

Newsletter for March 2020

Newsletter of the Universal Esperanto Association's Office of Liaison with the United Nations

Number 45, March 2020

Study Group and Princeton University delay 2020 symposium

Faced with widespread closures and travel restrictions, the Study Group on Language and the United Nations has decided to postpone its 2020 symposium until the coming year. Under the title "Language and Migration", the symposium was to have been jointly organized by the Study Group and the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS) at Princeton University. The organizers of the symposium plan to examine a range of topics, particularly those relating to language and refugees, and to narratives of migration. This May's sessions were to have been divided between the Church Center for the United Nations at 777 UN Plaza and the campus of Princeton University. Keynote speakers included the novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen and Harvard researcher Sarah Dryden-Peterson. Papers from some eight or ten countries were scheduled.

The likely dates for the symposium are now 29 April – 1 May, 2021.

Universal Esperanto Association salutes International Mother Language Day, 21 February 2020, with call for instruction in languages the students understand

On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, the Universal Esperanto Association sent the following message to the United Nations and UNESCO:

International **MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY**

21st
February
2020



In official
relationship
with UN and
UNESCO

"We must defend ... the indigenous languages, which we now know are disappearing at the rate of one every two weeks – an irreplaceable loss to our human heritage."

Director-General, UNESCO



Children have the right to learn in their own language.
Unesco and the international language movement, **Esperanto**, respect and support linguistic and cultural diversity throughout the world.



Find out more: www.linguistic-rights.org/21-02-2020

About languages: www.lingvo.info About interethnic communication: www.esperanto.net | www.uea.org

The United Nations and its Member-States have called for the achievement of a quality education for all as the fourth of their seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, to be reached by the year 2030. Among the expected outcomes and means of achieving this fourth Sustainable Development Goal are

- Universal primary and secondary education
- Universal pre-primary education
- Universal youth literacy
- Gender equality
- Effective learning environments
- Qualified teachers

This Goal suggests that if students are in school and under the care of qualified teachers, they will learn.

But there is an unspoken assumption underlying this belief – namely that the students will be taught in a language they understand.

In many countries and under many circumstances they 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, and negates the benefits of schooling, of competent teaching, and of investment in educational infrastructure. By not teaching students in a language they understand, we are throwing away money and throwing away promising lives.

That is why UNESCO has proclaimed 21 February International Mother Language Day, to be celebrated annually. Its principal purpose 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 that they fully understand – or, more precisely, 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 Universal Esperanto Association, as one of the few nongovernmental organizations concerned with questions of language, strongly supports International Mother Language Day and its message of linguistic justice for all. As Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, declared in 2018: "Our Organization shares with the Esperanto movement common values: the aim of building a peaceful world, empathy among the peoples, respect for cultural diversity, solidarity across borders."

UEA, in short, believes in education for all in languages they comprehend, in linguistic justice in all its aspects, and in a world made 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.

UEA greets the world's women, especially members of the worldwide Esperanto community, on International Women's Day, March 8, 2020

Speakers of the International Language Esperanto, women and men alike, can be found in every corner of the world. In its role as an international language promoting direct and unfiltered dialogue, Esperanto is uniquely positioned to help women everywhere communicate with one another across the barriers of distance and language, to exchange views and ideas, and to organize for action on behalf of women everywhere.

There is much to be done: equal pay for equal work, access to education, adequate health services, equality before the law, equal schooling for girls and boys – the list is long. Of those children who have access to education, too many girls drop out of school early, before they are able to develop their own particular skills or prepare themselves for careers. While the United Nations is making progress, particularly through Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, growing problems as a result of climate change, human displacement, military action, and epidemics undermine that progress – and are preventable. We need more dialogue, more willingness to compromise, greater understanding, among people and governments everywhere. We need to speak the language of peace.

"Real change," says the United Nations, "has been agonizingly slow for the majority of women and girls in the world. Today not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality." Domestic and public violence against women continues, as does resistance to feminist gains. "It is time," said Secretary-General António Guterres recently, "to stop trying to change women, and start changing the systems that prevent them from achieving their potential."

UEA recognizes and honours the leading role women play in movements for linguistic and cultural revitalization, and for the protection of the domestic sphere from oppression and discrimination. Such efforts are an essential part of the struggle to establish a world where many cultures and languages can coexist in harmony, and where true gender equality is realized.

We express our solidarity with movements to end discrimination against women and girls, and to build a sustainable future in which all people are treated with equal care and respect, regardless of language, culture, gender, and other forms of diversity.

Pandemic shifts focus but does not slow the Esperanto movement

Literally hundreds of Esperanto events slated to take place in the next two or three months have been cancelled or rescheduled, from Israel to China, and from Brazil to Australia – but the Esperanto movement, with its well-established web presence, has simply shifted gears. Chat groups and similar venues are more active than ever, in-person events have become virtual events, and sites for learning Esperanto, such as Duolingo and lernu.net, are attracting wide attention. Confined to their homes, Esperantists are reaching out to colleagues and friends in other countries in a remarkable show of solidarity. The Association's board, led by its president Duncan Charters (USA), has been working hard to adapt the Association to changing circumstances.

In other news:

- UEA was an active participant in the board meeting of the Conference of NGOs (CoNGO), held in New York in early March. Special attention was given to the Declaration of CoNGO on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, and to strengthening the membership of the organization worldwide. The Declaration is available, also in Esperanto translation, at: www.ngocongo.org.
- Francis Hult, a newly joined member of the team representing UEA at the United Nations, represented the Association at the celebration of International Mother Language Day at the UN on February 21.
- Gadirou Diallo, graduate student in International Affairs at Baruch College, City University of New York, has joined the team as an intern in the offices of UEA and CoNGO. Gadirou is a native of Guinea.
- Humphrey Tonkin represented UEA and CoNGO at the High-level Interactive Dialogue on the occasion of the International Day of Education on January 24. He also gave an address to the Civil Society Briefing and UN 75 Dialogue convened by CoNGO at the Church Center on March 5. Others on the panel included Gillian Sorensen, former Under-Secretary-General for External Relations, and the Permanent Representatives of Qatar and Sweden.
- The Conference of NGOs (CoNGO) operates in New York, Geneva and Vienna, primarily through a network of committees on topics of special interest to the UN. Among recent proposals under consideration by CoNGO is the establishment of a New York Committee on Language and Languages.

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