachers who are paid for their language lessons or scholars who conduct language documentation and anything that lies beyond academia or formal schooling is conducted on a voluntary basis. There are several international funders who are willing to provide support, but again, these donors are more interested in supporting language documentation rather than language development initiatives. Moreover, even if the donor is willing to support the language revitalization project usually the funding is provided for a certain category of expenses such as the purchase of technologies and supplies, travel, organization of the meetings and other similar expenses, which are surely important for language revitalization. But the time of the key person implementing the project is usually not paid for. Some donors even specify in their requirements that they do not support awards that include work time payment. People who are working on language revitalization are dedicated individuals; many are implementing their own initiatives on a voluntary basis, but they also need to provide for their families. This obstacle is a significant drawback in moving forward language revitalization.

Recommendations:

Having this in mind I believe that there is a need for a **Global Award in Language Revitalization**. People dedicated to language revitalization need this international recognition, especially those who are not from very developed regions where language maintenance and revitalization is lying mostly on the shoulders of the community. This award could be announced during the UNPFII stressing the achievements of indigenous peoples at the global level and sharing examples of success in the indigenous world.

There is also a need in the **Global Fund for Revitalization of Endangered Languages** as well as **State Funds** that provide support specifically to endangered languages. Such Funds should offer support for community-driven language revitalization initiatives that go beyond formal schooling and language documentation and expand to other spheres of social life of indigenous peoples.

At the **state level** we need to encourage the state to organize the **Committees on support of indigenous languages**. From the report of the Expert meeting on indigenous languages in 2008 we know of the effective work of such Committee in Greenland. Other states should definitely take a closer look at this idea that is aimed at regulating effective cooperation between the state and indigenous peoples in the area of language development.

Language diversity is a great gift created by nature and **the governments should shift from viewing it as a threat to the unity of the states, to seeing it as a strength**

that can serve to improve the life in our countries. For that **global meetings and conferences should continue** to gather consistently and provide platform for productive discussions on the improvement of the state of indigenous languages.

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