

# RENMUN VII

*Peace in Permanence*



March 5-6, 2022

**Chair Report**

## Chair Introduction

Hi everyone, we're Alina and Justin! A Y12 and Y11 from LPCUWC and CIS respectively, and we're honored to serve as your chairs for UNESCO at RENMUN VII.

Not going to lie, as typical human beings, we're really scared. It's our first time at RENMUN though we have been delegating and chairing other conferences for the past few years. So please bear with us because we haven't chaired an MUN since the summer (blame the lack of super cool MUNs out there). Anyways, we're so glad you all are here because we're sure we'll be an incredible (and active) council.

Since UNESCO is one of the beginner councils at RENMUN, we're aware there will be varying forms of experience showcased in our council, so as your cool chairs as always, we're here to support you with resources, sample resolutions and ways to be prepared for your first or shaky MUN experience. Our contact information will be listed below, so feel free to reach out to us anytime!

We look forward to meeting you all in March and all we'll say is – prepare well but don't over prepare either, just enjoy the experience and let it show you the wonders of being chaired by us (insert a picture of us judging you). Last but not least, we assure you we're way more funny in real life than what is being depicted in this report. This chair introduction was written at 2 in the morning for your information.

Good luck delegates,

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# The Preservation of Indigenous and Minority Cultures and Languages

Around the world, many nations comprise a wide range of ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture and language. Often, there are ethnic groups such as the indigenous peoples, such as the Native Americans in the United States, the Aboriginals in Australia, or the “Indians” in Latin America. Due to historical technological inferiority, these people were often abused when the new colonizers first clashed with natives, leading to a sharp decline in population and being significantly outnumbered. Regardless of whether they avoid the fate of near-total genocide, it is virtually inevitable that indigenous peoples end up with a lower socio-economic status in the newly formed society when compared to the new settlers.

As generations pass, these imbalances remained despite the fact that in most nations theoretically the system does not disadvantage indigenous peoples, and unjust laws and systems have been repealed. A common phenomenon in places where descendants of new settlers coexist with “First Nation” peoples is that the minority cultures are suppressed, actively (where society and/or the government are intentionally taking actions) or passively (where education and other social mechanisms in place are, sometimes inadvertently, causing the loss of culture).

The loss of language is one of the most obvious indicators of a weakening cultural identity. Most indigenous individuals have no choice but to learn the language spoken by their employers, police officers, etc, but as that happens the original language (or dialect) is increasingly displaced and forgotten. Without their own language, an individual's sense of belonging to a distinct cultural identity is greatly diminished.

As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, this committee will make decisions regarding the preservation of these endangered cultures and languages. Obviously, suppression of culture is not limited to indigenous peoples. However, this problem is especially prevalent to indigenous minorities, as such will be the main focus of this committee.

## Key Terms

Term	Definition
Compulsory sterilization	The forced removal of a person's reproductive capabilities, usually perpetrated by the government.
Dialect	A form of a language-specific to a certain group, such as Cantonese being a dialect of Chinese.
Ethnic cleansing	The targeted mass expulsion or massacre of an ethnic group, with an intention to remove the ethnicity from the region.
Ethnic minority	A group of people sharing a common ethnicity, and being a minority relative to the dominant population in the region.
Ethnicity	A group with a common cultural tradition.
Forced assimilation	The forced acculturation of a person who is often deemed "uncultured" or "barbaric".
Genocide	The deliberate killing of people from an ethnic group, with an intention to destroy the group completely.
Indigenous	An ethnic group that is native to a land, in contrast to colonizers who took control of the land afterward.
Language attrition	The loss of a language, in context referring to the native tongue of an indigenous person.
Mass expropriation	The acquisition of land by the government, in context referring to the targeted "stealing" of an indigenous people's territory.
Miscegenation	Marriage between two people of different ethnicities, sometimes this is banned, and sometimes this is forced.

