

Building Intercultural Citizenship through Education: a human rights approach

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A Human Rights Approach to Cultural Diversity

How to live together peacefully and without violence has been a challenge for all humanity throughout history. It has frequently been achieved, but it has just as frequently failed. It appears that humans, like other animals, prefer to live with their own kind rather than with others who look, speak, eat, dress, behave and worship differently to their community, in short, who are culturally different. Human societies have developed all sorts of intricate distinctions between insiders and outsiders, between those who feel themselves superior and those who are excluded as inferior, who are sometimes even denied their essential humanity because of these artificial distinctions. Trade and travel notwithstanding, tribal values and connections still constitute for many the necessary road map for a successful existence.

In today's globalised and interconnected world, living together peacefully has become a moral, social and political imperative on which depends, to a great extent, the survival of humankind. No wonder that education in its widest sense is called upon to play a major role in this worldwide shared task. The Report of UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, stated clearly that 'the task of education is to teach, at one and the same time, the diversity of the human race and an awareness of the similarities between, and the interdependence of, all humans'. In the epilogue in which the various commissioners added some personal reflections, I wrote: 'In many countries there are tensions between the purposes and requirements of a "national" system of education, and the values, interests and aspirations of culturally distinct peoples. At the same time, in an increasingly interdependent world, conflicting tendencies pull in different directions: on the one hand, the trend toward national homogenisation and world uniformisation; on the other, the search for roots, community and distinctiveness, which for some can only be found by strengthening local and regional identities, and keeping a healthy distance from the "others", who are sometimes perceived as threatening'.²

Like so many other institutions, education is at a crossroads, especially regarding the looming issue of cultural diversity, national identity and social integration that many countries are now facing. The current crisis in a number of European countries, as elsewhere, concerning these issues comes easily to mind, and the literature on the subject is vast indeed, particularly in relation to immigration and religious and ethnic diversity. While this problematique was already quite visible when our report was published ten years ago, it has become more intense and more complex since then, not only in relation to education, but also to the field of social

policy and politics in general. Educational policies have addressed these areas directly, with varying results, but it appears that little significant progress has been made in harnessing educational resources to these runaway problems, leaving their solution to the politicians.

While issues related to immigration in the richer countries frequently get the headlines, less attention has been given to the educational and social challenges posed by cultural diversity in other contexts. In this article, I will refer particularly to the challenges posed by traditional ethnic and linguistic minorities in multicultural States, and specifically to the problems faced by indigenous peoples and communities. Their educational and cultural needs and demands are increasingly being framed in the language of human rights, based on the expanding international legal and institutional human rights system.³ The United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, endorsed a rights-based approach to development, human rights education is a growing field in educational practice, respect for cultural diversity is now enshrined in international and domestic laws, and the right of every person to education and to culture has become a mainstay of international human rights principles to which a majority of the world's States has subscribed.

Nowadays, it is recognised that peoples and communities have a right to live by their own culture; the right to be different from a majority or dominant group in a nation state is considered a fundamental human right. This does not necessarily mean that cultures should be considered as self-contained isolated units, but rather in interaction and dialogue with other such units. Hence the idea of intercultural citizenship that takes us beyond cultural diversity to creative interculturality.⁴ The right to education is recognised in various international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two International Covenants on Human Rights, the Convention against Discrimination in Education and ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR) posits that everyone has the right to take part in cultural life and that the right of everyone to education 'shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity', which can be interpreted as the respect for everybody's cultural identities and values. Of particular relevance is article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that indigenous children shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess or practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Cultural Rights and the Right to Education

The various issues related to the full enjoyment of cultural rights have only been considered with greater attention in recent years. Under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, States undertake to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and must adopt effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combat prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship amongst nations and racial or ethnical groups. The Convention acknowledges that special measures that may be taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or

individuals requiring such protection shall not be deemed racial discrimination; in other words, it recognises the need, on occasion, for positive or affirmative action in order to achieve these rights.

Measures of affirmative action in favour of disadvantaged minorities are a complex and much debated issue in many countries. They mainly involve access to education, equality in employment opportunities, as well as benefiting from various social services. While nobody denies that such measures are helpful to members of such minorities, there has also been criticism that they tend to downgrade averages (e.g. in educational attainment), that people may strive less hard to achieve good results in school or at work, and that others who may be equally or more meritorious than those who receive support may, in turn, become unjustly excluded. To my mind, such criticism is unwarranted, because the benefits of affirmative action have been widely demonstrated, yet, in some countries, public policy has moved away from affirmative action in recent years.⁵

The United Nations Minority Rights Declaration takes the international debate further by stating that 'States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity'. This may include appropriate legislation and public policies in the fields of education, language, economic and cultural development, as well as the protection of traditional and customary practices when not in contradiction with international human rights standards.⁶

Cultural rights and freedoms are now considered within the wider framework established by UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity.⁷ The Convention recalls 'that cultural diversity, flourishing within a framework of democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures, is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels' and recognises 'the need to take measures to protect the diversity of cultural expressions, including their contents, especially in situations where cultural expressions may be threatened by the possibility of extinction or serious impairment'. Principle 3 of the Convention acknowledges that 'the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions presuppose the recognition of equal dignity of and respect for all cultures, including the cultures of persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples'.

Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, adopted by the UNESCO-sponsored World Conference on Linguistic Rights, held in Barcelona, Spain, in 1996, affirms the right to be recognised as a member of a language group, to use one's own language both in private and in public, and to use one's own name, as well as the collective right of language groups to have their own language and culture taught. These and other rights are crucial to the full enjoyment by indigenous peoples of the right to education.

