

Esperanto and the UN

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UNESCO greets World Esperanto Congress

“UNESCO is pleased and proud to work alongside the Universal Esperanto Association, as it has done for several decades, to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and its importance for building and strengthening peace.” In these words, conveyed by way of a message from Assistant Director-General Tawfik Jelassi, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay sent greetings to this year’s Virtual Congress of Esperanto, organized in July by the Universal Esperanto Association. UNESCO’s greeting singled out for particular praise the Association’s work in bringing about the publication of the *UNESCO Courier* in the Esperanto language, a task now entrusted to the UEA affiliate the Chinese Esperanto League.

Some two thousand people, from over one hundred countries, participated in the Virtual Congress. Among the topics discussed, in addition to the work of UEA, lectures, seminars, and musical and dramatic performances, was the International Year of Peace and Trust, declared for 2021 by UNESCO and the UN General Assembly. The congress also gave particular attention to the promotion of intercultural competence.

The Association hopes to meet in person in Montreal next year. The congress theme for 2022 is another UNESCO initiative: “Language, Life, Earth: The Decade of Indigenous Languages.”

Association emphasizes importance of indigenous languages

August 9, the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, was given special emphasis by Esperanto speakers on the eve of what will be the Decade of Indigenous Languages due to begin on January 1, 2022. “The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, also translated into Esperanto, recognizes the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, and also the right to self-determination, autonomy and self-government,” declared a message from the Universal Esperanto Association to the UN and UNESCO. “An important part of those rights is the conservation, revival and development of their languages, traditions and institutions. We remind the States of the obligations they have undertaken, and at the same time draw attention to the role of civil society in the implementation of the Declaration.”

UEA’s message pointed out that “to respect, conserve and develop diversity, and to find good ways of communicating, understanding and working together form the very basis of Esperanto as a linguistic and

cultural phenomenon.” Indeed, “the international language Esperanto does not seek to remove the languages of individual communities but to facilitate contacts between communities, while all languages have the right to develop in their own territories. In this sense, the speakers of Esperanto defend linguistic and cultural diversity, in contrast to the frequent practice of the major national languages, whose speakers do indeed occupy more and more space at the cost of smaller languages.”

UEA’s 2022 congress, the message states, “is one of the international events that will help to launch the Decade for the period 2022-2032. In celebrating the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples 2021, we announce our strong support for the Decade, which will form an occasion to celebrate and strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity, promote inclusion and human rights, and build peace and development.”

In addition to its message, the Association designed and distributed posters in several languages celebrating the International Day. A session of the virtual congress of the International League of Esperanto Speakers was devoted to a high-level discussion of indigenous languages, with particular attention to indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada, India, Iran, and Benin, and with special emphasis on the importance of mother-tongue education.

Esperanto youth organization speaks out on Youth Day

For International Youth Day, the World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO), which cooperates closely with UEA, issued a message on the central role played by young people in the public sphere. Youth participation in the fields of climate action, gender equality, social justice, peace, security and other topics important for human rights is remarkable and essential, according to the message.

The message drew attention to the topic of this year’s Youth Day, “Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health.” Such transformation can be achieved, the message stated, “only if young people are an active part of the solution.”

In endorsing TEJO’s message, the Universal Esperanto Association welcomed the growing participation of young Esperanto speakers in the work of the United Nations system: “Young people are the activists of a better future.”

A new issue of the *UNESCO Courier* published in Esperanto

Available in eight languages, including Esperanto, the April-June issue of the *UNESCO Courier* has as its main theme the challenges facing today’s young people. Youth, although an entertaining and exciting time, is always difficult, filled with doubts and difficult decisions. This issue deals with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people around the world, but it also deals with the important role of young people, who do not accept inequalities, work for environmental protection, advance solidarity, and defend democracy.

The issue also touches on other important themes, among them the effects of conspiracy theories, the situation of Haiti, and linguistic inequality on the Internet. This last topic is of particular interest to speakers of Esperanto, who have long argued that the world's most powerful languages tend to dominate international discourse and tend to neglect speakers of other languages.

Language, Conflict and Security

English and Esperanto were the two languages used for the symposium on Language, Conflict and Security organized jointly by Ulster University (Belfast, Northern Ireland) and the Centre for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems, with financial assistance from the Esperantic Studies Foundation. One in an occasional series of symposia named in memory of the Japanese diplomat Inazo Nitobe, deputy secretary-general of the League of Nations, the meeting brought together a group of international experts on the topic on July 26 and 27.

