

# Universal Esperanto Association: Message to the United Nations and to UNESCO on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, 21 February 2020



International  
**MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY**

21st  
February  
2020

"We must defend ... the indigenous languages, which we now know are disappearing at the rate of one every two weeks – an irreplaceable loss to our human heritage."  
—Cherif Bassel, UNESCO

Children have the right to learn in their own language. **Unesco** and the international language movement, **Esperanto**, respect and support linguistic and cultural diversity throughout the world.

Find out more: [www.linguistic-rights.org/07-02-2020](http://www.linguistic-rights.org/07-02-2020)  
About linguists: [www.lingua.info](http://www.lingua.info) About Esperanto: [communication.esperanto.net](http://communication.esperanto.net) [www.uea.org](http://www.uea.org)

The United Nations and its Member-States have called for the achievement of a quality education for all as the fourth of their seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, to be reached by the year 2030. Among the expected outcomes and means of achieving this fourth Sustainable Development Goal are

- Universal primary and secondary education
- Universal pre-primary education
- Universal youth literacy
- Gender equality
- Effective learning environments
- Qualified teachers

This Goal suggests that if students are in school and under the care of qualified teachers, they will learn.

But there is an unspoken assumption underlying this belief – namely that the students will be taught in a language they understand.

In many countries and under many circumstances they are not taught in their own languages and little is done to help them transition into the language of instruction. This often puts them at a permanent disadvantage, and negates the benefits of schooling, of competent teaching, and of investment in educational infrastructure. By not teaching students in a language they understand, we are throwing away money and throwing away promising lives.

That is why UNESCO has proclaimed 21 February International Mother Language Day, to be celebrated annually. Its principal purpose is

to reiterate the educational advantages of using the mother tongue in schools, particularly primary schools. Children learn to read and write faster in a language that they fully understand – or, more precisely, they suffer a disadvantage if they are obliged to begin their learning in a language that they do not understand, either partially or completely.

International Mother Language Day also reminds us that in many parts of the world entire languages have no official status, their speakers are discriminated against, and their cultural values are ignored.

The Universal Esperanto Association, as one of the few nongovernmental organizations concerned with questions of language, strongly supports International Mother Language Day and its message of linguistic justice for all. As Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, declared in 2018: “Our Organization shares with the Esperanto movement common values: the aim of building a peaceful world, empathy among the peoples, respect for cultural diversity, solidarity across borders.”

UEA, in short, believes in education for all in languages they comprehend, in linguistic justice in all its aspects, and in a world made peaceful through education and understanding. Our Association works for these goals in every corner of the world, linked by the International Language Esperanto. We call on the United Nations, UNESCO, and all those working for a sustainable world, to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the knowledge, equality, justice and opportunity that such an achievement would bring with it.

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