'Cultural liberty is a vital part of human development' states the United Nations Human Development Report of 2004, whilst it recognises the complexities and risks involved in managing cultural diversity in societies.⁸ The Report acknowledges that ethnic and cultural diversity within national societies are not 'good' or 'bad' *per se*, as some would argue, but rather an essential part of an historical process and of most contemporary nation-states. The debates concerning the advantages and disadvantages of a culturally unified State and a multicultural society continue to this day in many parts of the world.

In the monumental task of nation-building that many States in Europe and the Americas undertook during the 19th century, education was destined to play a crucial role. Schools became the preferred tool for social and cultural integration, curricula were designed to build good citizens, teach the official language, instill national values and assimilate and civilise the backward or primitive remnants of older times. During the post-colonial euphoria that engulfed many former European colonies in the mid-20th century, national integration through the school curriculum became the principal objective of educational policy in most African and Asian countries.

With few exceptions, most modern States have been multicultural throughout much of their history, despite efforts by political elites to impose cultural homogeneity through state policies. Nation-building from above, whilst successful in many instances, has also led on occasion to the formulation of alternative ethno-nationalist claims by excluded groups, and sometimes to demands for secession or autonomy, as well as to political upheaval and violence. Moreover, in many countries, the state model of a culturally homogenised nation does not fit the reality of a multilingual, multiethnic population, thus requiring political adjustments which, in some cases, have led to federal arrangements and power sharing, and in others to political tensions and sometimes violent conflicts.

Indigenous Peoples and their Right to Education

Indigenous peoples around the world (there are around 500 million, according to different estimates), as well as other ethnic minorities, have borne the brunt of these assimilationist cultural policies. The countries of Latin America that became independent in the 19th century excluded the indigenous peoples, the majority of their population, from the model of the nation-state. Indigenous languages and cultures were considered as inferior and not worthy of recognition. During the 20th century, state policies required the assimilation of the remaining indigenous populations into the dominant cultural model. Community identity was to be replaced by loyalty to the nation-state. In many countries, native children were coerced into attending missionary schools to be 'civilised' and converted to the 'true faith'.

In the second half of the 20th century, a vibrant indigenous movement demanding the recognition of human rights and dignity began to take shape in different parts of the world. In Latin America, this led to a series of constitutional reforms and new legislation in which indigenous peoples were finally legally recognised and the multicultural, multilingual and poly-ethnic nature of many States was constitutionally established. Currently, countries are faced with the challenge of turning legal principles into specific cultural rights and targeting social and cultural policies so that these rights can be achieved in practice. As yet, there is still a considerable implementation gap between existing legislation and the human rights enjoyed by indigenous peoples.⁹

A good example is provided by linguistic and educational rights, meaning here the right of indigenous peoples to receive education in their own languages, to use these in public life, in the administration of services, the courts and civil and penal proceedings, and to have access to the public media in their mother tongues. These rights were long denied them, but their full enjoyment strengthens cultural diversity and enriches the cultural life of any country. Linguistic, regional and national

minorities in other parts of the world have the same rights, although in some countries these are not officially recognised.

The formal education system provided by the State or religious or private groups has been a two-edged sword for indigenous peoples. On the one hand, it has often enabled indigenous children to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them to move ahead in life and connect with the broader world. On the other, especially when pedagogical programmes, curricula and teaching methods come from other cultural contexts that are removed from indigenous societies, formal education has also been used as a tool for forcibly changing and, in some cases, destroying indigenous cultures.

In recent years, many countries have adopted legislation on indigenous rights that usually includes the right to education and especially the right of indigenous people to be educated in their own language, within a context of recognition of and respect for their culture. However, various sources indicate that the principles and objectives set out in the aforementioned international instruments and in national legislation are far from being achieved in practice. Indigenous peoples encounter various difficulties in effectively exercising their right to enjoy their own culture in community with other members of their group and maintaining the use of their languages. For this reason, many indigenous organisations describe the problem of education as one of the fundamental issues affecting the full exercise of their human rights.

This situation has several aspects. First, there are the difficulties many indigenous people experience in gaining access to academic institutions. Secondly, many problems exist with regard to the institutionalisation of educational services for indigenous people. Most problematic of all, however, is the fact that the fundamental goal of education has long been the assimilation of indigenous peoples by the dominant culture ('Western' or 'national', depending on the circumstances), a culture that is alien to them, with the consequent disappearance or, at best, marginalisation of indigenous cultures within the education system. To a large extent, this is still the prevailing view in some countries' education systems, despite the existence of legislation to the contrary that sets specific objectives in this area.

Many countries have subscribed to multicultural principles and have set up programmes to bring formal education to indigenous peoples and communities. Some States have set up special institutions for the education of indigenous people. Significant progress in school attendance by indigenous children has been achieved in some countries. Canada provides funding so that 119,000 First Nations children can attend grades K-12 and another 26,000 First Nations and Inuit children can pursue higher education, but the government acknowledges that there are still major challenges to be met. In Mexico, the State provides assistance to 1,145,000 pupils from 47 indigenous groups in the form of 50,300 teachers in 19,000 educational centres through its bilingual and intercultural education programme. The academic performance of indigenous pupils, however, falls far below that of the non-indigenous population. In Chile, the levels of education attained by the indigenous population are significantly lower than those of the non-indigenous population; twice as many indigenous people lack any formal education at all (6.3% as compared to 3.1%) or have not completed basic education (21.3% as compared to 10.2%).

