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Remarks by PNG NRI Director Dr. Osborne Sanida on the Occasion of the 54th International Conference of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea themed: “Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of the South Pacific in IDIL 2022-2032”

Venue: PNG NRI Conference Centre, Port Moresby, PNG

Date: 21 September 2022

It gives me great pleasure to offer some remarks on this important occasion of the **54th International Conference of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea (LSPNG) themed: “Preserving and Promoting the Indigenous Languages of the South Pacific in IDIL 2022- 2032”**.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Organising Committee through the LSPNG President, Mr. Sakarepe Kamene for inviting me to speak at this very important conference. When the President made a request for the use of the PNG NRI Conference Centre for this event, I made a decision to offer the venue as NRI’s in kind contribution to the Conference having considered the very important role of language and linguistics and in particular with PNG having so many indigenous languages.

I wish to acknowledge the attendance of all conference participants both domestically and our international friends, either attending in person or virtually. Based on the information provided, I note that in 20 days’ time on 11 October 2022, the LSPNG will turn 55 years old, which is 8 years older than PNG as an independent nation. This a great achievement.

Language and linguistics are of vital importance. The good Oxford Dictionary defines language as “*the principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture*”.

The Oxford Dictionary also defines Linguistics as the “*scientific study of language and its structure, including the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics. Specific branches of linguistics include sociolinguistics, dialectology, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, comparative linguistics, and structural linguistics.*”

Cultures, societies, economies, institutions, communities and even individuals live and function because of language. Without language, there is no action and without action, there is no progress. Without language, there is no accumulation of knowledge and without knowledge, individuals, societies and economies cannot develop.

The theme of the Conference is vital for the region’s or even global community of indigenous languages and in particular for PNG where there are around 840 languages (about 12% of world total) and for which the survival of many of them are at stake.

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inquire, inform, influence

Preserving and promoting indigenous languages is important for the survival of the languages. Considering that languages are closely linked with cultures, societies and economies, any language preservation initiatives have broader welfare gains than just language preservation per se. This does not however, belittle the need to preserve a language for its own sake.

There are different ways to preserve and promote a language for which I believe many of you experts in linguistics will discuss over the course of the two days of the conference. Two that I can think of are: (1) creation of recorded and printed material or resources; and (2) ensuring continuity of spoken language.

In terms of recorded and printed resources, we give credit to you linguists and institutions involved. In PNG, institutions such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Bible Translation Association (BTA) and Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT), have documented various indigenous languages of PNG for the sake of spiritual development of people that also serve as preservation of these languages. I believe are similar initiatives in other countries. Such organisations must be given support to do the important work they do. I also acknowledge the work of LSPNG and all the universities and academic institutions involved in the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages of the South Pacific and PNG in particular.

As far as the need for continuity in spoken language is concerned, in a rural setting, it may not be a problem because all children grow up speaking the indigenous language before learning English. However, it is a challenge in towns and cities, where children learn to speak English first and probably many don't get to learn their parents' mother tongue. This is a challenge that perhaps adults need to address in terms of whether they teach their children and their indigenous language and the motivation to do so.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the very important work that all linguists and educationists do in the context of the role of language and linguistics in social, economic and spiritual development of people and in particular speakers of indigenous languages, the world over. I wish you all a successful Conference.