

Ladies and gentlemen! Dear colleagues!

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the participants of this conference – a landmark event taking place in PNG this month. I am the director of the Miklouho-Maclay Foundation that aims to foster stronger bilateral relations between Russia and Papua New Guinea, primarily in culture and sciences.

Before I begin, allow me to give you a short background story to demonstrate that for distant Russia and for me personally, Papua New Guinea represents a country with which we have shared a profound historical link for almost a hundred and fifty years.

These bilateral links were established in the course of Nicholay Miklouho-Maclay's expedition to northeastern New Guinea.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, 1871 Nicholay Miklouho-Maclay's ship reached the northeastern shores of New Guinea Island – where present-day Madang province is located – in Astrolabe Bay. His fellow sailors built him a small hut and after a while he was left there alone to pursue his main goal – that is, to gather as much ethnographic data about the indigenous people as possible to make a reliable account of their domestic and social life and traditions of the region that up to that point received very little attention. The only thing that could bring him closer to the locals was their native language. However, learning the native language proved more challenging than he expected. In his diaries, Miklouho-Maclay described the tribespeople as outstanding mime artists, who would explain things to him by way of acting out mummer plays. There, Nicholay Miklouho-Maclay found an invaluable helper – a Papuan named Tui, who became his guide in this extraordinary world. Miklouho-Maclay left many recollections of their meetings, when Tui would try to teach him his mother tongue. In the first year of his visit Nicholay wrote down 350 words in the native language. He spent two and a half years in the northeastern region and the total of four years in New Guinea, having dedicated fifteen years of his life to the exploration of this island. His legacy includes over 160 research papers, many of which remain relevant up to the present day, over 700 drawings that illustrate the 19-century life in New Guinea Island, as well as collections of invaluable artefacts of material culture reposed in Russia and Australia. Over the course of his research, he made numerous discoveries, most notably he managed to debunk certain myths cultivated by scientists who supported the cause of slave-owners – namely, that Papuans are evolutionally inferior to Europeans. No less important is the fact that Miklouho-Maclay not only had dispelled those myths and discredited erroneous theories with his research, he also championed the rights and interests of local people and sought to protect them. He particularly strived to protect those he knew most intimately, the communities that lived in the north-east of

the country, on the shores of Astrolabe Bay. The 300-km coast that runs along Astrolabe Bay was named the Maclay Coast by Miklouho-Maclay.

The inhabitants of the Maclay Coast have kept the Russian words learned from Miklouho-Maclay, this vocabulary has become ingrained in their native language. The word “axe”, for example. It was Miklouho-Maclay who was the first one to introduce iron to the islanders living in the north-east. The word “corn” was also introduced by him, and has since become an inseparable part of the locals’ lexicon.

Miklouho-Maclay’s diaries have been published worldwide, describing an exciting journey to the world previously unknown to most people. Such is, for example, ‘*The Journey to the Maclay Coast*’ that sold millions of copies worldwide. In the Soviet Union, every school student knew about Miklouho-Maclay and Tui – it was part of the curriculum. So many young people dreamed about taking a journey to the faraway land, whereas scientists yearned for a unique chance to carry out studies and record the changes that took place since Miklouho-Maclay’s visit.

In 1971, a hundred years after Miclouho-Maclay’s pioneer journey, the Russian Academy of Sciences sent a team of scientists to Papua New Guinea with the purposes of recording the local folklore and describing indigenous languages and material culture, to gain more understanding into the developments that took place over the past 100 years.

When Russian scientists reached the coast of Astrolabe Bay, the locals looked alert and very suspicious of the newcomers. Then one of the scientists cried out in Bongu language: ‘Kaie!’, and the response immediately followed: ‘Kaie!’ accompanied by a big smile, it was the first time since Maclay’s visit when the locals heard a stranger speak their native language. This time the scientists stayed but for a few days, but their knowledge of the local language allowed them to collect unprecedented ethnographic data.

In this new century, the exploratory tradition has been given new momentum by the Miklouho-Maclay Foundation. In 2017, the Foundation launched a new expedition with scientists from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, under my leadership. When we approached the Maclay Coast in 2017, we were met by 3000 locals who raised the Russian Flag and sang a national anthem of PNG. It was very exciting and unexpected. Local people retained the memory of Miclouho-Maclay’s visit, he became an inseparable part of their history.

Now I know that this meeting was made possible through the efforts of Assel Tui, the descendant of the legendary Tui who became Miclouho-Maclay’s first friend, and Sir Peter Barter, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them personally, as well as all residents of Astrolabia Bay.

It was their cordial welcome that made us feel at home that provided an impetus for the second research expedition, launched in 2019. Olga Temple carried out linguistic research in this expedition and made multiple discoveries. I would like to thank Olga for inviting me to participate at this conference.

