

Newsletter for May 2017

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CALLING U.N. PERSONNEL, MISSIONS, AND NGO'S: YOU ARE INVITED! **Symposium on the SDGs and reaching vulnerable populations, May 11-12, 2017**

17 April 2017. An oft-repeated aim of the Sustainable Development Goals is that they should "leave no one behind" and should concentrate on the most vulnerable populations. They should also encourage two-way communication, not just top-down solutions. But has anyone thought about the role of language in this process? Not enough people, according to the Study Group on Language and the United Nations, whose annual symposium for 2017 will address "Language, the SDGs, and Vulnerable Populations." The two-day symposium will take place on Thursday and Friday, May 11 and 12, at the UN Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York beginning at 9:00 a.m. on each day.

The symposium will feature some 25 papers delivered by development professionals, academics, and experts associated with the UN and UNESCO, on a range of issues, including the education of refugee children, migrant education, and problems of language in development. In addition to the USA, presenters will be drawn from a number of countries: Austria, Canada, France, Hungary, India, Italy, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK. Keynote speakers will be Christine Hélot (University of Strasbourg) and François Grin (University of Geneva).

With its strong interest in issues of language discrimination and language equality, the Universal Esperanto Association is a founding partner in the principal organizer of the event, the Study Group on Language and the UN. Cooperating in the organization are the Center for Applied Linguistics (Washington DC) and the Centre for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems (CED). The symposium is underwritten by the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Esperantic Studies Foundation.

The symposium, which is open to UN personnel, NGOs, researchers and others, aims to raise the consciousness of those involved in development work about the need to understand and listen to the voices of those who are often unheard, and to promote research on these problems. Details on the symposium are available at www.languageandtheun.org.

Zamenhof's life's work continues to inspire, one hundred years after his death

14 April 2017. Today is the 100 th anniversary of the death of Ludwik Zamenhof, creator of the International Language Esperanto. On this important day, the Universal Esperanto Association emphasizes once again the significance and continued value of his life's work, which is now detailed in some thirty languages on the new website www.zamenhof.life.

"Not only did Zamenhof possess a brilliant intuitive sense regarding languages," commented Mark Fettes, president of the Universal Esperanto Association. "He was also able to articulate, for example in his speeches at Esperanto congresses, an essential ethical vision for the Esperanto movement, namely the conviction that the gathering of 'people with people' in dialogue was not only useful in practice but also a spiritually profound step towards mutual understanding."

Zamenhof was born in 1859 into a middle-class Jewish family in Bialystok, a city then situated in the western part of the Russian Empire. Already in his teenage years he began experimenting with the creation of a neutral language. Finally, in 1887 in Warsaw, his first textbook was published on the "Lingvo Internacia de doktoro Esperanto," the International Language of Dr. Esperanto. Over the following 25 years, along with his wife Klara, Zamenhof dedicated a large part of his time, energy, and finances to the cultivation of the early Esperanto movement. He corresponded widely, edited periodicals and books, authored articles and poems, translated major works of world literature, and, as of the first World Esperanto Congress in 1905, delivered a series of inspiring congress addresses. Without doubt, his constant, tireless and well-judged activity during these often difficult years was crucial for the stability of the language and its community.

"Along with his ethical vision, Zamenhof insistently held to the idea that Esperanto belonged to all its speakers," added Fettes. "Unlike many other proposers of planned languages, he from the beginning looked for ways of ceding his guiding role to others. Thus, he reacted very favourably to the founding of UEA in 1908, because he rightly saw that the movement needed a common unifying organization in which all Esperantists could cooperate, independently of their nationalities and their various philosophies. His ideas and his example, still today, remain an inspiration for us all."

In 1959, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Zamenhof's birth, UNESCO recognized him as one of the Great Personalities of Humanity. Once again, UNESCO has listed the anniversary of his death as one of the notable anniversaries of 2017. Inspired by this decision, on April 7 the Polish Parliament unanimously accepted, by acclamation, a resolution on the significance of his life's work. Memorial events, symposia and other celebrations of Zamenhof's humanitarian contribution will take place across the world between now and the end of the year. See the calendar at www.gazetaro.org.

Lecture on persecution of Esperantists under Hitler and Stalin to follow symposium

14 April 2017. German historian Ulrich Lins, author of *Dangerous Language*, newly published in English in a two-volume translation by Humphrey Tonkin, will give the fourth Tivadar Soros Lecture on May 12. His subject will be the persecution of Esperanto speakers under Hitler and Stalin, an episode in the histories of Germany and Russia that remains relatively unknown outside the Esperanto movement. Not only were the members of the Zamenhof family targeted for extermination by the Hitler regime, but the entire Esperanto movement in the Soviet Union was eliminated and many of its members were murdered or shipped off to Siberian prison camps. Lins and Tonkin hope that publication of the English translation will make this shameful story better known.

The lecture will take place at 4:00 p.m. on May 12, immediately following the symposium mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. The location will be the same as that of the symposium: the UN Church Center, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York (44 th Street and First Avenue). The lecture is free and open to the public.

The Tivadar Soros Lectures are made possible by a gift from the Soros family to the Esperantic Studies Foundation and are sponsored by

the Program in Linguistics at the CUNY Graduate Center. Earlier lectures in this series were given by Esther Schor (Princeton University), author of *Bridge of Words*, a study of Zamenhof and his legacy in the Esperanto movement; Michael Gordin (Princeton University), on Max Talmey, interlinguist and founder of the New York Esperanto Society, and Brigid O'Keeffe (Brooklyn College), on Esperantist visitors to the early Soviet Union.

Dangerous Language: Esperanto under Hitler and Stalin and *Dangerous Language: Esperanto and the Decline of Stalinism* are published by Palgrave Macmillan and are available through Amazon and other booksellers.

Office of the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations

777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

212-687-7041

www.esperantoporun.org

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