SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
DECEMBER 14, 15 & 16, 2010, GATINEAU, QC

Resolution no. 55/2010

TITLE:	Actions Necessary to Save First Nations Languages from Extinction
SUBJECT:	Indigenous Languages
MOVED BY:	Chief Bill Cranmer, Namgis First Nation, Alert Bay, British Columbia
SECONDED BY:	Chief Mike Mitchell, Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne, Ontario
DECISION:	Carried by Consensus

WHEREAS:

A. Our languages were given to us by the Creator and as such, they hold deep spiritual meaning describing our responsibilities and connecting us to all of creation.

B. The right to educate our children in our languages is inalienable and an inherent Aboriginal and Treaty right.

C. The denial of this right violates a growing body of international human rights standards and instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

D. Our languages are integral to our civilizations, and the maintenance and revitalization of these languages are essential to the survival of First Nations as distinct societies in Canada.

E. UNESCO reported in 1996 that the Indigenous languages of Canada were among the most endangered languages in the world, and a state of emergency was declared in 1998 by the Assembly of First Nations regarding the drastic decline of Indigenous languages in Canada.

F. This dire state of our languages is the direct consequence of deliberate state policies that were designed to eradicate our languages, most notoriously through residential schooling.

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G. The Federal Government's apology for residential schools has done nothing to bring restitution for the linguistic and cultural destruction wrought by these schools and the teaching of our Indigenous languages in core programs in schools have failed to produce new speakers.

H. Immersion education is now recognized not only as the most effective means of creating new speakers, but also, for improving educational outcomes and increasing educational success rates that are key to building strong and thriving communities and to the full realization of self-determination.

I. Legislation recognizing the importance of respecting and promoting Indigenous languages (as in Manitoba, the Yukon, and NWT) is important, but virtually useless without financial resources to support education in Indigenous languages.

J. There is an urgent need for leadership and action to promote and protect Indigenous languages from extinction.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Chiefs-in-Assembly:

1. Recognize and affirm that urgent action is required to promote and protect Indigenous languages.

2. Direct the Assembly of First Nations to:

    a. undertake a nation-wide campaign to raise awareness about the benefits and critical importance of mother-tongue medium education using a variety of strategies, including conferences, brochures, Internet, TV and radio ads.

    b. urge that the mother-tongue be the official language in every First Nations territory or community.

    c. promote the development of immersion curriculum, and immersion teacher training for all First Nations across the country.

    d. support immersion programs not only for the young, but also for adults in communities with too few fluent teachers to support an immersion program for children.

    e. support a court challenge establishing the constitutional right of First Nations to educate their children in the medium of their own languages.

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3. Urge federal and provincial governments to:

   a. work in meaningful consultation with First Nations Peoples to develop provincial and national legislation that not only recognizes and protects First Nations languages as an Aboriginal and Treaty right under Section 35 of the Constitution, but also mandates financial support for First Nations immersion programs equivalent to that enjoyed by French and English programs in Canada.

   b. implement the international human rights norms and legally binding standards that are part of general and customary international law in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to ensure protection, respect and justice for all Indigenous rights, including those in treaties.

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