



ELEN ORAL STATEMENT TO 2023 UN FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

Session 4: Protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minority groups towards cohesive societies

Thank you Mr President, your Excellencies.

The European Language Equality Network is the leading international organization working for the protection of European indigenous minoritised languages.

Firstly, we would like to welcome the new UN SR to his post and look forward to working with him.

Every day we work with our members to help them in their efforts at effective language recovery and revitalization. And every day we deal with attacks and discrimination against these languages, many of which are endangered.

In terms of best practices in language protection and recovery, having an adequate legal base and funding is vital for effective language recovery. When we look at the languages that are having some success in language revitalization, such as Basque and Welsh, they all have a substantive legal base in terms of legislation that give these languages **the umbrella of protection** for them to conduct effective language recovery programmes.

We can compare Welsh to Breton, as examples. Wales, has an autonomous government, with legislation that ensures official status and underpins Welsh-medium education. In contrast, for Breton in Brittany, there is no autonomous government, no co-official status or official usage, no legal underpinning for Breton-medium education, no support for Breton language media. It means that Breton speakers are vulnerable to any government attack and underlines the need for a legal base to ensure language recovery

Across Europe there remains the overarching need for clear, unambiguous language legislation that protects our languages at state, European and international levels.

Therefore, following current best practices, ELEN recommends:

At the State level:

- 1) That States empower each indigenous language minority in their jurisdiction with the powers and funding to manage their own language maintenance and recovery policies.
- 2) That France, Italy and Greece ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, without further delay.
- 3) That France responds to the Special Rapporteurs Communication on regional language education in France, and acts to protect its so-called “regional” languages.

At the European level:

- 4) An EU Directive to protect endangered languages and that ensures their recovery.

At the UN level:

- 5) Upgrade the UN Declaration on Minorities into a binding UN Convention.
- 6) That the Convention contains clear unambiguous individual and collective language rights for indigenous minority language speakers.

I thank you.

