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You will find attached the English translation from the French of a petition originally addressed in Swedish, at my instigation, to the Nordic Councils to Unesco; in this Note the Councils are requested to seek from Unesco measures for the protection of the languages and cultures of small ethnological groups.

These languages and cultures are in our time threatened with extinction (a more exact term would be 'extermination') within a generation of two. If this danger is not eliminated, it could cause irreparable loss to the cultural heritage of all humanity.

The Swedish Council to Unesco has already given a favourable reply and it is very probable that the other Nordic Councils will do likewise.

Nevertheless, it is very much to be feared that a great number of other countries, perhaps the majority of them, will oppose any move by Unesco to decide to take the measures which are sought.

To further our hopes for success it is very desirable that other countries should have similar petitions put forward by their Councils to Unesco.

It is for this purpose that I am writing to you. I beg you, with the firmest conviction that I am working in the interests of one of the greatest cultural causes of our time, to take time from your daily routine to draw up a similar petition and to collect a sufficient number of signatories from your own country.

I also ask you to distribute this text in your field and to inform me in due course of what action you may have taken.

Perhaps you are a member of a university and think, as I did at one time myself, that as such, you should not embroil yourself in the affairs of nations. This is a reasonable attitude in many instances, but is not so when cultural matters are involved. If we take no interest, some languages and some culture, to the study of which we may perhaps have devoted our whole life and given all our affection, may soon become a dead language, a dead culture.

Signed: Pierre Naert

Lund, Clemenstorget 12, Sweden,  
15 May 1962

English Translation of the French Translation of the Original Swedish Text

To: The Danish Council to Unesco, Frederiksholms Kanal 26,  
Copenhagen  
The Finnish Council to Unesco, Hogbergsgatan 21,  
Helsinki  
The Norwegian Council to Unesco, Roald Amundsens vej 1,  
Oslo  
The Swedish Council to Unesco, Vasagatan 15/17,  
Stockholm Va.

We, the undersigned professors and lecturers of the Nordic\* Universities, request the Nordic Councils to Unesco, either separately or preferably collectively, to demand at the General Conference of Unesco in Paris that steps be taken for the preservation of those languages which, for political or other reasons, are threatened with imminent extinction or now exist under conditions unfavourable to their development.

It would be desirable that Unesco appoint a committee of linguists with the task of drawing up a list of the languages thus threatened with extinction and of suggesting measures for safeguarding them. It would be equally desirable that the proposal to this effect should emanate from the Nordic countries: on the one hand, these countries realise more than most the importance of language in the cultural life of a people; and on the other, however small the population of some of these Nordic countries, among them are included those which make the greatest effort to preserve the national language and to protect, at the same time, minority languages spoken within their frontiers.

Nowadays nearly every country possesses organisations and laws for the protection of nature. There is a general effort to prevent the extinction of rare plants and animals, a policy which we cannot

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but approve. Yet - to the best of our knowledge - there is not a single recognised official body dedicated to the defence of minorities and indigenous peoples in general and to the preservation of their languages and individual cultures in particular. Such a task seems to us, however, no less important than the preservation of animal and vegetable species.

There is a multitude of reasons to explain the deficiency. It could be due to general ignorance regarding the peoples and languages in question. But the lack of interest in and comprehension of the values present in the languages and cultures of small peoples is, without any doubt, the main reason. Most of the so-called civilised or cultured nations consider their ways of life and their cultures as vastly superior to those of small peoples, and particularly to those of indigenous peoples. This is justifiable from certain points of view, but it certainly does not entitle any nation to exterminate others, either from the physical or cultural points of view. It is, needless to say, unnecessary to draw the attention of the Nordic Councils to Unesco to the fact that it is the expansionist policy of large States which creates the obstacle preventing smaller peoples from following their own way of life according to their own traditions and conserving their own languages. Unless effective means are found for controlling the results of such expansionist policies, it can only have one result: the extermination or assimilation of small peoples by either one large nation or by a small number of large nations.

