



## **The “Belém Letter” concerning the languages of Brazil’s Indigenous Peoples (2nd International Symposium “Viva Língua Viva”)<sup>1</sup>**

The world’s Indigenous peoples, their leaders, governments, and both governmental and non-governmental organizations have been convened by UNESCO to come together for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) for the purpose of maintaining, strengthening, vitalizing, revitalizing, and reclaiming Indigenous languages, as an alternative means to break the global imbalance that directly impacts the life of the living creatures of our planet.

We emphasize, as it concerns this global imbalance, the accelerated processes of extinction, disappearance, and dormancy of languages and especially of Indigenous languages in the 21st century. All of these factors are directly related to life on our planet. With every tree that is burned, with every river that becomes polluted, with every piece of land that is destroyed, the global climate crisis only intensifies.

In this worrying time, Indigenous peoples know that Indigenous languages are a part of our spirituality and of the life of Mother Earth and that they belong to the very same body: the body of our great Mother Earth.

In light of the threats to Indigenous cultures and languages, we must incorporate the fight to defend Indigenous languages into the broader fight to defend and demarcate our Native territories, since Indigenous languages are not disassociated from the territory, nor from the spirituality, nor from the well-being of their speakers. Rather, Indigenous languages are the memory of our peoples, ones which guide and orient us through our ancestors; Indigenous languages express millennium-old knowledge and our ancestral resistance, history, and cultures.

We demand that the Ministry of Original/First Peoples undertake action, based on current law, to support and guarantee the promotion of Indigenous languages. This demand is being put forth by the National Working Group for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages; by thirty-four Indigenous peoples; by leaders, elders, specialists, linguists, supporting institutions, partners, Indigenous organizations, and governmental and non-governmental entities who have come together for the 2nd International Symposium “Viva Língua Viva,” which was organized by the Federal University of Pará, the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi and the Brazilian Linguistics Association and which took place in the city of Belém (Pará state) between November 22nd and November 25th 2022. We recognize that it is of fundamental importance to begin with what has already been put forward in Brazil’s legal articles and official documents concerning the linguistic dimensions of Indigenous peoples, as well as the official documents from Unesco, as cited below:

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Adam Singerman, Syracuse University (adamsingerman@gmail.com)



## ARTICLES OF OIT 169

### Article 2.

1. Governments should take on the responsibility to develop, in partnership with the peoples themselves, a coordinated, systematic action plan that aims to protect these peoples' rights and to guarantee broader respect for their wholeness.

### Article 28.

3. Measures must be adopted in order to preserve the peoples' Indigenous languages and to promote the development and ongoing use of those languages.

Law 9394/96, concerning the right to differentiated/customized education.

### Article 231 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 which discusses:

The right to one's own language, keeping in perspective the distinct cosmological vision of each people and the need for Indigenous languages to be present in all parts of Indigenous communities' lives and lifestyles for the sake of promoting peace, justice, and well-being among Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples are to be guaranteed adequate treatment in the areas of health, justice, and economy. Also guaranteed is full communication with elders in their own language so as to guarantee health, knowledge, learning about the world, and promoting well-being.

The **Atlas of Endangered Languages** (UNESCO, 2010) which highlights the need for specific attention, strategies and methodologies for language learning and language teaching so as to strengthen intergenerational linguistic transmission beyond just the classroom or school environment.

The **International Decade of Indigenous Languages**, supported by UNESCO and by other national and international organizations.

The **Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages** (UNESCO, 2022).

The **National Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages** (BRASÍLIA, 2021):

All of our considerations and demands are oriented in terms of three axes: the non-existence of linguistic policies on the part of the Brazilian state towards the nation's diversity of Indigenous languages, noting that the Brazilian state's treatment of Indigenous languages has historically been restricted to Indigenous schooling, which is not sufficient to put a break on the processes of extinction/silencing of Indigenous languages; the need for state policies for languages and for the teaching of Indigenous languages; and the support of institutions, Indigenous organizations,



leaders, elders, associations, and federations, which are fundamental for the promotion of Indigenous languages beyond their communities.

