

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **‘USE IT OR LOSE IT’ WARNING ON PACIFIC LANGUAGES**

Victoria University senior lecturer Galumalemana Alfred Hunkin told a 2009 Diversity Forum discussion that the future for Pacific languages rested in a simple approach: ‘use it or lose it’.

‘If we don’t work on preserving our languages now, they will be lost forever’, said Mr Hunkin, the chair of the forum hosted by the Ministry for Pacific Island Affairs and the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO in Wellington today.

The forum featured presentations by the Ministry’s Liz Tanielu, Waikato University Professor Stephen May, UNESCO’s Susan Isaac and Turama Academy’s George Upu.

Ms Tanielu outlined the Ministry’s overall position on preserving, maintaining and promoting Pacific languages in New Zealand.

Dr May told the forum that Pacific languages were generally in decline in New Zealand, and this was particularly evident among Cook Island, Niue and Tokelau people who had greater populations living in New Zealand than in the islands.

He pointed out that a bilingual approach to teaching can provide a strong educational platform for Pacific children.

Mrs Isaac said although none of the Pacific languages featured on its ‘atlas of world languages in danger’ there was work being done on revitalising and preserving indigenous Melanesian languages in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Turama Academy’s Mr Upu, of Cook Islands origin, demonstrated his community approach to teaching children through the use of drum beats, song and dance.

The forum agreed that it was important to proactively drive a Pacific Languages Strategy which the Ministry is actively developing.

ENDS

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