## Background Information

No matter the intent, there are a few common methods for an authority to eliminate a culture, such as

- 1) by separating children from family to deprive them of their culture, like the Canadian “Indian Residential Schools” between 1894 and 1947,
- 2) by indoctrination and nationalism, as Indian authorities have allegedly been perpetrating against the Adivasi “Original Tribes”,
- 3) by forced religious conversion, for example, Yugoslavian Orthodox Serbs being forced to convert to Catholicism during World War II,
- 4) by forced miscegenation, birth control or even abortions to minimize the distinction of a group.

Not all cases of loss of culture are due to extreme actions intentionally undertaken by powerful authorities. For example, in the US state of Hawaii, the native language of the indigenous Hawaiian people has largely been displaced by English, with less than 0.1% of the state being a “native speaker”. Meanwhile, the indigenous people of Taiwan are statistically experiencing social and economic inequality, with a higher unemployment rate than the average. All this indicates that people see benefits in assimilating to the dominant culture, and as a result, their own original cultures are endangered.

In many educational systems around the world, indigenous people are not taught — and sometimes not even permitted to speak — their own language. They grow up learning in the language of the majority settlers, and as they reach adulthood their language is spoken only to their family, if they still remember it at all. As they search for employment, seek higher education, or leave their families, language attrition occurs as they no longer have any opportunities to use their native language. Due to discrimination and prejudice, some people may even hide the fact that they can speak such a language to avoid being identified as an outsider. The preservation of language, one of the most important and distinct elements of a culture, is one of the primary concerns of UNESCO.

But language is only one of the many aspects of a culture. Traditions and rituals are suppressed, whether due to inconvenience in practicing them, or discrimination and contempt by the majority population. They may be deemed “uncultured” or “uncivilized”, and people become afraid to practice their traditions, and to be associated with their culture, for fear of prejudice. The same can be true for the indigenous art, which may not be appreciated or treated as art by the settlers. Furthermore, traditional food from an indigenous culture may be hard to come by, especially when the youth have left their homes and integrated into the greater society. The food, and dining practices, might be marginalized as “barbaric” and

“unsanitary”, once again meaning that people trying to integrate into society face ostracization if they associate with their culture, even by eating food from home.

## Potential Clashes

### Education

In many places, despite the presence of a significant indigenous minority, the education system does not offer courses in the language, or put class hours into the culture and history of these people. Many indigenous rights activists have been campaigning to change that, but the dominant majority culture often does not see any purpose in it, and would rather have the school not “waste” resources and class hours on these matters.

Additionally, activists in some regions have long argued that the history of indigenous people were overlooked or whitewashed, demonizing them as barbaric before the “salvation” by “civilized peoples”, or claiming that they did not suffer at the hands of settlers when they had.

### Culture vs Practicality

As younger generations grow up, they see more and more opportunities in the wider society, especially as today’s world becomes increasingly integrated. Even if the new generation wishes to keep their cultural identity, it becomes very challenging to practice the language and display their culture where they are a very small minority. Instead, it is much more practical to assimilate into the majority culture, and in the process losing some of the original cultures. Meanwhile, employers and the majority culture see no benefit in taking the time and effort to accommodate these cultures in the workplace and/or wider society.

### Integration vs Elimination

There is a fine line between integrating culture and eliminating a culture. When trying to assimilate a minority culture into the wider society, it is possible the minority loses its defining characteristics such as language, opportunity to practice rituals, etc. Additionally, prejudice against the minority may lead to discrimination, and members of the ethnicity may not necessarily want to identify with their ethnicity. This in turn results in less and less cultural identity, inadvertently causing the elimination of culture. However, leaving these people isolated is simply not an option as there are much more opportunities outside of their limited cultural circles.

### Politics

In democratic countries, since indigenous people are usually outnumbered, the politicians generally favour the dominant majority culture. This persists due to the majority preferring to prioritize themselves and being apathetic towards the culture

of the indigenous people. However, this can change if there is enough awareness raised in the general population, and public opinion sways towards helping with the preservation of indigenous culture.

