

Newsletter for September-October 2020

Newsletter of the Universal Esperanto Association's Office of Liaison with the United Nations

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World Festival of Esperanto shatters predictions, gains worldwide participation

Deprived of the World Congress of Esperanto, their traditional meeting place, because of the pandemic, Esperanto speakers initially expected 2020 to be a difficult year for the International Language Esperanto. Nothing could be further from the truth. The World Congress normally attracts between 1000 and 2000 Esperantists from perhaps 40 countries – as was expected when this year's congress was still due to take place in Montreal. But when the Congress was cancelled, its replacement, a three-months-long virtual World Festival of Esperanto, drew thousands of participants from around one hundred countries for a feast of events: lectures, discussion groups, musical performances, virtual exhibitions, courses, and numerous other activities, large and small.



All told, the Festival events provided over 500 hours of programming.

The Montreal congress was to have discussed the topic "The UN at 75: Dialogue and understanding in a changing world." When this became the topic of the Festival, it was possible to expand its treatment, with numerous discussion groups and presentations supplementing the lectures and panel discussions initially anticipated. Time was also allocated to celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day and to recognize the 75th anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (a special message was directed to the United Nations calling on all member states to sign the UN's Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons).

Nor did the World Congress disappear: a Virtual Congress was held as part of the Festival for one week in early August. Over 2000 people from 97 countries paid the registration fee and participated.

In addition to the activities of the Festival itself, including the Virtual Congress, other organizations also presented week-long virtual events under the auspices of the Festival, among them the Congress of TEJO (the Esperantist youth organization) and the conference of its Brazilian affiliate, national conferences by the Esperanto organizations of Italy and the USA, and the annual conference of the League of Esperanto-Speaking Teachers (ILEI). In addition, 42 day-long or two-day events were held, including special "days" – a European Day, an African Day, an American Day, a Middle Eastern and North African Day, and an Asian Day, arranged at times convenient for those time zones.

Vice-president of the Universal Esperanto Association Fernando Maia, Jr. (Brazil) coordinated the programme, and the Esperanto-speaking firm E@I, based in Slovakia, handled the technical arrangements. Financial support was provided by the Esperantic Studies Foundation.

Guide to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals published in Esperanto

The publisher Mondial (New York) has recently produced a Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals, published in book form and also on line at esperantoporun.org. The guide contains 17 essays covering each of the 17 Goals proclaimed by the United Nations in 2015 as its so-called Agenda 2030 – a plan for the UN for the years 2015-2030. The editors asked 17 Esperanto-speaking experts from various parts of the world to contribute essays in their fields, with additional suggestions for learning more about the various Goals and cooperating locally, nationally and internationally for their realization. Among the contributors are two former ambassadors, from Italy and Germany, an urbanist from France, an educator from Canada, an engineer from Brazil, and specialists from an additional three countries. Produced on the occasion of the virtual World Festival of Esperanto, whose theme was "The UN at 75," the guide not only gives Esperanto speakers basic information about the Goals, but also contains suggestions and ideas about how they can get involved, and how to engage local organizations, national associations, and other Esperanto groups. "If we want to show the United Nations the international value of Esperanto, we need to prove that we don't just talk but also act," said Humphrey Tonkin, who, along with Rakoen Maertens, edited the collection. The complete 113-page book, published in New York by Mondial, can be read at <http://www.esperantoporun.org/wp-content/uploads/Gvidilo-al-la-17-celoj-por-dauripova-evoluigo-de-UN.pdf> and is available from Amazon.

Declaration of the Universal Esperanto Association on the International Day of Peace 2020

The theme of this year's International Day of Peace, celebrated annually on September 21, is "Shaping Peace Together." The year 2020 is also the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, established, in the words of its Charter, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

The Esperanto movement, a community devoted to international dialogue through the medium of the International Language Esperanto, with participants in virtually every part of the world, has long seen the maintenance and promotion of peace as central to its goals. In 2020 its virtual World Festival of Esperanto had as its main theme “The United Nations at 75: Dialogue and understanding in a changing world.” Thousands of Esperanto speakers from some one hundred countries were drawn into the discussion, representing a direct and unfettered dialogue among equals that spanned the continents. Foremost among the questions asked was, “What can we as individuals do to promote peace and understanding, and how can we assist the United Nations in its search for a better, more peaceful and prosperous world?” Convinced that peace among the nations begins in the hearts of individuals, we pledged to continue our efforts to alert civil society to the need for open dialogue in which speaking is matched by listening, and listening leads to understanding.

The year 2021 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Peace and Trust. It is our hope that the World Esperanto Congress will take place in Northern Ireland next year, if the pandemic permits it. Under any circumstances, we can be sure that we will initiate a worldwide dialogue in 2021, through the medium of Esperanto, about the importance of trust and of ways to promote it, since only through trust can we have peace and only in peace can we face the perils of the future and continue the progress toward a better world.