Universal elementary schooling for indigenous children is still an unachieved goal, due to a number of factors. First, the geographical dispersion or isolation of

many small rural or nomadic indigenous communities makes it difficult to provide them with educational services, and many studies have shown that the presence of such services among this population falls below the national average. In many cases, it is also hard for indigenous children to travel long distances (often on foot and under difficult environmental conditions, with no adequate transport) to attend school with regularity. I have received much documentation on this situation in most of the countries I visited on my missions as Special Rapporteur for the United Nations.

In Colombia, the level of education on indigenous reservations is reported to be minimal, owing to a lack of infrastructure and teachers. In state schools in Ecuador, the Government runs a school food programme for indigenous children, yet a study shows that over 1.3 million pupils do not regularly receive their breakfasts and lunches. In the Russian Federation, indigenous peoples in the North find their access to schools restricted by their remote situation, the vast distances and transport difficulties, as well as the deteriorating school infrastructure. These peoples' economic problems exist alongside a number of serious social problems such as unemployment and high rates of alcoholism, suicide and infant mortality to create an environment in which it is hard to determine what educational strategy is most appropriate to local conditions. Public spending on education for indigenous children is generally lower than for other sectors of the population, teachers of indigenous children tend to receive lower pay and incentives than other teachers and their level of preparation is also below average.

In addition, indigenous children often do not attend school with the same regularity as other children, even if they have, at least in principle, an opportunity to do so. Sometimes this is because they are needed by their parents in the field or in the home, especially at certain times of the year such as harvest time or grazing periods. There are also many instances in which girls do not attend as a result of gender prejudice within the family. Poverty and poor nutrition amongst indigenous children are other factors that often limit school attendance. Comparative data show that indigenous girls attend school less often than boys. All this leads one to conclude that there are still serious obstacles impeding indigenous children's access to schools. I have recommended that States with indigenous populations redouble their efforts in the short term to improve indigenous children's access to education.

There is also evidence of various types of discrimination against indigenous children in schools, particularly when they live alongside non-indigenous populations, and especially in urban centres where recent indigenous immigrants live in precarious conditions. Because they are not fully competent in the language of instruction, indigenous children are ignored in classes and their performance tends to be lower. Later on, they are often classified as 'problem children', which makes the situation worse. If teachers are ignorant of the indigenous culture, they cannot communicate well with indigenous pupils, who are stigmatised from the outset.

In Thailand, for example, it is reported that education is offered only to students who hold Thai nationality, thereby excluding many members of minorities and indigenous peoples who are immigrants or who lack citizenship documents, and that indigenous languages are not used in schools. Likewise in Japan, the education system does not recognise or promote the history, language or culture of the Ainu, the original inhabitants of Hokkaido, even though the law acknowledges the importance of Ainu culture for the country's heritage.

In Latin America, 25 million indigenous women constitute the population group having the fewest opportunities to obtain work, land, education, health care and justice. From a very young age, girls spend at least five hours a day doing domestic chores, and most of them do not set foot in a school until the age of 10. In Guatemala, indigenous girls reportedly end up with 0.8 years of education, as compared with 1.8 years for indigenous boys and higher levels for non-indigenous children. Also in Guatemala there are reports that indigenous girls and young women are sometimes subjected to discrimination because they wear traditional dress to school, despite Ministry of Education Agreement No. 483, which prohibits such discrimination. In Kenya's Masai community, indigenous girls occupy a transitional position between their parents' family and that of their husbands. Here, the need to educate girls is not considered to be very important, since many families feel that there is no point in making an economic investment in a woman's education if its fruits are to be enjoyed by her husband's family. Most families prefer for women to remain at home to carry out domestic chores and take care of children and siblings. Because of these duties, girls cannot attend schools that in most cases are located hours away from their communities.

The exclusion and discrimination suffered by indigenous girls have serious consequences for society. The lack of access can contribute to high rates of infant and maternal mortality, fertility and malnutrition, indicators that are closely associated with women's level of education. This is compounded in some African countries by the practice of female genital mutilation, which also penalises girls of school age and seriously undermines the realisation of the most fundamental principles and values associated with the right to life and human dignity. Whilst female genital mutilation is outlawed in some East African countries, it is still widely practised because it is considered to be a culturally significant rite of passage. Some women's rights groups are promoting alternative acceptable cultural practices that would eliminate the physical harm done to young girls.

Indigenous children are also very often the victims of low quality and culturally inappropriate education. All too often, the curricula in indigenous schools are designed to develop conformity with national ideals, without taking into consideration the cultural and linguistic specificities of indigenous peoples. Discrimination in education is primarily reflected in the tendency to use schools as a preferred means of assimilating indigenous peoples into the cultural model of the majority or dominant society. The curricula are generally designed for urban children and thus have little relevance to indigenous environments. Indeed, for years, the very goal of indigenous education in many countries was to 'civilise' indigenous children by teaching them the language, culture and knowledge of the dominant group, which after the colonial era was that of the hegemonic nationality. Education provided by the State or missionary groups operated to that end. Whole generations of indigenous children passed through such schools in which they were subjected to linguistic, religious and cultural discrimination.

It is clear that such education has been largely successful, since, over the years, the dominant or hegemonic society succeeded in assimilating large segments of the indigenous population through public or missionary schools. At the same time, it has served to accelerate the transformation and ultimate disappearance of indigenous cultures, and over time a great many indigenous languages have continued to vanish.

