2,680 indigenous languages in danger: UN

It will launch a project to raise awareness

There’s Ojibwe in Canada, Ami in Australia and Ayapanec in Mexico: these are among the world’s nearly 2,700 indigenous languages at risk of disappearing unless new initiatives are taken, UN officials say.

The UN is hoping to raise awareness of the cultural loss with the launch this week of the International Year of Indigenous Languages, a year-long project to help protect these ancient mother tongues.

Out of the roughly 7,600 languages spoken worldwide, 2,680 indigenous languages are in danger and many are disappearing at an alarming rate, according to UN officials.

“Every two weeks, there is an indigenous language that disappears, so it is a pretty large toll indeed,” said Ernesto Ottone-Ramirez, an assistant director at UNESCO. In 2003, the last fluent speaker of Akkala Saami, spoken in Russia’s Kola peninsula, died.

At a ceremony in Paris this week, eight-year-old Odeskkun Thusky spoke in his native Algonquin from Canada’s First Nation regions in Quebec and Ontario.

“It’s important to speak this language because our language here is dying and we want more people to speak it,” he said. Canada, home to around 630 First Nation tribes comprising 1.4 million people, has promised funds to help revitalise several languages.