

Newsletter for May 2016

Issue 22, May 2016

Symposium Discusses Multilingualism and the SDGs

April 22. Language and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was the topic of a symposium held at the Church Center for the United Nations, in New York, on April 21 and 22, 2016. Over one hundred academics, diplomats, NGO representatives and UN officials attended the gathering, which examined the linguistic implications of the SDGs, set by the United Nations General Assembly as the basis for the UN's development agenda for the period 2015-2030.

The keynote address was given by Suzanne Romaine, former Merton Professor of the English Language at the University of Oxford. Michael Ten-Pow, Special Adviser to the UN Coordinator for Multilingualism, described his work in the promotion and maintenance of multilingualism within the United Nations itself.

The event was held to highlight the importance of language as a means for the communication of the SDGs to all of the world's peoples, and as an element in the successful realization of the goals themselves. Referring to the fourth SDG, on quality education, Timothy Reagan, of the University of Maine, pointed out that "in spite of the centrality of linguistic issues for this goal, and others, it is interesting to note that language is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the goals themselves, nor in the articulation of the targets to be met in meeting these goals." "Despite their lofty goals," added Professor Romaine of Oxford University, the SDGs "still fail to acknowledge the central role of language in the global debate on poverty, sustainability, and equity."

The symposium discussed language not only as an element in individual goals themselves, but also as the means of communicating the goals and engaging in dialogue with a multilingual world. Stress was laid on the importance of two-way communication in which everyone could participate fully.

Speakers included: Katalin Buzasi, of the University of Amsterdam; Terrence G. Wiley (Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC); Kurt Müller (National Defense University, Washington, DC); Lisa McEntee-Atalianis (Birkbeck, University of London, UK); Theo Du Plessis (University of the Free State, South Africa); Carol Benson (Teachers College, Columbia University), Dragana Radosavljevic (University of Greenwich, UK); Francis M. Hult (Lund University, Sweden); Alison Phipps (University of Glasgow, UK); and María Barros and Anna García Álvarez, of the UN's Spanish Translation Service. Presentations were given by NGO representatives from World Education, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, RTI International, SIL International, the Internationals Network for Public Schools, Linguapax International, and UN Academic Impact.

"Education is key to the success of post-colonial development efforts to eradicate economic and social inequalities," declared Rosemary Salomone, professor of law at St. John's University. "And the other SDGs are equally important linguistically," added Humphrey Tonkin, of the University of Hartford, chair of the symposium; "How can you have equality before the law, or livable cities, or even a worldwide concerted effort to eradicate disease or deliver clean water, if you do not have people speaking and working together, through languages that they all understand?"

It was the general consensus of the gathering that more attention needs to be paid to language in the formulation and execution of the SDGs. While development experts may be fluent in English, many of the people they seek to serve know none of the major world languages.

The symposium, convened by the Study Group on Language and the United Nations, a loosely-organized group of academics and practitioners, was sponsored by the Universal Esperanto Association, an organization in cooperative relations with the UN's Economic and Social Council and its Department of Public Information, and by the Center for Applied Linguistics, along with the Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems and its journal *Language Problems and Language Planning*. The symposium was funded by a grant from the Esperantic Studies Foundation.

Message from the Universal Esperanto Association on the occasion of the 2016 United Nations International Day of Families

May 15. The theme of this year's International Day of Families is "Families, healthy lives and sustainable future." On behalf of the thousands of Esperanto-speaking families it has welcomed into its ranks over the years, the Universal Esperanto Association expresses its enduring commitment to these ideals, including the three aspects emphasized this year: (1) Children and youth's health and well-being, (2) Work-family balance and health outcomes, and (3) Better quality of life for older persons.

Ever since its founding in 1908, our Association has striven to bridge the divides between people and nations. Not infrequently, these activities have led to international marriages and the founding of families whose children are at home in more than one culture. One hundred years ago, in the midst of World War I, the young Association worked, from its headquarters in neutral Switzerland, to use the International Language Esperanto as a means of reuniting families divided by war, and to establish contact with family members isolated from their loved ones. In peacetime, we have sought to spread the learning and teaching of Esperanto as a way of opening up the world to children, adults and older persons alike; for families of all kinds, it represents a unique way of participating in an international community linked by travel, literature, and other shared experiences. Today the Association organizes an annual global gathering of Esperanto-speaking children, and our affiliates arrange meetings for Esperanto-speaking families in several countries each year. The themes of this International Day of Families are thus timely and relevant for the challenges faced by our members around the world.

On this day, in a world in which far too many families are divided or displaced by war and political oppression, far too many families are living in poverty or beset by disease, and far too many families are vainly seeking a better balance between work and family, we express our determination, on behalf of all speakers of Esperanto, to work for a healthier, more egalitarian, more tolerant, and more peaceful world in which family life is strengthened in a way that benefits all families and all individual family members.

"Social Justice – Linguistic Justice" to be Topic of Annual Congress

“Social Justice – Linguistic Justice” is the topic of the 101st World Esperanto Congress, to take place in Nitra, Slovakia, from 23 to 30 July. While the Universal Esperanto Association serves primarily as a forum for Esperanto speakers and takes positions on linguistic issues, its dedication to human rights, and particularly language rights, is written into its constitution. The 101st Congress will look particularly at the way in which language rights intersect with other rights. Some 2000 speakers of Esperanto from around the world are expected to attend the event. The annual Congress serves the Esperantists also as an occasion for artistic events (including theatre), specialized meetings of professionals and scholars, and interactions with the local population. The working language of the Congress is Esperanto.

The event will also be the occasion for a conference on language policy in the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) held under the auspices of the government of Slovakia. The conference was announced by Valéria Zolcerová, of the UN Mission of the Slovak Republic, at the Symposium on Language and the SDGs held recently in New York.

Office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations

777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

212-687-7041

www.esperantoporun.org

Office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations

777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

212-687-7041