WE CALL FOR THE:

- Creation of a **Department of Linguistic Policy inside of the new Ministry of Indigenous Peoples**, for the promotion of Indigenous languages, staffed with a multidisciplinary technical team focused on Indigenous languages.
- Creation of a **National Fund for the Promotion of Indigenous Languages**, to partner with other governmental institutions that work on language policy (for example, state-level education ministries, FUNAI and IPHAN).
- Real-time integration between the various levels of government (municipal/state/federal) for the purpose of guaranteeing the recognition, valorization, strengthening and preservation of Indigenous languages, with supervision of how resources are distributed to the aforementioned levels of government.
- Changes in education, including in national evaluations (for example, Provinha Brasil) in order to guarantee multilingualism.
- Strengthening the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages and the absolute number of speakers; growing and expanding the spaces in which Indigenous languages are spoken, such as television, radio, and other digital media platforms.
- Changes so that there will be respect for the dignity of Indigenous peoples, so that the system comes to accommodate the day-to-day education of those peoples rather than the other way around.

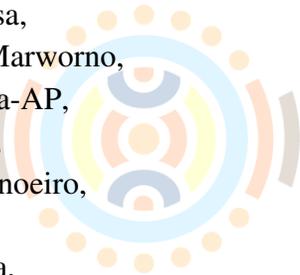
This letter is the result of a partnership between the National Working Group for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and its supporters, through a collective and collaborative process, bringing together proposals for promoting, valuing, recognizing, propagating and vitalizing the Indigenous languages of Brazil. We conclude by reaffirming the motto of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages: “Nothing for us without us!” No policy concerning Indigenous peoples should be established in our country without the full participation of the Indigenous peoples themselves throughout the decision-making process: deciding, consulting, planning, and implementing. Long live Indigenous languages!

Belém-Pará, November 25th 2022.



Below we list the Indigenous peoples who were represented at this event. Following that are the signatures of the representatives of those peoples and of the other participants at the 2nd International Symposium “Viva Língua Viva.”

1. Terena,
2. Kaingang,
3. Apalai,
4. Djeoromitxi,
5. Baniwa,
6. Tikuna,
7. Tembé,
8. Baré,
9. Tukano,
10. Galibi Kali'na,
11. Apurinã,
12. Macuxi,
13. Kambeba,
14. Rikbaktsa,
15. Galibi-Marworno,
16. Karipuna-AP,
17. Wayuru,
18. Āwa-Canoeiro,
19. Ikpeng,
20. Kokama,
21. Karajá,
22. Xakriabá,
23. Puruborá,
24. Wapichana,
25. Apyãwa -Tapirapé,
26. Sakurabiat,
27. Wai Wai,
28. Mÿky,
29. Munduruku
30. Aruã
31. Gavião-Akrãtikatêjê-PA
32. Haliti Paresi-MT
33. Warao
34. Manoki



2022-2032 | DÉCADA INTERNACIONAL DAS

Línguas Indígenas



2022-2032 | DÉCADA INTERNACIONAL DAS

Línguas Indígenas

Angélio Kezomaé-Daresi  
Eduardo Benival Hampide - Povo Hanoki  
Márcia M. Poampo Tixao - Povo Ikpeng  
Joaquim Wojumu - Povo Wajumu  
Thaíria Ajum - Povo Ajum  
Kamutaya Nilva Awa  
Tupay Mexxy  
Evandro de Sousa Bonfim - UFRJ  
Francisco Soares Figueiredo - UFRR, Makusi  
Geyson Wellington Salvea - UFMS  
Koratoari Daffarel - Ikpeng  
Geordiana Benama Arica - UNIFAP  
Adriane Quebril Valente Franco - Terena  
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ROBERTA PIRES DE OLIVEIRA - UFSC  
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 Carla Danielli N. da Costa - Museu Emilio Goeldi  
 Wilson Ubiwai Wai - Wai  
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 Nelivaldo Cardoso Santana - UFPA/Altamira  
 Manoel Alcêa Silva Martins Junior - UFPA/Breves  
 Thiago Gabriel Machado dos Santos - UFPA/Capanema  
 Bruner Fumemda S. B. Padovani - UFPA  
 Gabriela de Andrada Batista - PPGL/UFPA  
 Manoel Antonio de Oliveira Silva - Xakriabá  
 Milzimarca de Souza Silva - Esc. Est. Ind. Sizenando Duzig  
 Wlaxawo i Maurício Tapirapé - Escola Indígena Estadual Tapirapé  
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 anos da Década das Línguas Indígenas,  
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 Eleonor C.B. dos Santos - MPEB  
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