



Universala Esperanto-Asocio

## Message of the Universal Esperanto Association on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, 21 February 2021

**The Universal Esperanto Association greets the United Nations and UNESCO on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, 21 February 2021.**

The goal of a quality education for all – number four of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals – requires an atmosphere of trust and support by all parties: teachers, students, politicians, and official education authorities. Such an atmosphere in turn requires that students have the optimal conditions in which to learn. First and foremost, that means learning in a language that they fully understand – namely their mother tongue.

The United Nations has proclaimed the year 2021 the International Year of Peace and Trust. A good place to begin with such an effort is schools.

In many countries and circumstances children are not taught in their own languages and little is done to help them transition into the language of instruction. This often puts them at a permanent disadvantage, negating the benefits of schooling, of competent teaching, and of investment in educational infrastructure. By not teaching young people in a language they fully understand, we are throwing away money and, with it, promising lives.

The principal purpose of *International Mother Language Day* is to reiterate the educational advantages of using the mother tongue in schools, particularly primary schools. Children learn to read and write faster in a language they fully understand. They suffer a disadvantage if they are obliged to begin their learning in a language that they *do not* understand, either partially or completely.

International Mother Language Day also reminds us that in many parts of the world entire languages have no official status, their speakers are discriminated against, and their cultural values are ignored.

The recent World Festival of Esperanto brought thousands of Esperanto speakers together in a three-month virtual festival. Its final resolution included the statement that the United Nations and UNESCO must adopt “a more inclusive language policy if they wish to mobilize all worldwide society around their goals.” UNESCO’s support for education in the mother languages of children is a good example of such an inclusive policy because it brings learning to the children rather than bringing the children to learning. In the process it makes them better and fuller participants in a peaceful and just society.

At this time, in a time of pandemic, it is especially important that the schooling of children include their parents as partners in education – and that may well require education in the mother tongue, in a language that parents and children share as part of their heritage.

UEA believes in education for all through languages they comprehend, in linguistic justice in all its aspects, and in a world made more peaceful through education and understanding. Our Association works for these goals in every corner of the world, linked by the International Language Esperanto. We call on the United Nations, UNESCO, and all those working for a sustainable world, to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the knowledge, equality, justice and opportunity that such an achievement would bring with it.

We pledge our support in this effort. The International Language Esperanto can be used to reach populations in many countries with messages such as that of International Mother Language Day, as UNESCO is already experiencing through its commendable publication of works also in Esperanto.