Universala Esperanto-Asocio

The Study Group on Language and the United Nations invites you to a Symposium on “The United Nations at 75: Listening, Talking and Taking Action in a Multilingual World” on Thursday & Friday, May 9-10, 2019, at the Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA (First Avenue at 44th Street).

The United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, and came into force on October 24 of that year. Thus the United Nations will celebrate its 75th anniversary in the year 2020. For the past 74 years, the United Nations has worked (in the words of the Charter) “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights,” and “to promote social progress.”

In short, it has created a framework of international agreement and cooperation that, though fragile and often threatened, has endured for three generations. What can be done to secure its future?

According to Article 1 (3) of the Charter, among the purposes of the United Nations is the achievement of “international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”

This symposium will give particular attention to the question of language. Although the UN has always promoted dialogue, in recent years it has grown more sensitive to the need for equality in dialogue. In other words, it has become increasingly aware of the need to listen to its constituents rather than simply talking to them, and to understand as well as to be understood. Such concepts are inherent in the Sustainable Development Goals accepted in 2015 and setting the agenda for the UN as it grows closer to its first hundred years.

In a world in which thousands of languages are spoken, is the UN ready for equal dialogue, now and in the future? If not, what is to be done to create linguistic readiness – both in the internal workings of the organization and in its relations with the larger world? These questions have particular relevance in 2019, the UN’s International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Principal speakers at the symposium will be:

Joseph Lo Bianco. Professor of Language and Literacy Education, University of Melbourne, Australia; Past President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. A specialist in language policy and planning, in 2012 he designed, led and implemented a four-year, three-country initiative for UNICEF in Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand. He has published extensively on bilingual education, peacebuilding and communication, multiculturism and intercultural education, and the revitalisation of indigenous and immigrant community languages.

Narjess Saidane. Ambassador Saidane was named Permanent Observer for the International Organization of La Francophonie to the United Nations in 2017. Previously (2013-17) she worked for the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) Programme Assistance to the Palestinian People, serving from 2013 to 2017 as Deputy Special Representative of the Administrator based in Jerusalem. Previous positions include: Deputy Resident Representative for the Joint Office of UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Cabo Verde, and similar roles in Mauritania and in her native Tunisia.

Iris Orriss. Iris Orriss serves as Director of Internationalization at Facebook. She has been with Facebook since January 2013 and is passionate about eliminating the internet language barrier. Her work focuses on growing Facebook in international markets. In addition, she is a member of the board at Translators without Borders, a nonprofit organization that specializes in providing vital information in the right language at the right time. Before coming to Facebook, she was a director at Microsoft working on product internationalization and development process in the enterprise and language technology divisions. A native of Germany, she was educated at Freie Universität Berlin.

Sponsors of the symposium are the Center for Applied Linguistics, l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; the Esperantic Studies Foundation; the Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems; and the Universal Esperanto Association.

The provisional programme and details of registration will be available by mid-March 2019 at www.languageandtheun.org.

Esperanto in the NGO Committee on Education, Learning and Literacy

The February 2019 meeting of the NGO Committee on Education, Learning and Literacy, a standing committee of the Conference of NGOs (CoNGO) took place on Mother Language Day, February 21, and was devoted to the topic of language. Featured were three presentations. Prof. Carol Benson and Erina Iwasaki, of Teachers College, Columbia University, presented the results of their evaluation of
The Universal Esperanto Association salutes the world’s women, and particularly the members of the worldwide Esperanto community, on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2019. In its role as an international language promoting direct and unfiltered dialogue among the citizens of the world, Esperanto is uniquely positioned to help women everywhere communicate with one another across the barriers of distance and language, to exchange views and ideas, and to organize for action on behalf of women’s rights.

We recognize that there is much to be done. Despite significant progress in Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is concerned with education, women’s education lags behind men’s. Too many children lack access to education, and this is particularly true of girls. Of those children who have access to education, too many girls drop out of school early, before they are able to develop their own particular skills or prepare themselves for careers.

At the same time, the UEA recognizes and honours the leading role women play in movements for linguistic and cultural revitalization, and for the protection of the domestic sphere from oppression and discrimination. Such efforts are an essential part of the struggle to establish a world where many cultures and languages can coexist in harmony – a topic of special importance in this International Year of Indigenous Languages, and particularly important for our Association in its efforts to achieve linguistic equality.
Accordingly, we express our solidarity with movements to end discrimination against women and girls, and to build a sustainable future in which all people are treated with equal care and respect, irrespective of language, culture, gender, and other forms of diversity.

**UEA assists translation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights into American Sign Language**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recently (10 December 2018) celebrated its 70th birthday, is among the most translated documents in the world, and surely one of the most important. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, the document is available in 518 different translations in HTML and/or PDF format – from Abkhaz to Zulu. Among the recent additions is American Sign Language (ASL): see [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRinsignlanguages.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRinsignlanguages.aspx).

The ASL translation was added as a result of the intervention of the Universal Esperanto Association, working with the American School for the Deaf, in Hartford, Connecticut. The American School for the Deaf, founded in 1817, was the place where American Sign Language was born. ASL is quite different from British Sign Language and most resembles French Sign Language, from which it was derived.

Sign languages, as opposed to *signed* languages, are complete and independent languages in themselves, independent of the dominant languages spoken in the areas where they are used. They display the full range of grammar, syntax and lexical elements as can be found in spoken languages.

The UDHR is available also in Esperanto, in a translation crafted in the early 1950s by a team that included Ralph Harry, later Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN, and Ivo Lapenna, professor of international law and later president of the Universal Esperanto Association. See: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=1115](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=1115). The High Commission’s website notes that, “Our goal is to share the UDHR with the entire world, and anyone is welcome to contribute a new translation that is not already in the collection.”

**Happy birthday, Sir Brian! UEA salutes Sir Brian Urquhart on his 100th birthday**

It was in 1991 that the Universal Esperanto Association awarded Brian Urquhart its Zamenhof Prize in recognition of his many years of service to the United Nations. On February 28, he celebrated his 100th birthday, to a chorus of praise from international officials and peacemakers the world over. Sir Brian was there at the beginning – when the UN first came into being – and, as Secretary-General António Guterres pointed out in his birthday greeting, “He set the standard for the international civil service: principled, dedicated, impartial.” Sir Brian served as an aide to Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and worked closely with Ralph Bunche in establishing the UN’s role in international peacekeeping – work particularly recognized by the UEA in its award of the Zamenhof Prize.

Other recipients of the Zamenhof Prize have included James Grant, Director of UNICEF, Martti Ahtisaari, President of Finland, and Amadou Mahtar M’Bow, Director-General of UNESCO.

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