

Esperanto and the UN

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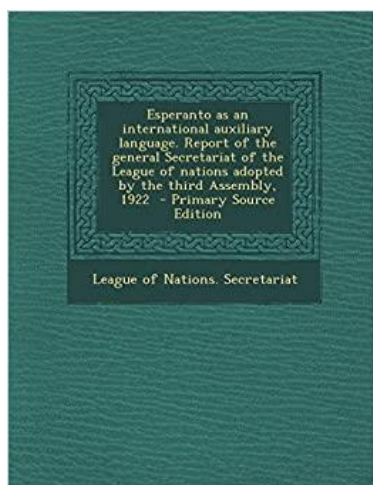
Universala Esperanto-Asocio

December 9, 2020: One hundred years of co-operation between the Universal Esperanto Association and international governmental organizations

Recently the Universal Esperanto Association celebrated one hundred years of cooperation with international governmental organizations.

The League of Nations was established after World War I with a principal mandate to keep the peace by solving disputes through peaceful negotiation. Its General Assembly met for the first time on November 15, 1920, in Geneva, with some 48 member states.

Weeks later (and precisely one hundred years ago), on December 9, 1920, a draft resolution was presented to the Assembly by eleven of these member states calling for the teaching of Esperanto as a second language in schools across the world so that all children would grow up with at least two languages: their own, plus "an easy means of international communication." The resolution was presented by the Persian delegation. Among its initiators was the Swiss scholar and internationalist Edmond Privat, a leader in the Universal Esperanto Association and later its president.



A revised version of the proposal called for a report on Esperanto's progress, which was duly prepared by the League's Under-Secretary-General, Inazo Nitobe. The report, favourable to Esperanto and including an analysis of language problems between states, accompanied the proposal when it was re-submitted to the second Assembly in 1921. Thirteen member states co-sponsored the resubmission: Albania, Belgium, China, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Finland, India, Japan, Persia, Poland, Romania, South Africa, and Venezuela.

In 1922 a conference on the teaching of Esperanto in schools was organized in Geneva, again reporting favourably on the educational value of the language. Later in the year, the General Assembly forwarded the entire issue to the newly created ten-member Committee on Intellectual Collaboration, the forerunner of UNESCO. Opposition to the proposal led by the French delegation resulted in its rejection by six votes out of the ten.

When word reached the World Congress of Esperanto, meeting in Nuremberg in the summer of 1923, the 5000 Esperanto speakers in attendance greeted the news with incredulity and laughter.

Disappointingly, and despite later diplomatic manoeuvring within the League, the issue of Esperanto in the schools was left to die. However, co-operation with the League continued, and led in 1924 to the recognition of Esperanto as a “clear” language for telegraphy.

The Universal Esperanto Association, and the Esperanto movement generally, did not give up on the larger question. It was not until December 1954 that a resolution of the UNESCO General Conference finally recognized that the aims and ideals of Esperanto in the field of international exchange were in full accordance with the aims and ideals of UNESCO, thus paving the way for the establishment of consultative relations with UEA and ultimately for the establishment of similar relations with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Cooperation with UNESCO and ECOSOC has continued ever since. The Association maintains representatives to UNESCO and the United Nations in Paris, New York, Geneva and Vienna and is a member of the board of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relations with ECOSOC.

Newsletter reaches fiftieth issue

With this issue of the Newsletter, we reach a small milestone: the fiftieth issue in the series. The newsletter is now published bi-monthly in three editions – Esperanto, English, and French – edited by our representative to the United Nations, Dr. Humphrey Tonkin. A message from Association president Duncan Charters draws attention to the newsletter and UEA’s continuing co-operation with the UN. These have been “years of action,” writes Dr. Charters “so that Esperanto can be seen as a natural contributor to reciprocal activities and goals” between the Universal Esperanto Association and the United Nations “not in terms of political ideologies but in terms of humanity’s essential common path to co-operation to improve interpersonal and international harmony.” We look forward to further years of co-operation in the future.