Although we generally regard our Western culture as superior to that of many other peoples, it must not be forgotten that there is no recognised universal criterion of cultural values. Even from the

point of view of moral standards, we must indeed admit that our Western civilisation betrays certain traits which can hardly do us credit, yet which do not exist among indigenous peoples. In this respect these indigenous peoples have higher standards than ours. Take for example juvenile delinquency: this is one of our very real, pressing problems, yet it seems to be non-existent among indigenous peoples. In the realm of art the same is true: the so-called cultured peoples have, for very many years, borrowed to a great extent from the indigenous peoples. On the other hand hygiene and technology are more developed among the cultured peoples than the others. But against this it can be claimed that among the indigenous peoples a high mortality rate is a less cruel remedy for over-population than the wars which, to a certain extent, anyway, result from our own over-population. As far as technical achievement is concerned, it is an indisputable fact that mechanical means of production and the specialisation that accompanies them have brought about a disturbing diminution of the individual's creative faculties and his enjoyment of creative work. Moreover, salesmanship, with its purpose of selling as much as possible at the lowest possible price, has brought about an almost continuous loss in quality.

All this goes to show that the wellbeing of small peoples is indeed a cultural matter of the very greatest importance, and we do not doubt that a large surge of opinion in the Nordic countries will support action in favour of indigenous peoples and even more so of those 'minority' peoples of a more advanced stage of cultural development. An indication that this is so may lie in the spontaneous protestations which have taken place from time to time almost

throughout Scandinavia, against the way in which the whites have treated the coloured population in the Union of South Africa.

If we are to help the less favoured groups, we must first establish how this should be done.

The most radical solution to the problem would indeed be to annul Article I:2, 7 of the UNO Statutes and in its place insert a clause giving UNO the right to intervene in the 'internal affairs' of nations. But, it is very doubtful whether such an alteration could be put through, and it is, thus, even less likely that UNO could secure the necessary authority to carry out interventions of this kind when deemed necessary.

There is, however, a realm in which action on the part of UNO would not inevitably meet with insurmountable difficulties and which has a fundamental importance to the defence of the cultured life of the peoples referred to: we refer to the sphere of language. Indeed, it is the most important aspect of the whole question. To defend the mother-tongues of small minorities and of indigenous peoples is the fundamental basis on which the protection of these groups of peoples must be built. This is because language itself is not, as it is so often wrongly thought to be, a reciprocal method of expressing preexistent concepts and ideas. Not so, it is indissolubly linked to such concepts and ideas: the more languages there are, the more ways there are of thinking.

It is likewise incorrect to think, as is often the case, that the languages of the so-called civilised peoples are superior to those of the so-called primitives. To the student of languages, who is the only competent authority, no language is superior to another,

but each has its own intrinsic merits. It is true that many scientific and technical terms are non-existent in the languages of indigenous peoples, but that is only because such peoples have not yet had need to use such terms: they will introduce them into their own tongues by means of neologisms or borrowed terms when the need is felt. It is thus that cultured peoples have always done, and still do. On the other hand, generally speaking there is a greater degree of subtlety in the expression of interdependent ideas in the languages of indigenous peoples than there is in those of more cultured peoples.

Since language and thought are permanently linked, and since an equally strong relationship exists between thought and culture, if a language becomes extinct, inevitably the intellectual development of which that language is the expression likewise comes to an end. It would seem that not one single fact can be adduced against this thesis. The American negroes, who gave up their own original languages to take up English, have certainly retained their own dances and their own folksongs, but nothing else; indeed, they would not have preserved so much if the poverty of the white Americans in the artistic field had not made them 'borrowers'.

The world is impoverished every time a culture disappears. For instance, it is easy to imagine what world literature would become if all nations wrote in the same language. In losing their own language, writers would lose contact with the traditions of their country and throughout the world books would eventually end by being as like as two peas in a pod. To a certain extent it would, of course, be practical if all Nordic peoples abandoned their own language to adopt English. But who among them would agree to do

this? Practically none, because everyone feels instinctively that Nordic languages and the cultures of Nordic countries are inseparable; are, in fact, the same thing. The same is true of all peoples - whether they be Icelanders or inhabitants of the Faroes - whose languages have survived; the Catalans, whose language is still recognised, but is constantly being eroded away; the Esquimaux and Laplanders, whose languages are protected, albeit insufficiently; or the Basques and the Ainus (the latter being the aborigenes of Japan) whose languages are submitted to systematic persecution or to a policy of denigration; they are heading inevitably for extinction if nothing efficacious is done to safeguard them.

