

# Newsletter for July 2018

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## Message of the Universal Esperanto Association on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2018



The United Nations has designated June 20 as World Refugee Day. On this day we particularly remember the many millions of people who have been displaced from their homes by war, violence, and natural disasters. The Universal Esperanto Association joins many other organizations in pointing to the necessity of international cooperation to address the needs of refugees and to work for their peaceful and secure return to their places of origin or their asylum in the countries in which they find themselves through no fault of their own.

Among many issues that need to be more vigorously addressed is the language problem: many refugees find themselves in situations in which they cannot communicate with those around them, including government officials, teachers, health workers, and relief workers. As speakers of the International Language Esperanto, we are particularly aware of this failure to address language differences adequately.

On the occasion of World Refugee Day 2018, we call on governments, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations itself to address language issues more directly and in a spirit of linguistic justice, non-discrimination, and humane concern.

**“Cultures, languages, globalization: Where do we go from here?” –**

**Topic of this year’s World Congress of Esperanto, Lisbon, Portugal, July 28 – August 6**



When the Portuguese mariner Vasco da Gama reached the shores of India 520 years ago, he opened a new era in world history. For centuries that era, as the great maritime empires of Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal established their reign over a large part of the world’s surface, seemed to be the era of European conquest. Along with their soldiers, priests, traders and bureaucrats, the imperial languages and cultures expanded their reach, influencing the lives of many millions of people, not only during the height of European power but down to today.

But the process of globalization did not stop with the establishment of the great empires and their colonies. Little by little, seemingly ineluctably, globalization wove all human societies together, so that even the home countries of the erstwhile colonizers became multi-ethnic, multilingual, and places of many faiths. Meanwhile, the advance of communication technologies opened new channels for the interrelationship of societies throughout the world, disseminating, among other things, the understanding that we all live on the same small planet.

That, at least, is what we would like to believe – as Esperantists, internationalists, believers in, and practitioners of, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind. But if we look around us, we see that many people in fact fear the vision and reality of an integrated world, taking refuge in images of their own superiority, their own ability to shut the others out. Language and cultures become weapons for such people – ways of distinguishing friend from foe, doors open only to the chosen. Or, perhaps, means of continuing colonial rule in other forms, forms deeply embedded in the world’s economic and political systems.

Over against these aspects of globalization, various social movements and cultural developments present an alternative path, one leading to a sustainable world based on economic and ecological justice. Such voices, some of them highly influential, are everywhere apparent. But on linguistic and cultural diversity they speak only in vague and generalized terms, in the former colonial languages, under the assumption that common ideas and values are enough to overcome all problems. In contrast to a lack of faith in their fellow human beings, they put too much faith in their ability to banish the shadows of history. But cultures and languages, at all times and in all places, carry with them their own past.

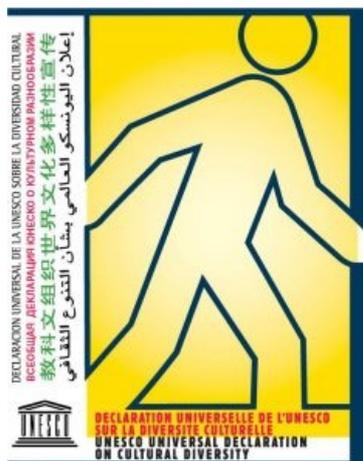
Where do we go from here? Can we Esperantists, having at our disposal a language and culture born in globalism, develop a new and convincing vision for the future? And how should we guide the development of our own culture to make it worthy of such a vision? The Lisbon congress topic will afford us many opportunities to discuss the interconnection of the Esperantist life with that of the world around us, and exchange experiences and perceptions concerning the most significant linguistic and cultural developments of our era. Come with us as we sail this sea!

The World Congress of Esperanto will bring together some 2000 speakers of Esperanto from all across the world for a week of discussion, cultural events, debate, business meetings, and tourism. All meetings are conducted in the International Language Esperanto.

## Association celebrates World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, 21 May 2018

On May 21 each year, the United Nations community celebrates the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. This celebration began in the year 2002, following the approval by the UNESCO General Conference, in November of the previous year, of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

According to Article 1 of the Declaration, “This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.”



Article 5 goes on to point out that “Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights... All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

The Universal Esperanto Association supports the efforts of UNESCO and the United Nations to preserve and strengthen linguistic diversity, while at the same time seeking ways of bridging this diversity in the interests of human rights and sustainable development. It supports the sentiments expressed in Article 6 of the Declaration: “While ensuring the free flow of ideas by word and image care should be exercised so that all cultures can express themselves and make themselves known. Freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equal access to art and to scientific and technological knowledge, including in digital form, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity.”

The Action Plan approved by the General Conference for implementing the Declaration includes three pledges that relate to language, namely:

5. Safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages.
6. Encouraging linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age.
10. Promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace and encouraging universal access through the global network to all information in the public domain.

Our Association encourages its members to celebrate and promote cultural diversity, and to use the International Language Esperanto as a means of engaging with the various cultures of the world in a spirit of reciprocity and respect. If the “dialogue” contained in the title of this day is to carry its full meaning, it must surely mean two-way communication that is as direct and meaningful as possible.

This year’s message celebrating the Day by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, stresses “the need to protect the different forms of cultural expression – languages, arts, crafts, lifestyles – especially those of minority peoples, so that they are not swept away by the movement of standardization that accompanies globalization.” She quotes the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible.” Thus, Ms. Azoulay suggests, “culture is not a heritage set in stone, but one that is living and breathing, open to influences and dialogue, allowing us to adapt more peacefully to the changes in the world.”

We congratulate UNESCO and the United Nations for their efforts to promote cultural diversity, and that sustainable development that maintains such diversity, and pledge our active support for these efforts.

*Office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations*  
777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.  
[1] 212-687-7041  
[www.esperantoporun.org](http://www.esperantoporun.org)

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777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.  
212-687-7041