

# Newsletter for July 2016

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## NGO Conference in Korea: “Now it’s up to the NGOs”

**June 3, 2016.** In their report following the DPI/NGO International Conference of NGOs in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, the Universal Esperanto Association’s delegation emphasized that the Action Plan approved by the conference “will now form the homework of the NGOs,” which must work out “how to realize the agreed-upon plan and put it into practice in accordance with their various functions.” For the UEA, that means paying particular attention to the places where the plan intersects with linguistic issues.

While highly positive about the conference itself, and particularly the presence of so many young people, the delegation’s report sharply criticized the discriminatory nature of the language arrangements: “Almost all speeches were made in English, except for a few workshops in Korean with English translation. Inevitably there was a language problem at the conference, as is customary in international events.” Indeed, the issue of language was largely ignored: “The problem of language was not addressed in any of the plenary meetings or workshops.” While UEA’s representatives, Lee Jungkee (UEA executive committee member) and Kim Young-Long (member of the Esperanto youth organization TEJO), were able to raise the issue in individual sessions, the Action Plan alluded to language in only two ways: first, by including “multilingual and multicultural competence” in its definition of a full education; secondly, by calling on organizations to “translate and disseminate this document in multiple languages and implement it in diverse cultural contexts.”

This second mention of language resulted from the intervention of a UEA representative in a planning meeting in New York in advance of the conference. His call for the inclusion of mother-tongue education and “education in languages that the pupils understand” was unfortunately not included in the Action Plan, though it formed one of the recommendations of the recent Symposium on Language and the SDGs.

As recommended by the Action Plan, the Universal Esperanto Association intends to translate the document, circulate it widely, and post it on its website.

## Language and Refugees: An urgent issue of linguistic justice

**June 8, 2016.** In a position paper addressed to the 101st World Congress of Esperanto, taking place in Nitra, Slovakia, in July, the noted Italian jurist Giuliano Turone, honorary president of Esperanto for the UN, an organization of Esperanto speakers supporting the United Nations, emphasizes the link between language and the fair treatment of refugees. Referring to the “indissoluble link between linguistic justice and social justice,” Turone points out that “we can never achieve the goal of linguistic justice if we do not assert, loud and clear, that in the face of the mass migration of refugees the just and right solution is above all their protection: definitely not the building of barriers and walls, but a rational and intelligent confrontation of the situation by international institutions, through sustainable agreements and with full respect for human rights.” In his statement, Turone calls for:

- 1. Communicating with refugees in languages they understand;**
- 2. Educating state functionaries in these languages;**
- 3. Creating specific services to listen to the voices of the refugees in their own languages.**

Turone rightly recognizes that it is not enough simply to speak Esperanto (which he himself has done since his youth), but that its ideal of mutual comprehension in a spirit of equality should cause speakers of the language to put special emphasis on the link between language on the one hand and human rights on the other. The topic of this year’s World Congress of Esperanto is “Social Justice – Linguistic Justice.”

## Symposium: We need bottom-up as well as top-down linguistic communication in planning and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

**May 29, 2016.** The Symposium on Language and the Sustainable Development Goals, held in New York on April 21 and 22, brought together 120 academics, international civil servants, and diplomatic staff. Its recently published Concluding Document points out that the SDGs require two-way communication across languages at every stage – in planning, in establishing dialogue with affected populations, and in bringing the Goals to a successful conclusion: “Without greater clarity, the global partnerships ... fundamental to the achievement of the SDGs cannot succeed. These partnerships require fair and multidirectional communication, which must inherently involve language.” In fact, the statement goes on, “all of the SDGs interface with language, either as a substantive element of the goal itself (language as a goal) or as a means of communication, dialogue, response, and implementation (language as a tool).”

The document warns that **work on the SDGs could actually widen the gulf between the planners and those whom they serve, because of language difference:** “The dominance of certain languages, particularly English, in international development discourse creates the illusion of a unified global effort. In fact, this dominance has widened the gulf between the Anglophone elites who research, discuss, and write policies, and the billions called on to implement these policies at the individual level. Dialogue tends to go in one direction: from the planners to the planned. Often, language prevents dialogue in a spirit of reciprocity and equality between planners and people.”