The salvage work which we advocate here is urgent. Every decade sees the disappearance of many of the lesser languages of the world, and if this trend is not halted, relatively more important languages will also disappear. It is thus estimated that within forty years' time the Basque language as spoken in the French Basque country will no longer exist; and the situation is even worse insofar as Ainu is concerned.

To avoid all misunderstanding or misinterpretation of our plea, we would like to emphasize that we do not claim that small peoples have no need to learn the language of their numerically superior neighbour peoples, or a 'greater' language. Most people find it useful to know several languages, and this is always an advantage for everyone from the cultural point of view. But the question of the preservation of the languages of small peoples depends not on 'ors' but on 'ands'. Learning the language of another people does not necessarily imply neglecting one's own. This is self-evident

in the Nordic countries, even though it is not appreciated by many of the larger peoples.

To summarise, we would like to re-emphasize the following points:

- a) the extermination of a language, of a culture or of a people are one and the same thing;
- b) in political conditions, such as hold today, the only practical defence seems to be that of upholding individual languages and to a certain extent individual cultures;
- c) steps must be taken to initiate as soon as possible this defence aim.

We therefore ask the Nordic Councils to Unesco, at their forthcoming General Assembly in August 1962, to take favourable notice of our petition and to decide upon joint action at the next meeting of the General Conference of Unesco on the 17 September 1962.

Lund, 1 May 1962

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(Promoter)

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Annexe

List of those languages which are more especially threatened

Frisian, in the North West of Germany (but not in Holland)

Sorb, in Lusatia (East Germany)

Scottish (Gaelic) in the North West of Scotland

Breton, in Brittany

Basque, on both sides of the Franco-Spanish frontier and in the extreme West

Most of the Caucasian languages (except Georgian) in the Caucasus

Samoyede, on both sides of North Ural

The Finno-Ugrian languages in the Gulf of Finland (Ingrian, Wote; but not Estonian); on Lake Onega (Ludik and Vepse); in the Gulf of Rigá (Livian); to the East of the Urals (Wogul and Ostyak)

The Turkish dialects of Siberia (Altai, Baraba, Soyot, Karagass, Kaibal) and of the Caucasus (Kasi-kumuk, Artchi - 'karatchai' in the French text -, and Udi - 'nogai' in the French text)

Tungus in Siberia

Orochone, Olcha and Goldic in the Lower Tungus region

Oroko in Sakhalin

Yukghis in North-East Siberia

Chukchi, Koryak, Kamchadal and Gilyak in Eastern Siberia

Ainu in North Japan

Tibetan in Tibet, since the Chinese annexation

Brahui (Davidian), in Baluchistan

The aboriginal languages of Australia

The Indian languages of the United States and of most of the other American States

Bushman and Hottentot languages in South Africa

The action which we advocate should also embrace the dialects.  
For it is often only a question of taste whether a language variant

should be termed a dialect or a language. As an example of 'dialects' which are under particular danger, first and foremost in Europe one must mention Occitan (these are the dialects of the South of France, direct heritage of the Langue d'Oc of the Middle Ages). At the same time, Galician in the North West of Spain, Istro-Roumanian in the East of Istria, and Megleno-Roumanian in the North West of Salonika must also be mentioned.

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throughout Scandinavia, against the way in which the whites have treated the coloured population in the Union of South Africa.

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Bushman and Hottentot languages in South Africa

The action which we advocate should also embrace the dialects. For it is often only a question of taste whether a language variant

should be termed a dialect or a language. As an example of 'dialects' which are under particular danger, first and foremost in Europe one must mention Occitan (these are the dialects of the South of France, direct heritage of the Languo d'Oc of the Middle Ages). At the same time, Galician in the North West of Spain, Istro-Roumanian in the East of Istria, and Megleno-Roumanian in the North West of Salonika must also be mentioned.