

Message of the Universal Esperanto Association on World Refugee Day 20 June 2020

According to United Nations statistics, today 71 million people across the world have been forcibly displaced by wars, natural disasters, and expulsion from their homelands. Most are living in refugee camps, often with the lifesaving support of the UN. Their situation has been made even more difficult by the arrival of COVID-19. For many refugees, social distancing is not a possibility, there is no way to quarantine, and there are inadequate health and hospital services. In many parts of the world national boundaries are closed even to the prosperous; refugees are actively spurned and vilified. While everyone is at risk from COVID-19, the world's refugees are among those most in peril.

As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has pointed out, "If ever we need reminding that we live in an interconnected world, the novel coronavirus has brought that home." COVID-19, says the Commission "knows no borders, no language barriers. It threatens everyone on this planet – including refugees and other displaced people."

The United Nations has designated June 20 as World Refugee Day. On this day we particularly remember the many millions of people who have been displaced from their homes by war, violence, and natural disasters. The Universal Esperanto Association joins many other organizations in pointing to the necessity of international cooperation to address the needs of refugees and to work for their peaceful and secure return to their places of origin or their asylum in the countries in which they find themselves through no fault of their own.

Among many issues that need to be more vigorously confronted is the language problem: many refugees find themselves in situations in which they cannot communicate with those around them, including government officials, teachers, health workers, and relief workers. As speakers of the International Language Esperanto, we are particularly aware of this failure to address language differences adequately.

On the occasion of World Refugee Day 2020, we call on governments, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations itself to address language issues more directly and in a spirit of linguistic justice, non-discrimination, and humane concern.

And, above all, we call on everyone to support the work of the United Nations in alleviating the plight of refugees in today's perilous world environment.

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