Goal 4 (“Ensure inclusive and quality education for all”) receives special emphasis in the document, which stresses the lack of attention to language: “The centrality of education to the successful implementation of all SDGs is emphasized in Goal 4, yet neither the Goal nor its targets may be said to address the role of language in providing inclusive education.... **If the languages pupils speak and understand well are not used as languages of instruction, they are not being given access to the curriculum, nor to quality teaching and learning opportunities.** Linguistically-aware educational policies, for example high-quality mother-tongue-based, multilingual education, must be adopted if Goal 4 is to be successfully implemented and assessed. Only then can equitable education form the foundation for the implementation of all the other SDGs.”

A second section of the Conclusions addresses **language issues in displaced populations:** “The migration of minors with interrupted

formal education has reached crisis proportions.... This increase must be a central concern for any global sustainable development strategy since it lies at the intersection of migration, education, language policy, youth development, and inequality.... Given the global flow of migrants and refugees, only a systematic and overarching re-analysis of educational policies, including language policies, will allow education systems to serve displaced students appropriately and facilitate their eventual productive reintegration into society."

**"Languages are bound up with issues of ideology and identity,"** the document states; "they are not neutral." It suggests that "incorporating language into the planning, implementation, and assessment stages of the SDGs requires acknowledging that language issues are inseparable from social ideologies and power. Top-down language policies frequently fail to engage individual members of society, whose grass-roots motivations and thought-processes will ultimately determine the outcome of policy implementation.... A social change, not only a policy change, may be required before policymakers and individuals become allies in achieving the SDGs."

Two further issues receive special attention in the Conclusions document. The first is a strong call for **policies of multilingualism and inclusion**: "Taking advantage of lingua francas and selective multilingual policies, institutions have achieved global levels of cooperation in research and policy making. However, this is often at the cost of marginalizing key stakeholders. Any gains also obscure the reality of global multilingualism – the day-to-day experience of those at the grassroots level. Engagement and authentic dialogue require acknowledgment of language diversity." While the document notes that "the UN's institutional policies and rules regarding multilingualism demonstrate an explicit commitment to multilingual practice, recognizing language as a core value and as fundamental to its work," it also points out that "these policies have been difficult to operationalize or enforce." Thus, "the UN must reflect further on how best to convey the SDGs in languages and via media that can reach a global population and elicit a constructive response."

Finally, the document addresses **language rights and Goal 16**: "Legal systems which oblige individuals to interact with police, courts, and prison systems through a majority or government language infringe on the very rights the SDGs aim to enforce. Goal 16 ('Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies') implies that sustainable development must incorporate the protection and enforcement of individuals' fundamental rights – rights guaranteed to individuals under Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regardless of what languages they speak. Therefore, language services, such as accredited translators and interpreters, must be offered so that the burden of accurate, unbiased, and contextually appropriate communication is not placed on already disenfranchised speakers of minority and foreign languages."

## **UEA welcomes its first summer intern**

June 1, 2016. Sam Winkelman, a German and linguistics major from Centre College, Kentucky, will be the Association's intern for the summer, supported under a grant from the Esperantic Studies Foundation. He will work on drafting position papers for topics having to do with language implementation and language education policies on both regional and supranational levels. In addition, he will be perfecting his knowledge of Esperanto and become more familiar with the language with the help of his co-workers and members of the Esperanto Society of New York. "I am so excited to make my debut in the Esperanto community," Sam commented. "I'm really looking forward to learning everything that I can from the experience and hope to be a big help to the UEA as well." Interns have been a regular feature of UEA's office in Rotterdam, but Sam's arrival is a first for the New York office.

## **High school students learn Esperanto**

June 6, 2016. An introduction to Esperanto and an opportunity to experiment with the language was recently provided to a group of 30 high-school students from Lacey Township, New Jersey, by local Esperanto speakers and the UN office of the Universal Esperanto Association. The students, led by teacher Maurice Grillon, were introduced to Esperanto grammar and then spent time in groups building Esperanto words and sentences. "It's amazing how much of the language you can learn in an hour," said Humphrey Tonkin, UEA representative at the UN, who led the session. He was assisted by Ulrich Becker, Michael Brandini, Robin Hill, Allison Thorsen, Emma Walker, and Sam Winkelman. The success of the session and the enthusiasm of the students led to the suggestion that such school visits should become a regular part of the UEA's program in New York.

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