

Newsletter for September 2014

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Annual Congress Approves Resolution on Language and Sustainable Development

Inequalities of language and the voices silenced because of language differences were a major concern of the 99th World Congress of Esperanto, which took place in Buenos Aires in August. The Congress approved a Declaration marking the conclusion of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, as follows:

DECLARATION MARKING THE CONCLUSION OF THE DECADE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In their closing resolution, the 706 participants in the week-long 99th World Congress of Esperanto, which ended on 2 August 2014 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, firmly aligned themselves with the global effort for a sustainable future. The Congress, marking the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), focused on ways in which the movement for the International Language Esperanto could best use its worldwide network of speakers to advance the goals of the United Nations and UNESCO in this field.

In a series of sessions under the general topic “**Will Our Grandchildren Thank Us? Mobilizing for a Sustainable Future,**” the participants, from 57 countries around the world, emphasized three major conclusions:

1. The movement for the International Language Esperanto is a contemporary and relevant part of essential global efforts towards a sustainable future.
2. The pursuit of healthy, sustainable societies based on peace, justice and democracy, and grounded in economic practices that serve human needs and respect life-sustaining natural systems, is fully congruent with the spirit of intercultural solidarity that is the driving force of the Esperanto movement.
3. In the various approaches to sustainability, insufficient attention is often given to the connections between language issues and other vital concerns, making the work of the Esperanto movement in drawing attention to these connections all the more important.

The participants called on all supporters of Esperanto to do everything possible to fulfil the Esperanto movement’s particular role as a movement for a just and socially conscious multilingualism. “A sustainable world is a multilingual world,” as the President of the Universal Esperanto Association, Dr. Mark Fettes, declared in a speech to the Congress, emphasizing the movement’s support for the maintenance and development of all languages at the same time as it works for open and fair communication between all members of the global community.

Accordingly, the congress participants urged supporters of Esperanto “to take our place among the various social movements advocating for intercultural and anti-discriminatory education, and for human rights, environmental protection, popular education, low-consumption lifestyles, and other efforts to secure a sustainable future.” Aspects of these major issues were taken up in Congress presentations and debates, all of which were conducted in Esperanto. The congress participants went on to declare that “the values needed to build a sustainable world society are the core values of our movement,” and that diversity, peace and justice were essential conditions for a world in which Esperanto could flourish.

Universal Esperanto Association Represented at the DPI Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations, New York, August 27-29

The Universal Esperanto Association was represented by three delegates at the recent 65th Annual Conference of NGOs organized by the Department of Public Information: Prof. Humphrey Tonkin, representative of UEA to the United Nations; Neil Blonstein, director of UEA’s New York office; and Young-Long Kim (Republic of Korea). Over 2000 representatives from 117 countries attended the event. The goal of the conference was to develop a post-2015 agenda for NGOs. Roundtable discussions and workshops dealt with numerous issues pertinent to the coming decade – a period in which the Millennium Development Goals will be replaced by a set of Sustainable Development Goals, currently being discussed by both NGOs and member-states. Such issues as climate change, health, the role of media, and human rights formed a prominent part of the programme. Also an important topic of discussion was the exclusion of many people in the developing world from participation in sustainable development.

Despite its best efforts, the Association made relatively little progress in convincing delegates of the need to consider language as a dimension in this exclusion. “Many voices are silenced,” remarked Professor Tonkin, “because their languages are not understood by those conducting development programs and planning their future. It is certainly good that we are shifting our attention from production-based development to consumption-based concerns, but everyone must have a place at the table. We have to recognize that we cannot hear the multilingual voices of the world’s population by conducting monolingual conferences in the comfort of New York City.” A proposal by the Association, supported by the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Legion of Good Will, among others, for a workshop on language difference was not approved, and language was barely mentioned as an issue in the conference agenda. The UEA delegation pledged to continue its fight to persuade the United Nations to broaden its approach to language in order to avoid exclusively top-down planning.

Fettes: UN Must Address Language Issues

“An analysis of United Nations policy-making on sustainable development shows that linguistic issues are rarely defined and developed in ways that reflect ‘sustainability thinking’”, according to Professor Mark Fettes, President of the Universal Esperanto Association, at the recent Conference on Multidisciplinary Approaches in Language Policy and Planning, held at the University of Calgary from 4 to 6 September. “One consequence,” he added, “is that no coherent framework exists for addressing language inequalities within the development process.” Other papers at the conference included a consideration of transnational communication and ‘glocalisation’ given by Prof. Federico Gobbo, professor of Esperanto and Interlinguistics at the University of Amsterdam, an examination of the historical background to Esperanto (Prof. Humphrey Tonkin, University of Hartford), and an exploration of the European Commission’s de facto language policy (Dr. Michele Gazzola, Humboldt University, Berlin).

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