In non-democratic regimes, such as autocracies or other authoritarian states, governments often see no point in preserving the culture of a minority group. In fact, history has shown that these governments promote a strong sense of nationalism, to have the country unite as one behind them, as such preserving varying cultures is actually counterproductive for them. This means that sometimes, the governments are more prone to even taking active measures to destroy and undermine a culture, with the most extreme cases resulting in ethnic cleansing or genocide, as seen in Nazi Germany's Holocaust against the Jews, or Myanmar's military burning Rohingya villages.

## Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement with the Issue
Indigenous populations	While indigenous people may want to preserve their culture, it is often the case that they do not see the purpose behind taking measures to do so. They often feel powerless and that their culture has no place in the wider society. As this drags on, the newer generations begin to increasingly lose their cultural identity in favour of the majority culture.
Other minorities, such as immigrants	Other minorities are likely to also face the endangerment of their culture and language, and it may be possible to implement measures to protect them as well. However, it may be prudent to question whether society has as much responsibility and that many resources — to protect these other cultures, as they were not originally here.
Majority populations	Generally, majority populations are apathetic towards the preservation of minority cultures. They may not want to see society's resources being "wasted" on something they might not benefit from. However, public opinion does vary, especially in recent times when progressives

	especially are very supportive of such programs.
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## Possible Solutions

### Reformation of education systems

Reforming educational systems to include education about indigenous culture and language. Additionally, if it is currently banned, allowing the native language to be spoken in the classroom may help with the preservation of the language. Passing laws and regulations to ensure ethnic minorities feel free to express their culture, without risk of being discriminated against. However, it is often argued that anti-discrimination laws infringe upon freedom of expression.

### Promotion of native languages

Promoting native languages, for example by translating government pamphlets, signage, addresses, etc. Delegates could consider renaming streets, buildings, holidays, or even towns named after colonizers to a name significant and meaningful to the indigenous culture.

### International action against governments

International actions against governments that want to only destroy a culture. This can take the form of sanctions against the perpetrators, the taking in of refugees, etc. Maintaining the status quo is also vital. Some delegates might not see the point of preserving these cultures at all, and believe it is much more important to prioritize the country as a whole, without regard for individual ethnic cultures. Working from the grassroots will yield for more feasible solutions.

### Support of existing action

Supporting existing NGOs that work to preserve minority cultures and languages. These organizations may be more effective than the government or intergovernmental organizations such as UNESCO, as they already have prior experience and have direct input and support from the beneficiaries, the indigenous people.

## Past Actions

This topic has rarely been a very high priority for governments, as such, there are not many large-scale actions that have been taken to preserve indigenous culture. Instead, many NGOs and activist groups have been formed to tackle the issue and raise awareness.



Additionally, the UN General Assembly passed the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. Officially, countries are bound to commit resources to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, including “the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture”. However, unfortunately in reality many nations go against these principles.

In theory, most countries also have a constitution (or equivalent) that protects and embraces the culture of indigenous peoples. However, as above, governments do not necessarily always achieve this.

However, there has been some action on the issue. For example, in the United States, only 20 of the original 50 states still celebrate “Columbus Day” as a national holiday. Many states have replaced it with some form of an “Indigenous People’s Day”. Furthermore, awareness campaigns on social media have garnered much attention and support for abused indigenous people in the Western world.

## Guiding Questions

- Should the wider society be responsible for the protection of an indigenous minority's culture at all?
- What are the best ways to preserve a dying language?
- What are possible methods to make it easier for indigenous people to express their heritage?
- Should the UN hold countries accountable for their treatment of indigenous peoples? If so, how?
- How should governments that abuse indigenous peoples be treated? What are possible methods of dissuading them from perpetrating abuse?

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