

Indigenous Children's Education as Linguistic Genocide and a Crime Against Humanity? A Global View

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Indigenous Children's Education as Linguistic Genocide and a Crime Against Humanity? A Global View (in press, Guovdageaidnu/ Kautokeino: Gáldu, Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, www.galdu.org) is written by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (sociolinguist and educationist) and Robert Dunbar (human rights lawyer).

The book builds on two Expert papers for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. As the title shows, the book investigates to what extent educational methods for Indigenous/Tribal and minority children which use a dominant language as the means of instruction can give rise to international criminal liability on the part of States which use such forms of education, within the meaning of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and under the concept of crimes against humanity. These methods of subtractive education very frequently result in the degradation and even loss of competence in the mother tongue and also inadequate acquisition of the dominant language, with severe consequences for these children. This contributes to language shift, and thus to the disappearance of the world's linguistic diversity (and, through this, also disappearance of biodiversity). Using insights drawn from education, sociolinguistics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, political science and economics, as well as the law, and drawing on a wealth of evidence from around the world, the book shows that this kind of education intentionally aims at alienating these children from their own languages and cultures and assimilating them into the dominant culture. Such education also can and often does cause both physical and mental serious harm to them, with consequences that can last for generations. We show that such forms of education are completely inconsistent with educational and other rights of Indigenous/Tribal peoples and minorities, as well as frustrating the satisfaction of other important international obligations, and that the very severe consequences for the lives of those affected raise serious issues of international criminality. The education is also organised in contradiction with solid research evidence. The book also answers the question what forms of education would be consistent with law and research, and ends with concrete recommendations.

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Crimes against humanity and genocide are two distinct concepts. They became part of international law in the mid-1940s, after the end of World War II, and really around the time of the Nuremberg trials. They were new concepts -- they are relatively recent in that sense. And what I have been doing in a new book that I am working on is tracing their origins. The basic difference between crimes against humanity and genocide is as follows: Crimes against humanity focuses on the killing of large numbers of individuals. The systematic, mass killing of a very large number of individuals will constitu