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Many international bodies have affirmed the rights of speakers of minority languages to use cherish and be educated in their native languages. Prestigious documents that embody these rights include The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and the American Convention on Human Rights of 1969. However, the existence of these charters and declarations, have had minimal success in securing the language rights of the vast majority of native speakers of minority languages and dialects, including the speakers of Caribbean creoles. As a bold corrective response to this situation, the recently created International Centre for Caribbean Language Research (ICCLR) convened an invitational conference of Caribbean heads of states, Caribbean educators and prominent Creole linguists to create and sign a charter on language policy and language rights for speakers of Caribbean Creole vernaculars. The conference was held on January 13-14, 2011 on the Jamaican campus of the University of the West Indies. Working from a draft previously circulated to working groups, this body of linguists and administrators formulated the attached charter and signed off on it as a first step in a process that is expected to culminate in the implementation of its provisions by Caribbean educators and its adoption by the governing bodies of Caribbean countries. This was a bold initiative undertaken by the ICCLR to directly involve linguists, educators and heads of states in a project aimed at recognizing, legitimizing and protecting the language rights of indigenous Caribbean peoples. This conference also declared October 28 to be International Creole Day.

In this talk, I will first present some of the general linguistic properties of Caribbean Creole languages to show that these Creole languages have distinct structural characteristics. Then I will review some of the key features of the charter and discuss their sociolinguistic implications for Caribbean and North American language communities.