A particularly notorious phenomenon in this regard has been the existence of boarding schools for indigenous students. In many cases, these institutions played an important role in ensuring access to and continued attendance at school whilst also providing, where necessary, food and health-care services, especially when the population was scattered and communication was difficult. On the other hand, in many places, such institutions were relentless in their efforts to separate whole generations of indigenous students from their cultural roots and, very often, their families, doing irreparable harm to the survival of indigenous cultures and societies. A particularly striking case is the Residential Schools of Canada, which, for many years, were designed to thwart the continuation of the cultures of the First Nations. In many cases, these schools were also the scene of physical, sexual and psychological abuse of indigenous students. The Federal Government of Canada has set up a programme to award compensation with a view to making reparations for the injustice done. Survivors of these schools still talk about having suffered 'transgenerational grief'.¹⁰

The Need for Culturally Appropriate Education

UNESCO stresses the need for a linguistically and culturally relevant curriculum in which the history, values, languages, oral traditions and spirituality of indigenous communities are recognised, respected and promoted. Indigenous peoples are now calling for a school curriculum that reflects cultural differences, includes indigenous languages and contemplates the use of alternative teaching methods. Unfortunately, in most of the world's countries, indigenous cultures have been reflected in educational texts and materials in an inappropriate and disrespectful way, which has further contributed to discrimination and prejudice against indigenous people in the wider society. One of the main problems here has been the lack of participation by indigenous people in the planning, programming and implementation of the existing curriculum, which is generally established by central authorities who do not necessarily attach priority to indigenous issues. It is important that curriculum content and methodology be legitimised and accepted by members of the community.

Today, States are increasingly adopting educational policies that are in harmony with the rights and cultural needs of indigenous peoples. Many countries have special indigenous education programmes that aim to respect indigenous cultures and their languages, traditions, knowledge and lifestyles. This implies several tasks. First, teaching must be in the children's mother tongue. The promotion and dissemination of indigenous languages are key aspects to be considered in providing culturally appropriate education. Language becomes an essential tool for transmitting indigenous culture, values and world view. Secondly, it has been recognised that education must be placed in the context of local indigenous communities' own culture. However, such programmes also promote the opening up of communities to the national society, which means that instruction in the regional or national language must begin at an early age through a system of bilingual education with an intercultural focus.

Given the diversity of living conditions of indigenous peoples in the world, indigenous education cannot conform to a single model; teaching methods must be adapted to actual situations. While there are many successful examples of intercultural bilingual education, not all countries with indigenous populations

have adopted this model. Moreover, even when it exists on paper, its implementation, according to several studies, leaves much to be desired, and the results achieved are not always entirely satisfactory.

In Guatemala, the 1995 Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, an essential part of the Peace Accord which put an end to 30 years of civil war, sets out a full set of measures for the recovery, protection, promotion and development of indigenous languages; it also provides for the launching of a major reform of the education system with a view to consolidating bilingual and intercultural education and ensuring the access of indigenous peoples to education. Yet there is still no general system of intercultural bilingual education actually used in schools in small towns and villages, as reflected in curricula adapted to the language, needs, values and systems of these communities. The prevailing model is based on Spanish language education.

The inclusion of indigenous languages in school curricula has not, however, been enough to close the gap between the academic performance of indigenous students and the non-indigenous population. Significant problems still exist in the standardisation of spelling of indigenous languages, the teaching of indigenous languages as a mother tongue and the methodology for teaching second languages. One serious problem is the lack of well-trained bilingual indigenous teachers. Few countries have given priority to their training. Instructors who are trained in traditional teacher-training institutions know little or nothing about indigenous cultures and generally do not speak any indigenous language. Even young indigenous teachers who are trained in such traditional institutions quickly learn to devalue their own culture and adopt the official assimilationist pedagogical model. Any effort to strengthen bilingual intercultural education must start with the training of the teachers who are to provide it. This often means overcoming institutional resistance, promoting a change in attitude among ministry officials and education departments and even among teachers' associations and unions within the formal education system.

Another problem is the lack of teaching materials that are suitable for intercultural education. Bilingual intercultural education can only be successful when schools have textbooks, supplementary teaching and audiovisual materials, etc., that are prepared in indigenous languages and are adapted to indigenous cultures. The preparation of such materials cannot be improvised, but must be carried out by multidisciplinary teams over a period of years. Poor countries have not been able to carry out such projects, even though several have tried. It is chiefly in the richer countries that progress has been made in this area. Pedagogical problems abound, and none of them have yet been solved. Indigenous communities increasingly assume responsibility for developing their own teaching methods and running their own schools. The right to education cannot be fully exercised until these obstacles are overcome.

Bilingual intercultural indigenous education is becoming widespread in the early grades of elementary schooling; it then tends to spread throughout the whole basic education system, and, in some countries, institutions of higher learning designed to meet the needs and address the cultural and linguistic situations of indigenous peoples have already been set up.

During the colonial period, education in Greenland was very limited. With self-government instituted in 1979, indigenous people began to demand more effective and appropriate education that would combine local culture with inte-

gration in the global society. In 2002, Parliament established the *Atuarfitsialak* programme, a sweeping educational reform that addressed these needs and is now being fully implemented.

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network is developing a school curriculum based on aboriginal knowledge. The Kativik school district in the autonomous territory of Nunavut in Canada is developing an innovative bilingual education programme in Inuttitut, English and/or French that integrates local knowledge with courses to prepare students for modern life.

