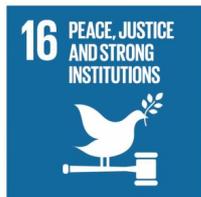


Newsletter for May 2018

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Message from the Universal Esperanto Association on the occasion of the 2018 United Nations International Day of Families, 15 May 2018



The theme of this year's International Day of Families is "Families and inclusive societies." 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 social inclusion for all family members, protection of their human rights, and assistance to all across the world who, in the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 16, "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions," seek help from the international community in coping with displacement, war, extreme poverty, and disease. Many such families are hindered from expressing their needs by language barriers, lack of access to education, and social marginalization.

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 theme of this International Day of Families is thus timely and relevant for the international challenges that our members seek to address around the world through the Sustainable Development Goals.

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.

Symposium examines multilingualism at the United Nations

What can be done to promote multilingualism in the work of the United Nations? How would it make the UN more effective? These were questions raised at a recent symposium on multilingualism organized by the Study Group on Language and the UN. Participants agreed that the UN's language needs extend far beyond the translation and interpretation of its six official languages, yet these needs receive insufficient attention. Nor is the multilingual potential of the UN fully realized.

In a wide-ranging discussion, UN personnel, diplomats, NGOs and academics were in broad agreement that, if the UN is to realize its mission to reach out to civil society, and if it is to engage in constructive dialogue with its various publics, it needs to address its language priorities in the field and find the resources to act on these priorities. Symposium participants pointed to peacekeeping operations, UN information services, and, above all, implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, as areas where a more systematic effort is needed to use a wide range of languages if success is to be achieved.

The Symposium, convened at the UN Church Centre on May 10 and 11, 2018, opened with a panel discussion involving four ambassadors: Martín García Moritán of Argentina, Rudolph Michael Ten-Pow of Guyana, Valentin Rybakov of Belarus, and Narjess Saidane of the International Organization of La Francophonie. Moderator was Igor Shpiniov of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. In effect representing four of the six official languages (Spanish, English, Russian, French), the four panelists discussed efforts to achieve parity among the six, emphasizing the lack of resources and the increasing demands on the language services.

But they also went further.

"We need to stop thinking of multilingualism as a technical issue," declared Ambassador Saidane. "It is a political issue, on how the UN engages on the ground with the people, and their different cultures. A language is a way of thinking and knowing." "What is the cost of multilingualism in comparison with the cost of the absence of multilingualism?" she asked.

We must move away from "a culture of translation," added Ambassador García Moritán, and embrace a world of multilingualism, in which people are as free as possible to express themselves in their own languages.

Ambassador Ten-Pow, of Guyana, pointed out that under the leadership of the present Secretary-General the organization is making strides to strengthen language parity and change its culture to embrace a greater awareness of multilingualism. The panelists agreed.

Ambassador Rybakov, whose delegation was among the initiators of the International Day of Translation, celebrated on September 30 each year, added another important dimension to the discussion: the need for greater awareness, and an international agreement, to protect interpreters and translators in combat zones. Like journalists, language workers are neutral parties who can easily run afoul of the ire of both sides in a conflict. They deserve protection.



[Left to right, Ambassadors García Moritán, Rybakov, Ten-Pow, Saidane, Mr. Shpiniov]

Keynote speaker at the symposium was Michele Gazzola, of the University of Leipzig, a specialist in the economics of language, who addressed language policy in the World Intellectual Property Organization and the European Patent Office. A more multilingual approach to patenting would help safeguard intellectual property, argued Dr. Gazzola, and thereby benefit humankind. It makes sense from both an economic and a humane perspective.

Among other organizations whose language policies were examined in the course of the symposium were ASEAN, the International Criminal Court, and the European Union.

A panel discussion on the symposium's second day, chaired by Rosemary Salomone, of St. John's University School of Law, included Guillaume Dabouis of the European Union delegation, Mekki Elbadri of the Arabic Section of the UN's Documentation Division, Jean-Victor Nkolo of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, Director of the UNESCO office at the UN Marie-Paule Roudil, and Russell Taylor of the UN Department of Public Information. The discussion highlighted the achievements of the UN's language and publication staff but also pointed to major structural shortcomings. With greater resources, the public information staff could reach a wider public, Mr. Taylor suggested. Ms. Roudil pointed out that UNESCO has been a major promoter of mother-tongue education, but that many children are still prevented from learning in their mother tongue. Drawing on his wide experience of UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, Mr. Nkolo stressed the extreme importance of having personnel competent in local languages attached to such operations.

Papers presented during the symposium included studies of sign language, corporate multilingualism, the language of instruction in universities, and the role of language in refugee resettlement agencies. A report from Red T, an NGO established to promote the safety of interpreters and translators, reinforced the message delivered to the symposium earlier by Ambassador Rybakov of Belarus.

Some one hundred people attended the symposium. The Study Group plans to continue its work of sensitizing the United Nations to the importance of multilingualism. Stressing the need for two-way communication and echoing one of the slogans associated with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the General Assembly in 2015, Humphrey Tonkin, chair of the symposium, remarked, "We all know how to say 'No one left behind' in English, but can we say it in Twi, or Gujarati, or Guarani – languages of the people whom we are supposedly serving? And can we understand, or even hear, the left-behind when they speak to us?"

The symposium was sponsored by the Center for Applied Linguistics (Washington DC), Birkbeck University of London, the Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems and its journal *Language Problems & Language Planning*, the Universal Esperanto Association, and the Esperantic Studies Foundation. More information is available at www.languageandtheun.org.

Universal Esperanto Association elected to board of CoNGO

At its annual meeting in Geneva in March, the Conference of Nongovernmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, or CoNGO, elected UEA to its Board for the period 2018-2021. The Association thus joins 17 other major international NGOs in acting as the voice of organizations affiliated with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Under the leadership of its president, Liberato Bautista, who is based in New York, CoNGO's mission is to facilitate the participation of NGOs in the UN system. Its board meets on a rotating schedule in New York, Geneva, and Vienna, where UEA is represented, respectively, by Prof. Humphrey Tonkin, Stefano Keller, and Prof. Hans-Michael Maitzen. UEA is particularly active in two CoNGO committees – on Peace (Vienna) and on Education (New York).

"This recognition of our Association's international standing is an important milestone in our efforts to work more closely with the United Nations family," commented Dr. Tonkin. "We look forward to working with CoNGO on behalf of, and in cooperation with, international NGOs across the world."

CoNGO board members include Soka Gakkai International, the International Alliance of Women, Soroptimist International, the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the International Union of Psychological Science.

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

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