

# Message on International Education Day, 24 January 2021

The Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) joins with the International League of Esperantist Teachers (ILEI) and the World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO) in this message on the occasion of International Education Day 2021.

Some twenty years ago, a forum in Dakar organized by UNESCO outlined the most urgent worldwide steps required in the field of education, including the following:

- States must strengthen the protection and instruction of all young children, particularly those in poverty or threatened with exclusion and/or discrimination.
- Children from ethnic minorities should receive particular educational attention.
- Access to adequate programmes of instruction should be guaranteed to all, so as to satisfy basic needs and active civic life.
- Access to instruction should be available for all, not only in childhood but throughout life.
- It should be possible to assess instructional outcomes, and these outcomes should enable all activities of normal life: reading, writing, numeracy.

Even though these principles were articulated in the year 2000, they remain a long way from fulfilment.

The world has changed enormously over these twenty years through the arrival of new means of communication. Digitization and the Internet have brought false facts and new dangers, but they have also made possible new ways of teaching and learning. One area affected by these changes is non-formal education, where the majority of training programmes for young people have moved away from physical encounters and on to the Internet. Digitized education (in schools, universities, youth activities, and training) may offer a path to the future, if the actors involved can guarantee that such structures are available to all and that the rights of participants are respected, even in a digital environment. The pandemic year of 2020 has shown that the Net allows contact and discussion on a worldwide scale, for example among Africans who could not physically attend meetings in Europe.

Even before the revolution in communications, Africans expressed the wish that basic information be available in Esperanto, in all fields, "so that we could have access to knowledge without using the colonial languages." This is now possible through Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, which was twenty years old on January 15, 2021. The version of Wikipedia in Esperanto now has more than 290,000 articles; thus, little by little, this desire of Africans is being realized. At the same time, a working group on Esperanto in universities is exploring new ways of using Esperanto as a language for university learning and instruction.

The whole question of the language of instruction requires intense attention at all levels. We favour the use of the mother tongue of pupils in basic education, and, in later years, the learning of other languages, including Esperanto, for broader communication. We are firmly opposed to all unjust discrimination on the basis of the language that a person speaks, although this problem persists in many parts of the world. We favour education for global citizenship in a linguistically diverse world.

We are very much aware that the present International Education Day is taking place in the middle of a pandemic. The World Bank calculates that an additional 72 million children will face illiteracy because of the resulting limitations or even collapse of education systems in many regions of the world. Many children are suffering hunger; others are facing disease. The lofty goals of the United Nations Agenda 2030 are undergoing a huge, perhaps fatal, blow.

We call on all people of good will, on the speakers of Esperanto throughout the world, on the United Nations and UNESCO, to come together in a spirit of co-operation to educate our children, compensate for the damage of the pandemic, particularly for young people and vulnerable populations, and rediscover the path to equality, prosperity and self-sufficiency proposed by effective worldwide education.

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