Mexico launched an indigenous education programme in public elementary schools in the 1960s that was ultimately staffed by thousands of bilingual teachers. Curriculum content and teaching methods adapted to indigenous cultures were designed, and readers were produced in most indigenous languages, but the training of bilingual teachers was inadequate. The programme never received the necessary support and resources from the authorities to make it a real educational option for indigenous children. Despite these efforts, 25% of the indigenous population over the age of 15 are illiterate, and, of this group, a higher proportion are women. Thirty-nine per cent of the indigenous population between the ages of 5 and 24 do not attend school. Three indigenous universities and a National Institute of Indigenous Languages have been established in recent years and their accomplishments have yet to be evaluated.

In Ladakh in Northern India, the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) has succeeded in radically changing the traditional assimilationist education system and has enjoyed noteworthy success, with support from the authorities, in reverting to the use of their indigenous language (which is spoken by a quarter of a million persons) in schools and creating a local community-based education system that meets the needs of the people.

New Zealand began using Maori in pre-school education in 1982, an initiative that was subsequently extended to primary, secondary and higher education; however, it was not until 1987 that Maori was declared an official language of the country. Despite these efforts, statistics continue to show a wide disparity between Maori students and the rest of the population.

The 1997 education reform in Norway included a directive on the curriculum in Sami schools in 6 municipalities that applied to 1,500 students receiving instruction in that language. The programme objective is to teach traditional Sami cultural values and knowledge.

Major efforts to promote indigenous languages in the education system have been made in South Africa and Namibia. The Department of Education in Northern Cape Province is preparing teaching materials for primary schools in indigenous San and Nama communities. There is an awareness of the need to promote multilingualism and adult literacy as part of the official policy of recognising South Africa's indigenous peoples. Dictionaries have been prepared in some local languages and the Department of Education has produced supporting materials for use in schools. As use of the San language is also being promoted in Botswana, a network for the sharing of educational materials and strategies has been developed in the region.

The Ifugao of the Cordillera in Northern Philippines are endeavouring to reform the formal education provided by the State, and to incorporate indigenous systems of learning in school programmes, thereby increasing the empowerment of the indigenous people and ensuring authentic cultural development.¹¹

During my visits to indigenous communities in many countries in the past six years, I have received numerous complaints about insufficient attention being paid to indigenous education by government authorities. Education for indigenous peoples would seem to be the 'ugly duckling' of national education programmes and it is generally assigned low priority and inadequate budgets at the national level.

Education is not imparted only in classrooms. Audiovisual media are increasingly important, and, with the arrival of telecommunications in indigenous communities (especially television and the Internet), vast opportunities for distance learning have been opened that are still being explored in many areas, especially at the secondary and higher levels. This development is exemplified by the services provided by the University of Athabasca to various indigenous education centres in Western Canada. However, the problems mentioned earlier that hold back the expansion of bilingual intercultural education become even more acute where telecommunications are involved: a lack of trained teachers, inadequate teaching materials, teaching methods that are still in the developmental stage and so forth. Considerable progress has been made in some countries in the use of community radio stations for educational and cultural purposes, while in other countries such efforts run counter to legislation that gives priority to corporate commercial interests and sets obstacles to educational broadcasts. With the support of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, legislation in Mexico has been amended to increase opportunities for action by an extensive network of community radio stations operating in indigenous areas, but these stations run up against the commercial interests of private broadcasters, whose quasi-monopolic position in Mexican broadcasting was recently (June 2007) overturned by the Supreme Court.

Given the havoc once wreaked by the imposition of rigid models of educational, linguistic and cultural assimilation in indigenous communities, some of these are trying to recover traditional communal types of non-formal education. To this end, they draw on the wisdom and knowledge of older persons, who are once again appreciated after having been devalued by formal educators. Many interesting and successful examples of this can be seen, e.g. among the Maori of Aotearoa New Zealand, some of the First Nations in Canada, the Sami in the Nordic countries, the Mapuche in Chile, the Quechua in Ecuador, the Masai in Kenya, the Ratankiri in Cambodia, the Sungai in Malaysia, the Chakma in India and many others. Sometimes these efforts form part of more structured education projects, whilst in other cases they take place outside the context of formal education. In all cases, however, they help to save the knowledge of the aboriginal culture, enhance cultural pride and identity amongst young people, strengthen ties to the land and the environment and offer indigenous youth an alternative view of their own future.

From Multiculturalism to Intercultural Citizenship

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are not the closed preserve of indigenous communities. In fact, they can only be successful if the prevailing attitudes of the national society can be changed. As the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity says, contemporary societies must recognise that they are multicultural in more than one sense, since, in addition to indigenous peoples,

there are also national and ethnic minorities, immigrants from different cultures and other groups demanding the right to exercise their cultural identity. For the most part, indigenous peoples are virtually invisible in the formal education systems of the urban and rural non-indigenous population. What is more, they are often treated with contempt and subjected to discrimination in history, geography, literature, art and social studies textbooks and by their own teachers. Real intercultural education must also be taught in education systems nationwide, for only then will the human rights of indigenous peoples be fully recognised.

To make respect for cultural diversity a reality, as UNESCO has suggested, and to reform education systems with a view to redirecting education towards total respect for all human rights, especially cultural and linguistic rights, indigenous peoples must be able to recognise themselves in this effort. This requires that they participate freely in all phases of the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of such reforms. To date, one of the weaknesses of education systems that fail to meet the needs of indigenous peoples has been their lack of involvement in the design of education programmes and policies from the outset. Such participation must involve parents, legitimate representatives of indigenous communities and indigenous schoolteachers, administrators and staff and members of the educational bureaucracy. Education plans and programmes must not be designed in far-off offices by experts who lack direct contact with indigenous communities.

