

Abstract 45

Language Policies and Social Cohesion in Multilingual States: Some Personal Observations

Royal L. Lewis
royallemis@gmail.com

This paper is meant simply to be an opening point for a continuation of an ongoing discussion of multilingualism within states and regions vis-à-vis: Civil and criminal law, law enforcement, domestic educational policy, civil and human rights, political franchise, cultural and national identity, commerce and economic development, etcetera. Although I have lived in the Sri Lanka for over 11 years, Sri Lanka is not the subject of this paper but rather serves as a lens through which I can see more clearly the potential ramifications and importance of these issues internationally. I would like to look briefly at the extremes – at one end, state language policies that have led to civil war and at the other end states that have dealt creatively, fairly and productively (albeit not perfectly) with the management of the issues and challenges which are an intrinsic part of dealing with multilingual populations. Virtually every country in the world, to one extent or another, deals with the challenges brought on by multilingualism. I would not presume to attempt to offer prescriptions for the problems which are an intrinsic part of multilingual issues; rather, I hope that the questions I pose will help to stimulate a continuation of a vigorous exchange of ideas between informed and open people who care.

Key words: challenges, language policies, multilingualism, observations, social cohesion