

Declaration of the Universal Esperanto Association on the occasion of International Mother Language Day 2018

21 February 2018

On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, a celebration established by UNESCO as a reminder of the wealth of linguistic diversity across the world, the Universal Esperanto Association points out that, while in some countries attention is given to the conservation of linguistic diversity and the use of mother tongues in education, in other countries, all across the world, discrimination, in various forms, still continues against speakers whose mother tongues are small and unrecognized.

As a result, many children are deprived of the possibility of learning in their own languages, even at the elementary level, and accordingly suffer disadvantage in their earliest years of schooling.

In this way, little by little languages are disappearing and dying, and entire peoples are losing their intellectual treasure – a point made by many linguists both within and outside UNESCO.

Biological and linguistic diversity are indivisibly linked and interdependent. The loss of linguistic diversity causes the loss of traditional knowledge essential for sustainable biodiversity, for life itself.

Speakers of the international language Esperanto favour equality among all languages and all cultures, whether large or small. Beginning as early as the 1950s, our Association has always collaborated with UNESCO in protecting local languages and their use in education. With UNESCO's establishment of International Mother Language Day in 1999, the Universal Esperanto Association has regularly participated in marking the occasion with its own activities (posters, declarations, events), and is doing so again this year with materials in several languages (<http://www.linguistic-rights.org/21-02-2018/>).

The core values of this Day, namely diversity and the right of everyone to speak their mother tongue, are also the values supported by the worldwide Esperanto movement. We, the speakers of Esperanto, wish to cause no language to disappear; we wish that all languages continue to exist, that everyone's language rights be respected, and that linguistic justice apply in all communication.

Esperanto is a means of protection against the disappearance of languages, as the former President of the Republic of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, has explained: "It is time that the various nations understand that a neutral language could become a real bulwark for their cultures against the monopolistic influences of only one or two languages, as now appears increasingly evident. I sincerely hope Esperanto will rapidly make more progress to assist all of the world's nations.

Behind Esperanto there are no states, economic interests, imperialist drives – nor are there peoples whose interest lies in the disappearance of other peoples, or their languages, or the acquisition of others' markets. Behind Esperanto are people of goodwill from many peoples and nations, who work together for justice for all cultures and all languages, in the spirit of peace.

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