Resolution calls for greater multilateralism and attention to language policy in the United Nations

The Member States of the United Nations must “work together more conscientiously and with greater determination” and civil society organizations must support such co-operation “with greater awareness and insistence,” according to a resolution adopted by the *World Festival of Esperanto*, meeting virtually over a three-month period that began this past June and ended in September. Several thousand speakers of Esperanto, unable to travel because of COVID, participated in this Festival, which replaced the annual World Congress of Esperanto, planned for Montreal in early August. Participants came from a total of 97 countries.

The resolution pledged “the continuance of the several decades of cooperation by the Esperanto movement with the UN and UNESCO” and called on Esperanto speakers to enlist the support of their

governments for multilateral approaches to world problems. It praised the United Nations family for the progress made over the past 75 years, but pointed out that multilateral cooperation “is still insufficient to overcome the planet-wide crises which we now confront, and is hindered by misunderstandings and national rivalries.” The future, the resolution declared, “depends on yet stronger multilateral cooperation among governments, working with civil society worldwide.”

The resolution recommended to Esperanto speakers across the world “that they mobilize themselves ... around cooperation with the UN and UNESCO at all levels, including through these organizations’ civil society associations.”

Finally, it alerted the United Nations and UNESCO “to the need for a more inclusive language policy if they wish to mobilize all worldwide society around their goals, and to the value of using the International Language Esperanto” to reach populations in many countries simultaneously. The resolution pointed out that UNESCO, particularly, is beginning to use Esperanto in this way in its publications programme.

The Festival included, among its over 500 hours of programming, lectures and extensive discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals and ways in which Esperanto-speakers can help in reaching these goals.

The Festival was launched with a special address from Fabrizio Hochschild, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary General on the 75th Anniversary of the UN.

Conference of NGOs stresses the need for better NGO liaison during pandemic

At a November 18 meeting of NGOs on access to the United Nations, the Universal Esperanto Association, a board member of CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, joined with other NGOs in stressing the importance of “adequate access to UN meetings, conferences, special events and documentation” during COVID times, when many of the normal avenues of co-operation have been cut off.

The Conference was particularly aware of the need for better sharing of timely “information on UN COVID regulations, restrictions and requirements” so that NGOs are not denied participation in UN meetings at the last minute.

A resolution approved the following day by the CoNGO board, with the participation of UEA representatives Humphrey Tonkin and Spyros Papadatos, pointed to a general need for more active co-operation between UN bodies and civil society. For its part, CoNGO has expanded its website (ngocongo.org) to provide comprehensive information on rules and procedures for NGO access to and participation in the United Nations System.

UN Day 2020: “The world is better for the existence of the UN, but not better enough”

“October 24, United Nations Day, marks the date in 1945 when the UN Charter entered into force and the UN came formally into being. Seventy-five years later, we look back at that day as one of the great achievements of humankind.” So began our Association’s message on UN Day.

“However,” the message continued, “despite the UN’s efforts, the past seventy-five years have not yet led to the outlawing of war, nor to a world in which human rights are adequately respected, nor to sufficient progress in creating a sustainable and inclusive world order. Misunderstandings and breakdowns of communication remain frequent, mistrust abounds, and the world remains divided by race, religion, and nationalist intolerance of others. The world is better for the existence of the UN, but not better enough...”

“Our association,” the message continued, “strongly supports the work of the UN in seeking solutions to worldwide problems, not least in the difficult times that we are currently passing through. We have undertaken a concerted effort to inform our worldwide community about the Sustainable Development Goals and their importance, and, to that end, are redoubling our efforts to mobilize Esperanto speakers the world over.” UEA has produced a 100-page guide to the SDGs in Esperanto. The guide is receiving wide distribution.

“Above all,” said the message, “we believe that multilateral issues require multilateral solutions, in which nature itself, the ordinary life of people, families and local communities, and human inventiveness and creativity can all combine to create a better world.”

“Achieving such goals requires active communication in a spirit of equality, such as we seek through our use of the International Language Esperanto. Our community has supported the United Nations from its beginning in 1945 and will continue that support into the future, serving as an example of how equality of communication can promote equal and enduring understanding. We look forward to a continued partnership with the United Nations and with people of goodwill – ‘We, the People’ – the world over.”

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