

Newsletter for July 2014

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Artist On Kawara, User of Esperanto, Dies

Renowned conceptual artist On Kawara died recently at the age of 81. Known particularly for his series of paintings *Today*, in which he recorded the date of the day on which he painted a painting – and nothing else – he achieved international fame for his uncompromisingly simple work. The *Today* series, begun in 1966, consisted of utterly plain monochrome canvases bearing a single date. If, on a given day, he began a painting and did not finish it, he destroyed it. Eschewing stencils or other devices, he built each date up through meticulous brush-strokes, always in the same typeface (early on, he used Gill Sans Serif; later he moved to a version of Futura). He stored each painting in a handmade cardboard container, to which he often added a cutting from a newspaper published on that day in the city where he painted the picture.

The language of the dates varied, depending on the country he happened to be in on the day on which he painted the painting. Since he lived primarily in New York, English was the most common language used – but German, French, Spanish, and other languages also appeared. When he was in a country that did not use the Latin alphabet, including his native Japan, he recorded the dates in the international language Esperanto. These utterly simple canvases served as reminders that, while dates themselves are nothing more than a way of measuring time, they stand for everything that happened on that day. It is perhaps no surprise that Kawara began the series in the tumultuous year 1966. His use of Esperanto suggested an interest in the universality of time and events. The office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the UN was honored to have his support.

Universal Esperanto Association Addresses UN Meeting on Language Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Universal Esperanto Association, led by its UN representative in Geneva, Stefano Keller, played an active role in the recent seventh session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), which took place in Geneva from July 7 to July 11. Meeting topics included access to justice in the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, natural disaster risk reduction and prevention and preparedness initiatives, and the post-2015 development agenda. Special attention was given to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition to experts, the meeting was addressed by representatives of indigenous peoples, NGOs, and member states. Among the active participants were the Special UN Rapporteur on Indigenous Affairs, the president of the Human Rights Council, and the UN Deputy High Commissioner on Human Rights. UEA's representative was scheduled to address the meeting on the topic of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its provisions for language rights.

However, difficulties in preparing translations of the meeting's draft resolution required a change in the program. While the formal presentation did not take place, Keller ultimately intervened not once but twice, first to draw attention to the fact that the proposed final resolution (concerned with communication, education, and justice) made no mention of the right to use one's mother tongue in situations where such use was a requirement for full and adequate participation in the life of society.

Keller's second intervention came on 10 July during consideration of language rights contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These rights are defined in Article 13 of the Declaration, along with responsibilities of the States. Keller alluded to the significant reduction in biocultural diversity and the need to maintain such diversity for sustainable development. In the same way, protection of all languages is important, particularly the languages of indigenous peoples, because they contain knowledge needed to preserve diversity.

In accordance with the aims of the Esperanto movement, Keller also drew attention to the need to respect the human dignity of all peoples, to prevent the stronger from forcing their languages and cultures on the others. He stressed the fundamental role of the mother tongue in the lives of all and repeated his recommendation that this idea be included in the final resolution. He drew attention to the fact that the words "language" and "mother tongue" are frequently missing in the relevant UN documents.

Keller used the occasion of the meeting to renew or initiate contact with representatives of NGOs and with the leaders of indigenous peoples.

The texts of Keller's two interventions (translated into several languages) are available at <http://www.linguistic-rights.org/eventoj/>.

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