

Interview with Tarcila Rivera Zea, Executive Director, Centro de Culturas Indígenas del Perú

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How could UNESCO support the efforts in safeguarding the intangible heritage of indigenous peoples?

UNESCO as part of the UN system recognised for its cultural role, that also recognize the importance of indigenous knowledge of our sacred places and our intangible heritage can contribute to raise awareness and ensuring that both States and policy-makers within countries take indigenous peoples into account when it comes to initiatives to be developed at a national level. Therefore, there is a lot of work to be done from UNESCO's perspective, mainly with the States, with a view to provide platforms for indigenous organisations and peoples.

What role does education play in safeguarding indigenous languages?

Several generations of young men and women have gone through a process of reflection and analysis, and we can now happily say that there is an opportunity for our languages and cultures to be recognised as part of the universal culture. Indigenous peoples - especially new generations- think that the government should legitimise and validate the importance of indigenous languages and cultures as part of the richness of their countries. Although we indigenous peoples are asking for recognition, respect and the right of transmission of our cultural heritage to the new generations. It is also extremely important for multicultural countries to raise awareness among non-indigenous communities about the contributions and values of indigenous languages. This is why indigenous language and culture must be included at all levels of the educational curriculum -basic, secondary and higher-.



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What message would you share with new generations?

I am very hopeful that the changes that are taking place now will pay off for the new generation. Moreover, we are at this point thanks to the efforts of several generations of indigenous leaderships, and because we have found allies in institutions and we have the support of well-known figures and sometimes, even politicians had supported us along the way. Thus, the strategy chosen by our elders about using the UN Charter to claim our rights has been effective.

The new generation is more creative, and we need to use available technology to safeguard our cultures, our languages, our values and our cultural heritage. We should be proud of our heritage. We should recognise that all of our knowledge, languages and cultural expressions are just as valid as any other culture in the world. So come on, you youngsters - onwards and upwards!