The Esperanto community celebrates voices of Indigenous peoples on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, August 9, 2020

The Universal Esperanto Association again gave special attention to the International Day of Indigenous Peoples on August 9, 2020. Esperanto speakers around the world were invited to learn more about the history, contributions and current struggles of Indigenous peoples through a series of talks, films and publications hosted virtually by the World Esperanto Festival, MondaFest' 2020: <https://eventaservo.org/e/indighenaj-popoloj-2020>.

Among the contributions were a welcome message by Georges Sioui, a historian with the Huron-Wendat Nation (Canada), and a number of subtitled short films by up-and-coming young Indigenous directors under the auspices of the Canadian National Film Board. The city of Montreal, Canada, had been scheduled to host this year's World Esperanto Congress until the Covid-19 pandemic forced its postponement to the year 2022. The Congress was to have had a significant focus on Indigenous themes. It is hoped that this focus will now be central to the 2022 event, taking place in the year of the launch of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Also highlighted was a recent issue of UNESCO's flagship publication, UNESCO Courier, devoted to Indigenous languages. Esperanto is now among the languages in which the Courier regularly appears.

The Esperanto movement was active in celebrating the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019. As an organization committed to multilingualism and the preservation of linguistic diversity, the Universal Esperanto Association promotes the use of the International Language Esperanto for international communication.

UEA speaks out on the 75th anniversary of the nuclear attacks on Japan

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Universal Esperanto Association expressed its views in the following message to the United Nations:

“At the Virtual Congress of Esperanto, taking place from August 1 to August 8, 2020, with 2006 Esperanto-speaking participants from 97 countries, Ms. OSIOKA Taeko, of Hiroshima, spoke on behalf of Ms. PAK Namju, a Korean who spent World War II in Hiroshima and was a victim of the USA's nuclear attack on that city. As a guide for visitors to the Peace Park in Hiroshima, Ms. Osioka often tells PAK Namju's story to Japanese school groups and to Esperanto speakers from throughout the world. The use of Esperanto allows speakers of this idiom created as an international language to learn the facts directly from their source and to empathize with the victims. Seventy-five years later, no one can forget: everyone should know.

“Ms PAK Namju, speaking clearly and firmly through the voice of OSIOKA Taeko, wants everyone to know that in war nobody wins. Both sides lose. At the end of a war one army finds itself in an advantageous position and decides the fate of the other country. But in both armies, of both countries, there are wounded and dead. Consider France in 1945: in theory France was among the winners, but it was badly damaged. The winner does not emerge healthy and strong from war: that view is just a myth. The winner suffers, in fact suffers much as the loser also suffers: soldiers from both armies suffer nightmares and sleepless nights because of memories of battle. Some of them have lost an arm, or a leg, or an eye; all have certainly lost family members or fellow soldiers. ‘War is always the result of failure,’ remarked the French minister Dominique de Villepin at the UN Security Council in New York in 2003: it results from the failure of peace talks to solve problems.

“‘When elephants fight, the grass suffers,’ says an African proverb. Thus, we should emphasize the suffering of members of the public, civilians, in modern warfare. The Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were no threat to the United States, but the USA wished to save its army and test its bombs: the people of those two cities became their lab animals. A terrifying but unacceptable strategy.

“Universal Esperanto Association notes the UN's successes in the diplomatic solution of conflicts, but also notes that wars continue to destroy huge regions, to force people on to the roads to flight and exile, to terrorize them, to impoverish them, to wound them, to kill them. At the same time we note that no power, no state, despite the huge stocks of atomic bombs and the far greater strength of new types of bombs, has used any of these weapons since Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

“The handbook A History to Open the Future, jointly published in 2005 by China, the Korean Republic and Japan, was translated into Esperanto in 2007. The book presents the tragic events of the first half of the twentieth century in that part of East Asia, and its title eloquently stresses the fact that only after recognizing all of the evils of the past can a peaceful future be constructed.

“Among the activities of the World Festival of Esperanto is a ‘virtual exhibition’ entitled ‘Hiroshima-Nagasaki: 75 Years for Peace’. The exhibition consists of two “rooms”, the first consisting of photographs, and the second of videos on aspects of the tragedy: <https://mondafest.net/hiroshimo/>.

“UEA and the Esperanto movement, through the use of a neutral language, is able to pass on information gathered directly from the people concerned, to organize meetings and conferences that work to reduce xenophobia and strengthen friendship and solidarity.

Tolerance and empathy are the basis for all the work of this worldwide movement. The translation of many works of literature and the publication of original writing in Esperanto reinforces cultural diversity and has a positive effect educationally. Clearly, the Universal Esperanto Association works in parallel with the United Nations and UNESCO and pursues similar goals in the common search for worldwide peace.”

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