

Esperanto Day and International Friendship Day 2021

The week of 25-30 July is of special importance to the Esperanto-speaking community.

July 26, 2021, is the 134th anniversary of the publication of the International Language Esperanto and is celebrated within the Esperanto movement as **Esperanto Day**. The initiator of the language, Dr. L.L. Zamenhof worked tirelessly for the promotion of peace and understanding, and for the friendship of the peoples of the world. In those early years, many individuals and organizations adopted Esperanto and used it for the promotion of peace. Today, there are speakers of Esperanto all over the world,



numbering in the millions and located in the majority of Member States of the United Nations. With the example of their founder Zamenhof, they work to bring people together in the spirit of peace and trust.

July 30 is **International Friendship Day**. Ten years ago, in 2011, the UN General Assembly declared this day the International Day of Friendship, building on UNESCO's call, some fourteen years before, for the creation of a Culture of Peace, "a set of values, attitudes and behaviours that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes."

Among those root causes is a lack of understanding among the peoples of the world, and among the root causes of that lack of understanding is the issue of language.

We the people, quite literally, can't understand one another.

All across the world there are people who are underprivileged, who live in poverty, who suffer from want and disease, who are powerless in the hands of those in power and are displaced from their homes by war and natural disasters. Many of them speak languages the rest of us do not understand: even if we try to listen, we cannot understand them. Far too many of us are insensitive to these differences of language, as Dr. Zamenhof sought to make clear a century or more ago.

Many of them are losing their languages: minority and indigenous languages are dying out, along with the history and knowledge associated with them.

The Universal Esperanto Association, and the Esperanto-speaking community of which it is a part, are deeply committed to bringing people together across boundaries geographic and economic, across differences of race and religion, class and social status, politics and ideology. Friendship and fellow-feeling are not mere "soft values" but the very underpinning of peace and trust.

This year's virtual congress of Esperanto, which brought thousands of people together, ended on July 24. Its principal theme was **Peace and Trust**, in recognition of the International Year of Peace and Trust

declared by UNESCO and the United Nations for 2021. We dare to hope that in this year of pandemic and of natural disasters, when trust among the peoples is being put to the test as never before, the world will rise to the occasion.

On Esperanto Day, we speakers of Esperanto, who have spent the past few days at our annual congress talking of peace and furthering trust, rededicate ourselves to the promotion of understanding and, on the occasion of the International Day of Friendship, to the friendship that the world so desperately needs. **Friendship depends on trust; trust depends on understanding – and friendship, trust and understanding depend on a realistic assessment of the world's needs at a time when our very existence is threatened.**