

Chennai Declaration of Language Rights

Language Rights Conference
19-20, September, 2015
Chennai

The organizations and individuals, signatories to the present Chennai Declaration of Language Rights, or Chennai Declaration, meeting in Chennai on 20th September 2015,

Having regard to the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, released on 9th June 1996 in Barcelona, Spain which was a culmination of various international and regional declarations, laws, covenants and conventions, including 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1992 Resolution 47/135 of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, 1989 Convention of the International Labour Organization and others,

Having regard to various resolutions and demands raised by various language communities in the Union of India on preventing or removing imposition or selective promotion of any particular language over any other language and for language rights,

Considering that the current language policies of the Union Government of India are detrimental to the very survival and development of languages spoken by various communities in the Indian Union,

Considering that the current provisions in the Constitution of India and all acts, rules and guidelines based on it related to the languages in the Indian Union are neither based on language equality and rights nor on the demands of the people of various language communities,

Considering the imposition of Hindi by the Union Government, supported and promoted by various pan-Indian political parties and organizations, the centers of power including media and the State governments and considering the historically significant movements by various language communities against the imposition,

Considering that in the name of development, English is given over-emphasis and the all pervasive and increasing phenomenon of English dominating every aspect of our lives and replacing all the languages in the Indian Union in the public and private spaces, thus restricting our linguistic, cultural and economic choices;

Considering that the people representing the languages listed in the Schedule 8 of the Constitution of India are demanding to make their languages the official languages of the Union Government of India, the people representing many other languages demanding their languages to be included in the said schedule and hundreds of language communities with numerically smaller population are fighting for conserving and developing their ethnic languages,

Considering that the Languages in the Indian Union signify the diversity of the population in the Indian Union, with these languages being historically, socially, culturally and territorially part and parcel of the respective language communities,

Considering that the languages of the Indian Union are the vaults of traditional knowledge systems which have evolved over centuries based on their own conditions and practices and losing them would mean losing our heritage, knowledge base and traditional expertise,

HEREBY DECLARE THAT

All languages in the Indian Union are considered to be equal and each language community has the right to conserve, develop and empower their languages in all possible ways and means in a democratic milieu.

Every citizen of the Indian Union has the fundamental and inalienable right to use his/her mother tongue for all transactions with the executive, judiciary and legislative wings of the government and the government shall use the mother tongue of the citizen for all transactions and communications with the citizen. All citizens of the Indian Union shall have the rights to get all education in their mother tongues. All citizens of the Indian Union shall also have the rights to get commercial and public services in their mother tongues.

We call for setting up a New Language Commission to review and amend Part 17 of the Constitution of India and other relevant provisions to create a new language policy, based on the recommendations and demands for all language communities in the Indian Union.

We demand that the Union Government address the following demands and accept them immediately:

- a. Make all the languages listed in Schedule 8 of the Constitution of India the official languages of the Union Government
- b. Include in the Schedule 8 of the Constitution the languages for which the demands were made by their respective language communities and pending with the Union Government for many years
- c. Provide urgent support to the ethnic, indigenous and other languages with fewer number of speakers through an exclusive government agency and save them from extinction and assimilation.

We demand that all the governments ensure that the right to get education in mother tongue is not infringed at any level.

We demand that the state governments implement already existing governing language laws and policies fully. States that do not have such a policy should create one.

Declaring the above demands, we seek the support of all political parties, organizations, civil society organizations including human rights bodies, educational and cultural entities, and media to bring what we call THE LANGUAGE EQUALITY AND RIGHTS BILL in the Parliament and pass it to achieve the above goal. We urge the State Governments and local governments to pass legally powerful resolutions to demand the above three rights particularly and set up of a new Language Commission to address the various aspects of language rights, policies and planning.

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