Four broad topics were considered: language policy in Northern Ireland, language in humanitarian crises, language in security and conflict resolution in Europe, and the promotion of linguistic justice. Speakers at the virtual event included specialists from North American and European universities and from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and UNESCO.

<https://esfacademic.org/en/nitobe-2021/>

President of Brazilian Academy of Letters joins UEA's Honorary Patrons

A Brazilian speaker of Esperanto over many years, Marco Americo Lucchesi has recently been named by the UEA's board to the Association's Honorary Committee of Patrons. Lucchesi, a professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and a well-known writer, is the current president of the highly respected Brazilian Academy of Letters.

He is known for his defence of indigenous languages and of human rights. Educational and literary projects in the poorer quarters of major cities and in prisons have been frequently organized under his leadership. Of his literary work, the Italian scholar and critic Umberto Eco has said: "His intense creative labours have produced a superb body of work." In 2019 he became the first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters to invite indigenous representatives to address the Academy in indigenous languages.

Lucchesi learned Esperanto in his youth (he was born on December 9, 1963) and is an active supporter of the language. He was appointed to UEA's Honorary Committee during the 2nd Virtual Congress of Esperanto on July 24.

International Esperanto Day proposed for UNESCO



July 26, the date of the publication of Esperanto in 1887, is celebrated in the Esperanto movement as International Esperanto Day, a day when Esperanto speakers remember the many contributions of the language to the peace movement, to international understanding, and to the struggle for linguistic justice. Esperanto has already been declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO Commissions of Poland and Croatia, the *UNESCO Courier* is published in Esperanto, and recently an Esperanto translation of a UNESCO volume celebrating the first seventy years of that organization has appeared. For sixty years UEA has been contributing to UNESCO's work on the rapprochement of east and west through its East-West Series of literary translations.

UEA has sent an official letter to UNESCO and national Esperanto associations are working with the national UNESCO commissions in their countries.

Refugees and language: UEA addresses a worldwide problem

"A recent UN communication explains that the number of people driven from their homes by violence, war or human rights violations reached 82.4 million in the year 2020 – 4% more than in 2019. Between 2018 and 2020, nearly one million children were born as refugees. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, over one percent of humanity is now forcibly displaced." So begins a statement by the Universal Esperanto Association issued on World Refugee Day, June 20, 2021.

"The topic of this year's Refugee Day is *Together we Heal, Learn, and Shine*" the statement continues. "The topic emphasizes the need for refugees to reach public health, educational and recreational services. We grow healthy together when we all receive the needed care. When we learn together, we create a stronger community. We shine when we play together as a team. And inclusion will make possible a better recovery after COVID-19."

As the statement points out, "The language dimension is crucially important. What languages must refugees use to access these services? This is no easy question, because we must respect the origins of refugees, help them to adapt to new circumstances, and support the widest and richest education possible. Refugees often do not understand, or misunderstand, life-saving information and are incapable of communicating to ask for help. They suffer, for example, a language handicap or lack of confidence, and they must confront many obstacles with respect to language."

"People gain access to human rights through language. Thus, respect for someone's language is respect for that person. In the face of this truth, the Esperanto movement supports linguistic justice in every type of

communication, and proposes Esperanto as one effective way among many. Esperanto can help both refugees and hosts as an instrument of understanding and cultural dialogue.”

The statement reminds its audience of the work already done by speakers of Esperanto: “Esperanto speakers throughout the world participate in activities to help refugees, among them the translation of vital information, and the teaching of local languages and of Esperanto. One good example, among many, is a series of websites that teach languages and offer useful information about ways of life and employment in Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Russia and the Czech Republic, in many languages, including Esperanto.”

Finally, the statement reminds its readers that “two months ago, our Association was among those who sponsored a virtual symposium on Language and Migration. The Symposium, whose speakers included authors Viet Thanh Nguyen and Jhumpa Lahiri, brought together over 1000 people from some fifty countries to discuss, among other topics, language services, multilingual education, and the linguistic human rights of refugees.”

UEA intervenes on language and education

Recently, UEA, in a series of interventions by UEA representative to the UN, Francis Hult, has drawn attention to the importance of language in education. In the UNESCO Futures of Education initiative and in preliminary discussions on the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, Prof. Hult has pointed out that many young people do not have access to education in a language they understand. Obviously, this is a huge impediment to quality education and to educational equality. Reports from UNESCO and the World Bank have shown that many countries have no policies on multilingual education and that, where policies exist, they are incompletely realized.

Linguistic access to education is essential, not only for learning, but also for all aspects of development. UEA, as it has repeatedly emphasized, supports multilingual education that includes the mother tongue, along with languages of wider communication – regional, national, and international.

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