



The United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, warned that half of the world's estimated 6,000 plus languages will likely die out by the end of the century, and urged world governments to take significant and urgent efforts to protect both minority communities and their language heritage.

"Some groups are vulnerable to factors beyond their control, such as policies of assimilation that promote dominant national or official languages, the impact of conflict, or forced displacement from their traditional lands," Ms. Izsák said during the presentation of her latest report\* to the UN Human Rights Council. "Some countries have aggressively promoted a single national language as a means of reinforcing sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity."

The human rights expert noted that minority language rights and language use have frequently been a source of tensions, both between and within States. "Proponents of linguistic rights have sometimes been associated with secessionist movements or have been seen as a threat to the integrity or unity of a State," she said.

"Language is a central element and expression of identity and of key importance in the preservation of group identity," Ms. Izsák underlined. "Language is particularly important to linguistic minority communities seeking to maintain their distinct group and cultural identity, sometimes under conditions of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination."

In her view, protection of linguistic minority rights is a human rights obligation and an essential component of good governance, efforts to prevent tensions and conflict, and the construction of equal and politically and socially stable societies. "To create unity in diversity requires dialogue with all stakeholders, including on how to appropriately accommodate the language needs and rights of all groups," she said.

"Where conflicts have ceased or peace building initiatives are under way, it is essential that all groups in society play a full role in discussions, negotiations and decision-making processes," the UN Independent Expert recommended.

According to the Independent Expert, historical factors such as colonialism have had a huge global impact on languages, resulting in the marginalization of and a rapid decline in the use of indigenous and minority languages which were often seen as backwards, a barrier to colonial hegemony, or as slowing national development.

"It can also be argued that today globalization, the growth of the Internet and web-based information is having a direct and detrimental impact on minority languages and linguistic diversity, as global communications and marketplaces require global understanding," she said.

In her report, Ms. Izsák analyses various threats to the existence of minority languages and linguistic minorities, the importance of recognition of minority languages and linguistic rights, the use of minority languages in public life, education, in the media, in public administration and judicial fields, minority-language use in names, place names and public signs, participation in economic and political life and the need for provisions of information and services in minority languages.

The Independent Expert also presented her findings following her visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of September 2012, as well as the Recommendations of the fifth session of Forum on Minority Issues that she is responsible for guiding in the conduct of her mandate (see below).

(\*) [Check the full report](#)

**Rita Izsák** was appointed as Independent Expert on minority issues by the Human Rights Council in June 2011 and took up her functions on 01 August 2011. As Independent Expert, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. Under her UN mandate, the Independent Expert is required to promote implementation of the

UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which marks its 20th anniversary in 2012. [Learn more...](#)

- [Check the Independent Expert's report on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)
- Recommendations of the Forum on Minority Issues at its fifth session - [Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: identifying positive practices and opportunities](#)

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