For example, in Canada, the First Nations and the Inuit have the option of establishing their own education programmes and exercise control over primary and secondary schools, thanks to growing support from the Government and local and community initiatives. Nunavut Arctic College provides Inuit students with education in certain fields of study and aspires to become a genuine Inuit university. The Canadian Government has announced the establishment of an Aboriginal Languages and Cultures Centre to promote indigenous languages and has supported the establishment of the First Nations University of Canada.

The specific problems facing indigenous peoples make it necessary to implement special education programmes. For example, given the over-representation of indigenous youth in the juvenile justice system¹² it would be beneficial to organise special education programmes for the rehabilitation of indigenous offenders who are in prison or have been released. There is also a need for special programmes for indigenous young people and women who, for various reasons, become involved in trafficking in women, the sex industry, drug addiction and alcoholism. In rehabilitation and prevention programmes of this type, which are already being implemented in various countries, the role of traditional indigenous culture and the involvement of respected elders can be vital.

While the main problems related to intercultural and bilingual indigenous education now centre around the primary and secondary levels, significant progress has been made in recent years at the level of higher education. For reasons set out above, indigenous students' access to universities has traditionally been difficult owing to such factors as geographical remoteness, cost, cultural prejudice and the low number of indigenous students completing pre-university studies. When at last they do obtain a university diploma, most indigenous students tend to remain in urban areas, look for jobs in the modern economy and adapt to the lifestyle of a culture other than their own, which results in a loss for their communities and peoples of origin.

Three or four decades ago some universities, especially in wealthy countries, set up centres or departments specialising in subjects related to indigenous peoples. In North America 'native studies centres' abounded. Affirmative action (scholarships, grants, quotas, etc.) made it possible to increase the number of indigenous students in some universities. Special courses on indigenous topics made their appearance. An interesting experience is taking place at the University of California at Los Angeles, which has set up the Tribal Learning Community and Educational Exchange (TLCEE) to help generate a curriculum based both on Western scholarship and tribal knowledge.

There is now increasing demand for the establishment of universities with programmes that are designed specifically for indigenous communities. A growing number of such centres of higher education now exist in various parts of the world, including New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America, the Nordic countries, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Mexico. They aim to provide high-quality education that meets the current needs of indigenous peoples, forge a close link between the university and indigenous communities and train an indigenous professional and technical elite that can work for the development of their peoples and help them relate to the modern, globalised world.

The Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URACCAN), established in the early 1990s, is the first indigenous university in Central America. Its focus is multiethnic and its goal is to promote and strengthen continuing education for the people of the Atlantic coast. The University has played a central role in the development of the Intercultural Bilingual Education Programme (PEBI) for the indigenous people of the area.

Several United Nations agencies provide support for the education of indigenous peoples. UNICEF reports that it is involved in a number of intercultural education projects in various parts of the world. In Bolivia, for example, it provides support for four indigenous education councils that advise the Government in this area, and in Brazil it has collaborated with an indigenous council of the Guarani people. In Venezuela, it promotes the civil registration of all children, which facilitates their admission to school, while, in Mexico, it supports the construction of adequate school infrastructure in certain indigenous areas. In Tanzania, it promotes education among nomadic communities. Under ILO Convention No. 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples, the International Labour Organization is involved in training programmes on the needs of indigenous children in South America, China, India, the Sudan and the Great Lakes region of Africa, amongst others.

UNESCO provides support for a number of initiatives such as the Mayan bilingual and intercultural education project for primary schools in Guatemala. Its key components are the teaching of two languages, two mathematical systems, complementary value systems and comparative world-views; and Maya art in a comparative perspective.

Besides the difficulties associated with the practical implementation of education and language rights, some influential voices in government and the media believe that a country should only have a single official and unifying language and that the promotion of linguistic diversity leads to the break-up of the nation (the 'Tower of Babel' effect). They also argue that the school system should teach only the country's official language and that minority tongues should only be spoken at home, if at all, or at best in community schools under the responsibility of the

parents. Usually, school teachers are not adequately trained to handle minority or regional languages, and there are insufficient teaching materials in these languages. The full enjoyment of language rights in education and at all other levels by indigenous peoples and linguistic minorities remains limited by lack of resources and of priority at official levels. Indigenous peoples and minorities do not reject the use of a national or vehicular language and they favour full bilingual intercultural education, which is still more of an aspiration than a reality in many countries. Such problems must be solved in a participatory and democratic manner by all parties concerned.¹³

There are numerous examples of indigenous peoples and other linguistic minorities organising themselves to preserve and promote their endangered languages. Some years ago, a group of Maori women in Aotearoa, New Zealand, worried that younger people were forgetting their traditional language, came together to develop community schools in which Maori was taught. Now, years later, there are hundreds of such schools at all levels receiving government support to carry out their important tasks. Similar projects exist among First Nations in Canada, tribal indigenous peoples in India, the Saami in northern Scandinavia and the Cordillera peoples in the Philippines, as well as in Latin American countries such as Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. Through the exercise of their cultural rights many indigenous peoples and socially excluded minorities (such as the Roma in Europe) are able to recover their identity and dignity, are now respected and recognised by other groups and are able to take part more fully in the cultural life of their country. But it has taken them a long struggle to achieve this goal, and it is not yet fully realised.

