

Message of the Universal Esperanto Association on the International Day of Multilateralism, 24 April 2020

We often think of the United Nations simply as an independent international organization fully able to address the problems of the world. Around the United Nations, under its umbrella so to speak, is a host of specialized organizations that are concerned with issues as various as management of the world's economy, setting international standards for the shipping industry, monitoring progress in education, improving agricultural production and distribution, looking out for the welfare of the world's children, and keeping the peace in troubled regions around the globe.

And currently we are all heavily dependent on the work of the World Health Organization as it monitors COVID-19, coordinates efforts to fight it, and unites scientists across the world in the search for its prevention and cure.

But none of these activities is fully international, none would exist if it were not for the willing co-operation of the various countries of the world. The United Nations, including the many organizations that form part of the UN family, are dependent on the active support, collaboration, and financing of the individual states.

Yet it is not unusual to find people who believe that the world would be better off without the United Nations, that all it does is talk, that all it does is limit the sovereignty of individual states. They believe that each country should be free to act exactly as it chooses.

While no organization is perfect, sometimes member-states blame the United Nations for their own shortcomings, or punish the United Nations by cutting off money that goes to assist all UN members. Sometimes it is easier to blame the UN than it is to work with other member-states to address world problems.

Not all problems can be solved by bilateral discussions among states. Indeed, as the world becomes more integrated, more and more problems become multilateral. We need multilateralism and cooperative partnerships to address global problems. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' call "to promote and support a reformed, reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system" is timely. All across the world we see a dangerous withdrawal from multilateralism, a decline in confidence in international order and a rise in nationalism and competition.

In today's dangerous world, faced with a pandemic, with massive displacement of human beings, with military conflict, with droughts and floods, we need multilateralism as it is practiced by the United Nations more than ever. We need talk rather than war, humanitarian co-operation rather than competition, generosity rather than the hoarding of resources, understanding rather than hatred.

And we need a better approach to linguistic diversity, the strengthening of multilingualism within the United Nations, a clear understanding of language rights within states, and a neutral international language to equalize linguistic relations among states.

The United Nations is one of our strongest bulwarks against chaos and conflict. We should make more use of it rather than less.

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