

# Oral Statement by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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**Language: English only**  
Human Rights Council  
18th session

15 September 2011

## **Item 3 (“Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development”)**

Thank you Mdm. President.

The Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) is deeply concerned that many States continue to deny minorities and indigenous peoples the right to maintain and use their own languages. The promotion and protection of this right is not only a key element of several UN treaties and declarations, including article 4 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and article 13 and 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but it is also enshrined in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA).

The STP is particularly concerned about the linguistic discrimination in the People's Republic of China, since the government has taken measures that have threatened the survival of the language of the Uyghur people, who are indigenous to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Since 2004, the government increased its efforts to shift the medium of instruction throughout the entire education system in the region from Uyghur to Mandarin. The authorities claim that the language policy is making the region's school system “bilingual,” but the trend has been toward eliminating instruction in Uyghur completely or relegating the language to a second level. In 2008, Xinjiang Chair Nur Bekri described criticisms of “bilingual” education as an attack from the “three forces” of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism – an accusation peaceful Uyghur dissent is often confronted with.

Language restrictions in Xinjiang have coincided with government restrictions on political, religious, cultural and economic freedoms and represent an attempt to dilute and erode Uyghur ethnic identity.

The STP encourages the four Special Procedures mandate holders to stand up for the Uyghur language as they stood up for the Tibetan language in October 2010 when they issued a joint urgent appeal to the Government of China regarding restrictions imposed on the use of Tibetan in schools in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

In addition, we call on the Chinese authorities to take measures to protect the languages of the minority and indigenous peoples living in its territory. Language is the most fundamental element of an ethnic group's identity and to deny a group the right to maintain and use its language is to deny that group the ability to maintain its identity.

Thank you.