Adopted in 1992, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages recognises the rights of groups and their members in certain territories to maintain, use and promote these languages and requires States to adopt the necessary measures for their protection. The UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity enjoins states parties to encourage individuals and groups to 'create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to their own cultural expressions, paying due attention to the special circumstances and needs of women as well as various social groups, including persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples'. Although it has become fashionable recently in some quarters to reject public involvement in cultural policies and to leave cultural matters to the market, only by implementing cultural rights can this objective be achieved and States must include specific cultural programmes and budgets in their policy objectives to do so.

Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities have long insisted on the protection of their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which is an integral part of their internationally recognised cultural rights that are linked to the right to education. Therefore educational policies must perforce include the cultural rights that UNESCO, amongst others, has been promoting worldwide. In the current global atmosphere that is favourable to the privatisation of community resources (such as archaeological and historical monuments, sacred sites, spirit forests, ethno-botanical knowledge), the cultural rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities have become increasingly vulnerable, so that a culturally appropriate approach to their educational needs must include these wider concerns.

In the legal tradition of the Western countries, human rights refer mainly to universal individual freedoms, i.e. the liberties of the individual person which can

be held against the State. Cultural rights, in general, belong to this category, because, for instance, the rights to education, the use of one's mother tongue, freedom of religious belief and of artistic creation pertain to the individual. But cultural rights are also something more.

In fact, many cultural rights can only be exercised in the context of specific group life, that is, within the framework of culturally defined collectivities. If community rights are not recognised, then the individual rights of the community's members may be denied.

What good is an individual right to my own language, if I cannot use it in school, the administration or the public media? Language is not only a means of communication, but an integral part of one's identity and culture because it shapes our thought processes, our perceptions of our environment as well as our emotions and spirituality. If the members of a linguistic community are denied the public use of their language (as happened to many indigenous and tribal peoples and minorities, such as the Kurds in Turkey, the Amazigh in North Africa, the Ainu of Japan, the Sami in Scandinavia, the Indians of the Americas, the Catalonians in Spain), their inherent human rights are being denied. Consequently, the protection of linguistic group rights is one of the components of respect for cultural diversity and an integral part of the right to education.

Yet for historical and practical reasons it is obvious that there are many advantages to the widespread use of certain vehicular languages. Thus when post-colonial States in Africa and Southern Asia achieved their independence, they decided to continue the use of the major colonial languages in public administration, the school systems and international relations. And increasingly, States demand of immigrants that they be fluent in the official national language before they may apply for permanent residence or citizenship (an issue that is currently being debated in the US, France and other countries).

Multilingual States have to deal with these issues on an everyday basis and solutions are not always easy, as shown, amongst others, in European cases such as Belgium, Switzerland, Spain and the former Yugoslavia. Recognising that linguistic rights pertain not only to individuals but also to language communities, the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights declares the right to be recognised as a member of a language community; to use of one's own language both in private and in public; to use one's own name; to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin; and to maintain and develop one's own culture. To this would be added the rights of language groups to be taught in their own language, of access to cultural services, to an equitable presence of their language and culture in the media, and to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socio-economic relations.

A truly multicultural society cannot exist simply as a collection of self-contained culturally distinct collectivities; these communities must be open to the rest of the world and their members must be free to interact with others. Without such dynamic group relationships there cannot be an inclusive society. Plural monoculturalism doth not a multicultural society make.¹⁴ Therefore, rather than simply preserving diversity and multiculturalism, the task before us is to build truly intercultural societies.

UNESCO defines interculturality as 'the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect'.¹⁵ This ideal can be achieved through the

conscious building of intercultural citizenship. In the Canadian context, Kymlicka proposed the concept of multicultural citizenship as a form of differentiated integrative citizenship that is based not only on the recognition of diversity, but also on a commonly held legal status as well as a shared identity.¹⁶ Based on UNESCO's concept of interculturality, the idea of intercultural citizenship points to the building of political and social institutions by which culturally diverse communities within a multiethnic and multilingual nation can solve their differences democratically by consensus without tearing apart the common structures and values or having to abandon their particular cultural identities, such as language, culture and ethnicity. Moreover, it also suggests that such communities have a role to play in truly democratic governance. This conception of citizenship recognises that between individuals and States there are organised sub-national units that are important in articulating demands and interests of culturally diverse communities, and are essential for the well-being of the wider society.

Such an approach may be more suitable in some contexts than in others. Certainly countries that receive numerous immigrants from around the world are faced with issues of integration, whereas others will deal more specifically with the historical rights of territorial, religious, national and regional minorities and indigenous peoples that have long been excluded from full participation in the wider society. Some countries, of course, need to deal with both kinds of issues. The immigration issue is much debated in Europe and North America. In the former, nationalists (and extreme right wing parties) will argue that their national identities are being overwhelmed by massive immigration from culturally different regions of the world (mainly Africa and the Middle East) and that this should stop. In the US, similar positions are espoused in relation to immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. The debate over immigration, whilst it is often framed in racial and cultural terms, results from the growing world inequalities created by the global economy. It also challenges established nation-states to rethink and readjust their cultural identities and adapt their cultural and social policies to the changing global environment.

In any case, the group rights of culturally differentiated communities require specific policies in the cultural field that States must address in order to comply with their international obligations. These policies, as mentioned before, must relate to the provision of culturally appropriate educational practices (K through higher education), respect for and promotion of minority languages (including access to the media), respect for collective religious practices and spirituality, including of course non-religious secular identities and freedoms), as well as the protection of culturally significant heritage and intellectual property rights.