The Miklouho-Maclay Foundation has hosted 35 exhibitions on Papua New Guinea, attended by 65 thousand people in the last year alone, and today we have brought an exhibition on Russia to Papua New Guinea, it is called 'Russia – Papua-New Guinea. Unity in Diversity', I hope you it will provide more insight into the Russian culture, encourage the interest in the Russian language, and showcase education opportunities in Russia.

Our colleague Artyom will be happy to give you a tour of the exhibition and answer your questions, you can also try on a Russian traditional costume and a *kokoshnik* for a memorable photo. At the end of my presentation, we will also run a videoclip that shows us getting the costumes ready for this exhibition.

I shall now turn more specifically to Russian languages and the ways the languages of indigenous peoples are promoted and preserved.

### **State Policy on Preservation of the Languages of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples in Russia**

The tasks of removing the divides and mending bridges between people have dramatically raised the demand for the acquisition of languages.

Today, about 300 million people around the globe speak Russian. It is a kind of lingua franca for CIS countries, but not only that.

Russian is also the most common Slavic language and the most common language in Europe, geographically and by the number of native speakers.

It is an international language (one of the six official and working languages of the United Nations and UNESCO).

It is a national language that embraces a vast variety of lexical and grammar devices. It is one of the world's richest and most advanced languages with an enormous vocabulary. Russian language is stratified in composition. It includes literary and vernacular languages, dialects, and jargon.

The year 2019 was proclaimed the Year of the Indigenous Languages in Russia.

Russia is one of the most multinational states in the world. There are 151 languages in our country, and together with dialects and parlances there are about 300 of them. In the field of education, 27 languages are used as media of instruction, 72 languages are taught as mandatory subjects, and some 9 more small languages are taught as elective subjects.

More than a half of the languages of the peoples of Russia are on the verge of extinction, and all of them - except the languages of the largest groups - are at risk of becoming extinct. The most significant threats those languages are exposed to are: the destruction of traditional language communities as a result of modernization and migration, the growing level of education, the lack of mother tongue instruction and the policies that discriminate against the minorities.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to deter the extinction of small languages. They die with their speakers. This process turns imminent at a certain point when there are too few speakers left. But it is possible to slow it down.

Russian scientists estimate that 14 languages have disappeared in Russia over the last century and a half.

Today, the languages spoken by not more than 10 people are subject to preservation. For example, there is a law in Russia that provides for the possibility of acquiring education at all its stages with the indigenous languages as the media of instruction.

A concept of learning and teaching native languages is being developed.

The first principle of the state policy on preservation of the languages of the indigenous small-numbered peoples is the adoption of positive state cultural policies in the field of native languages of those ethnocultural groups.

The second principle is the existence of high devotion of the members of ethnic and cultural groups to their respective ethnic origin, i.e. their positive ethnic identification and self-identification. The preservation and further development of the indigenous languages in the Russian Federation depend on whether individual representatives of the ethnocultural groups consider it a social, cultural, and personal value when they and their children speak such languages.

The preservation of indigenous languages depends largely on the preservation of the traditional ways of life. And therefore it is a task of not even years but of decades. It is related not only to schools and books, but to all the economic and social spheres of indigenous peoples' lives.

Currently, only a half of the languages of the small-numbered peoples is involved into the educational process in the modern educational system.

The languages can be classified in four major groups:

(1) languages of instruction and study. These are seven languages: Nenets, Evenki, Khanty, Even, Chukot, Mansi, and Dolgan.

(2) Languages of study; 10 languages: Vepsian, Nanai, Koryak, Nivkh, Selkup, Teleut, Shor, Saami, Udege, Eskimo.

(3) languages with recent systems of writing: 8 languages: Itelmen, Negidal, Nganasan, Soyot, Ket, Tofalar, Ulch, Yukaghirs.

(4) Unwritten languages - 16 languages: Aleut, Votic, Oroch, Kamchadal, Kerek, Qumanda, Tasu, Telengit, Tuba, Tubala, Tozu-Tuvan, Chelkan, Chuvan, Chulym, Uilta (Orok), Enets.

Native languages are currently studied in three ways: as a subject (from 1 to 3 hours per week), as an elective course (from 1 to 2 hours per week), as an extracurricular course (1 hour per week). The possibility of primary education in the languages of the indigenous small-numbered peoples is being considered.

Languages, unique customs and traditions, economic systems of the indigenous peoples are our common heritage. They shape the cultural and ethnic diversity and represent the genuine wealth of Russia.

We are pleased to present the diversity of our culture as a part of our Russian as a Foreign Language online project in Papua New Guinea. We invite everybody to take our online course of Russian (basic and elementary levels) and thus to master phonetic, linguistic and extralinguistic competences.

Every year, more than 15,000 foreign students come to learn Russian to St. Petersburg alone. Some of them do so for the love of the literature and culture of this country. Others see it is an opportunity to enrich their professional skills and to increase their value on the labour market.