

# CONSERVE YOUR MOTHER LANGUAGE

International Mother Language Day is designed to develop greater awareness and interest in linguistic and cultural traditions, and to inspire solidarity based on mutual interaction, understanding, tolerance, cohesion and respect within modern multicultural societies.

Nirmal Paul is the founder of Mother Languages Conservation (MLC) Movement International Inc. Here, he explains why libraries of all kinds should be celebrating International Mother Language Day on 21 February 2015.

In technical terms, language is the engineering of arranging sounds in a particular way to convey a message to others. Spoken and written languages are our main instrument of communication. Languages are a powerful tool for preserving and developing the tangible and intangible heritage of our civilisation. They are the foundations of formal education and gradual development, adapting to social, economic and generational changes of human society.

The term 'mother language' refers to the ancestral roots of a language family and culture. Considering our current environment of rapid technological development, migration and globalisation, the practice, protection and revitalisation of mother languages depends on understanding the long term interests, as well as motivational change of concerned linguistic communities.

Unfortunately, languages are globally associated with a history of gradual loss and decline. Linguists believe the declining trend of language has caused a reduction in the number of practiced languages to around 7,000, down from 20,000 in 800BC.

## Studies have revealed one language dies every fortnight.

Over the period of 1970–2005, the declining trend has exceeded 20%, and linguists are concerned that by the end of this century, half of today's languages will have become extinct. In Australia, about 90% of the country's 250 aboriginal languages are near extinction. Only seven have more than 1,000 speakers, and only two or more are likely to survive the next 50 years or so.

Losing a language means losing identity, culture, and the historical track of human civilisation. Mostly the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity will result in the inabilities for future generations to access integrated studies on chronological developments of human society, civilisation, development and globalisation.

To combat this unprecedented global trend, as well as to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism, the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) has been observed on 21 February every year since 2000.



In Australia, IMLD is celebrated every year at Ashfield Heritage Park, NSW and it was here the world's first monument to the movement was erected, referencing mother language conservation, multiculturalism, globalisation and the spirits of 21 February, in a design created to reach out to all linguistic communities.

In addition to on-going formal and institutional education, research and revitalisation programs running by governments and non-government organisations and institutions, the Mother Languages Conservation Movement International Inc has been working in support of the 1999 IMLD observance mission of UNESCO. Using the Ashfield monument design elements as a framework, we are supporting the establishment of Twenty-first (Ekushey) Corner bookshelves in libraries, community centres and academic institutions, created to collect and save alphabets used by their users and communities. We are also supporting the adoption of a standard policy by UN member countries to observe IMLD and encourage participation, and developing standard guidelines for technical and communication media to promote the Conserve Your Mother Language message and campaign.

The MLC Movement International is also in the process of publishing a book illustrating an effective integrated strategy for all concerned local, national and global authorities and institutions to adopt a policy on mother language conservation with leadership and guidance of UNESCO and the United Nations to encourage linguistics professionals to come together as a global community under the banner of Mother Language.

NIRMAL PAUL  
nirmalpaul@optusnet.com.au