These are not merely academic or abstract questions, because they are constantly faced in daily life and relate to the exercise of human rights as a guide to living, as a means to achieve an individual's full human capabilities in freedom. The issue is often raised that the values which are sometimes held in certain culturally defined communities may actually limit rather than further the rights of individuals in such communities. This is surely the case of patriarchal societies in which the rights of women are severely curtailed. Examples abound, from societies where marriages for young people (mainly girls) are pre-arranged, to severe limits on the public appearance and activities of girls and women, to sexual mutilation and domestic violence. Such discrimination occurs to a greater or lesser degree in many societies, and it is often upheld, mainly by men appealing to so-called 'traditional

cultural values'. In these cases, do cultural rights and freedoms pertain to the community as a whole or to its individual members? These issues are difficult to resolve but one thing is certain: the solution must lie with the community itself. If an outside authority attempts to impose its values (be it the State, a dominant religious or linguistic group or liberals who do so with the best of intentions and in the name of human rights and freedoms) it can do so only by curtailing the accepted cultural values of specific communities, which, strictly speaking, would go against the principle of respect for cultural diversity and cultural rights.

Cultural identities are essential elements for the constitution of societies and for the full human development of their individual members. We are, after all, social and cultural animals. But as individuals we may have many other identities as well, some of which, depending on the circumstances, may compete with our cultural identity. We are usually born into a cultural identity (that of our families, our community, our peers), but during our lifetime we have the opportunity to build on this identity, to construct other identities or to change them. This is a part of our cultural rights: to live by one's cultural identity, and also to change one's identity. For some contemporary analysts, choosing an identity appears to be as easy as deciding on a package of cereals on a supermarket shelf. Given all the inherent tensions in the current era of identity politics, they argue, it would be convenient to downgrade the importance of cultural identities and emphasise everybody's common humanity. One such approach argues that we should all endeavour to become enlightened cosmopolitans.¹⁷ This is more easily said than done, because, in real life, things are more complicated. Ethnic identities should not be considered as some primordial essence of human societies and their members, which can be turned on and off at will. We are dealing, rather, with labels, classifications and ideologies that can be constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed as part of a process of social and cultural change. In the modern world, as in ancient times, such identities can become powerful mobilising forces for good as well as evil. We are witnessing this duality in many places at the beginning of the 21st century.

Some Conclusions

Although the right to education is universally recognised, indigenous peoples still do not exercise it fully. The degree of illiteracy, poor academic achievement and poor school attendance, especially at the middle-school and higher levels, tends to be higher amongst indigenous peoples than in the rest of the population. While some countries are making a major effort to improve education levels amongst indigenous peoples, many obstacles continue to impede their access to education.

The demographic dispersion of indigenous peoples and the lack of adequate transport often make it hard for children to attend the few schools that do exist in indigenous areas. Economic, social and cultural factors can make it hard for children to take part in educational activities. Schools in indigenous areas generally lack adequate facilities and resources, and budgets and teaching resources are insufficient. Various types of discrimination against indigenous education persist in the education administration systems of many countries.

The main obstacle to the full enjoyment of the right to education has been assimilationist models of teaching and the education system's failure to appreciate indigenous languages and cultures. In recent years, this situation has begun to change, and there are now several countries that officially recognise indigenous

cultures and agree on the need for bilingual and intercultural education. Indigenous peoples are demanding recognition of their right to education that is taught in their own language and is adapted to their culture.

Intercultural bilingual education faces many hurdles, from the small number of inadequately trained bilingual teachers to problems in developing appropriate teaching materials and methods, and the need to involve indigenous communities in the designing and running of their education centres at all levels. Progress is being made in this area in many countries, from pre-school to higher education, albeit with mixed results. There is a tendency to focus on continuing education as an alternative in the area of indigenous education.

Indigenous education, adapted to indigenous peoples' cultures and values, is the best way of ensuring the right to education; it does not mean shutting out the outside world or ignoring the challenges posed by national societies or the global economy, but is viewed by indigenous communities themselves as a necessary tool for the full personal, social and cultural development of aboriginal peoples.

NOTES

1. Member of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People, Professor Emeritus El Colegio de México. A preliminary version of this article was presented at the 2nd World Forum on Human Rights, Nantes, July 2006.
2. 'Learning: the Treasure Within', pp. 92, 231.
3. This refers principally to the activities carried out by the United Nations, but also to regional institutions in Europe, Africa and the Americas. See the UN human rights website: www.ohchr.org with links to other pages. The author has been actively involved in these issues at the UN and in the Inter-American system.
4. See Javier Pérez de Cuellar *et al.* (1995) *Our Creative Diversity*, Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, UNESCO.
5. See Yusuf Bangura and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Editors (2005) *Racism and Public Policy*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.
6. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1992.
7. Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in October 2005.
8. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004. Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, United Nations 2004.
9. See Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Report to the Human Rights Commission*, E/CN.4/2006/78, United Nations, 2006.
10. See Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Report on mission to Canada*, E/CN.4/2005/88/Add.3, United Nations, 2005.
11. These and other examples are taken from my report to the Human Rights Commission E/CN.4/2005/88, United Nations 2005.

12. See my report to the Human Rights Commission, E/CN.4/2004/80, United Nations, 2004.
13. See the author's report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights E/CN.4/2005/88 available at www.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/rapporteur/
14. This argument is made strongly by Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*, London, Norton, 2006.
15. Convention on Cultural Diversity, Article 4.8.
16. Will Kymlicka, 1995, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
17. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*, London, Norton 2006.