

Monday, February 26, 2018

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## WAG YOUR MOTHER TONGUE

Many of our native languages are in danger of extinction.

What are we doing about it?

*Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing tangible and intangible heritage. —United Nations*

**L**ast Wednesday's International Mother Language Day has brought to our attention the sad fact that, according to the United Nations (UN), more than 50 percent of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken in the world are in danger of dying out within a few generations.

Some of those languages might be ours. "Many of our native languages would face extinction if we fail to preserve and promote them," said Sen. Loren Legarda she expressed support over current efforts to save such heritage. "Language is not only part of our culture and history but also an important aspect of our identity as a nation."

According to the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) there are 130 native languages in the Philippines that are being used today, excluding the dialects borne from each language.

Meanwhile, according to the Defenders of the Indigenous Languages of the Archipelago (DILA), several native languages have become endangered due to social and economic forces.

Legarda, a staunch advocate of Philippine art and culture promotion, said that there are indigenous communities that have chosen to abandon their mother tongue and have shifted to languages that are perceived as superior because it would make them easier to become part of the bigger community that they live in and opens greater economic opportunities particularly in employment.

The preservation of the country's languages is currently being addressed through the Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program of the Department of Education (DepEd). As of 2016, however, the program only covers 19 languages: Tagalog, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Iloko, Bikol, Ybanag, Sinugbuanong Binisaya, Hiligaynon, Waray, Bahasa Sug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Chavacano, Ivatan, Sambal, Akianon, Kinaray-a, Yakan, and Sinurigaanon.

"Studies have shown that the use of the first language as the medium of instruction contributes to students' better performance in school. Thus, the MTB-MLE is a mechanism we can use to

save our languages and help our children learn more effectively," Legarda said.

The KWF is also undertaking efforts to preserve and promote the country's languages. Among the projects are the Language Markers Project, which seeks to install language markers in different parts of the country where a specific language was born; and the research and documentation of languages in the Philippines.

The KWF has already produced the Atlas ng mga Wika ng Filipinas, a product of the mapping and validation of the languages in the Philippines it did in 2014-2015.

"We need to comprehensively document all endangered languages of our ethno-linguistic groups in the country and we should promote the continued use of such languages. For instance, to complement the Language Markers Project of KWF, the Department of Tourism and the local government units can provide language tours to include discussions on how the language started and was embraced by the community in order to widen the perspective of the youth, students, and tourists when visiting various tourist sites in the country," said Legarda. "Majority of Filipinos use Tagalog and English, but this does not mean we must care less or abandon our indigenous languages, which are in fact the first languages of our ancestors. We must preserve these languages as a sign of our respect for our history and heritage."

\* LANGUAGE

\* DEPED (DEPT. OF EDUCATION)