

8.093 Recognising the importance of Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage in biodiversity conservation

NOTING that, of the 7,168 languages spoken globally, over 4,000 are Indigenous, spoken by less than 6% of the world's population, CONCERNED that only a few hundred languages hold official status, and ALARMED that 50–90% of languages could disappear by 2100;

OBSERVING that Indigenous languages are essential to the preservation and transmission of ecological knowledge, sciences and practices and are vital for biodiversity conservation;

RECOGNISING the deep interconnection between culture, language, nature and conservation;

ALSO RECOGNISING the importance of transmission across generations and the need for gender-responsive approaches to language and traditional knowledge preservation and biodiversity conservation;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous Peoples' rights to revitalise, use and teach their cultures and traditions, including their languages;

RECALLING that the International Labour Organization Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) recognises the crucial role of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity conservation and mandates that States take measures to protect and promote Indigenous languages and knowledge systems;

APPRECIATING the increasing participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in global conservation governance, supported by IUCN resolutions, and the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) including its coordination of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and other bodies, to safeguard cultural heritage, including the languages, traditional knowledge, and the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in biodiversity conservation;

COMMENDING the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for the establishment of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the CBD; and

ALSO COMMENDING the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) and the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) for global engagement in 50 languages through online platforms;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General to:

- a. promote State involvement in protection of Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage through their formal recognition in legal frameworks;
- b. facilitate equitable, gender-responsive and culturally respectful cooperation between Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and governments, for the promotion and preservation of languages;
- c. collaborate on and support Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' initiatives for language preservation and intergenerational transmission, including field and community schools or learning centres, ensuring their full ownership, and recognising the essential role of women in language transmission and intergenerational knowledge sharing;
- d. establish grants to support Indigenous language, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage preservation; and

e. support Indigenous and community, women-led initiatives that strengthen language use and ecological knowledge transmission in homes, communities, and cultural practices;

2. CALLS ON Members to support Indigenous and community-led monitoring of Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples as set out in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), report findings and take steps to preserve the biodiversity knowledge they carry;

3. INVITES IUCN to establish a task force, with leadership including its Indigenous Peoples' Organisation Members, to protect and promote Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage;

4. URGES governments, non-governmental organisations and conservation stakeholders to promote the respectful use of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' knowledge, sciences and practices, languages and normative systems, including by recognising their heritage value, ensuring the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples with their free, prior and informed consent as set out in UNDRIP, avoiding appropriation and misrepresentation, and supporting projects integrating Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, particularly species and ecosystem names, to complement taxonomy and conservation programmes;

5. RECOMMENDS promotion of the value of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' knowledge systems as an integral part of global conservation frameworks, with the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples as set out in UNDRIP, and ensuring they are valued and communicated through relevant visual formats to facilitate wider understanding and decision-making; and

6. CALLS ON IUCN to collaborate with UNESCO, CBD and IPBES in promoting the value of the knowledge, sciences and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as an integral part of global conservation frameworks, ensuring they are valued equally alongside scientific research, and to recognise the importance of Indigenous languages, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage in global understanding, and to support their use, along with visual tools to enhance accessibility and share scientific findings and policy recommendations, with Indigenous Peoples' free, prior and informed consent as set out in UNDRIP.