

Esperanto and the UN

Newsletter of the Universal Esperanto Association's Office of Liaison with the United Nations

Number 55, November-December 2021



Universala Esperanto-Asocio

UEA representative Francis Hult keynote speaker at NGO Summit

In UN affairs, language matters. Language mediates all aspects of the UN's work across areas such as humanitarian action, peacekeeping, social justice, human rights, migration, and public health. It does not receive the attention it needs. This was the urgent message conveyed by Universal Esperanto Association representative to the UN Francis M. Hult, one of four keynote speakers at the recent Civil Society Summit on Substantive Issues, organized by the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations on the theme "The UN We Need for the World We Want." Addressing the question of why language matters to all stakeholders in development, not just language-related organizations, Professor Hult emphasized that multilingualism is essential for both the UN and civil society in order to facilitate transparency, equitable participation, dialogue, outreach, and awareness-raising. Looking to the future, he called upon all NGOs in consultative relationship with the UN to engage deliberately and explicitly with the management of multilingualism in their work with UN partners and civil society.

The other three keynote speakers at the Summit were Irina Bokova, former Director-General of UNESCO, Radhika Coomaraswamy, former UN Under-Secretary-General and Garry Jacobs, president of the World Academy of Art and Science.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zS1x9aIPrqHlI5ta-LJBE-jD-j48Z4HT/view>

Esperanto Youth Organization Gains Consultative Status

The worldwide organization of young speakers of Esperanto, TEJO, has recently gained Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This makes it the second Esperanto organization to enjoy such status, along with the Universal Esperanto Association, which has worked with the UN and UNESCO since 1954. TEJO has long co-operated with the UN in various capacities, notably through youth NGO activities in connection with the UN High-Level Political Forum and through ICMYO, the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations. In 2019 TEJO took part in the ECOSOC Youth Forum and its representative, Rakoen Maertens, was selected to speak on behalf of youth at the opening ceremony. In 2021 TEJO organized two side events on language rights and youth.

“This achievement signals a new stage” in TEJO’s UN relations, noted Valentin Ceretto Bergerat, TEJO board member responsible for external relations. He stressed the close working relationship between TEJO and UEA and the opportunities for co-operation in the future. Chief UN representative for TEJO will be Rakoen Maertens (Belgium and UK), and TEJO will be represented at the UN in New York by Hans Becklin (USA).

NGO Committee on Language and Languages Founded

On the initiative of the Universal Esperanto Association and a group of additional NGOs, an NGO Committee on Language and Languages has been established to highlight the importance of language issues at the UN and the need for effective multilingualism in the UN’s work. Led by Universal Esperanto Association representatives to the United Nations Professors Humphrey Tonkin and Francis Hult, the committee has 22 founding members, and additional NGOs continue to join. A working group to set up by-laws and determine procedures was established at the Committee’s founding meeting on September 9.

NGOs in the working group include the International Federation of Translators, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, the Order of St. George, and Red T. The Committee’s first (virtual) briefing meeting is scheduled for December 7, when the group will be addressed by Mr. Movses Abelian, UN Under-Secretary for General Assembly and Conference Management, who also serves as the Secretary-General’s Coordinator for Multilingualism.

Also speaking at the inaugural briefing on December 7 will be H.E. Ambassador Rabab Fatima, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations. Bangladesh. It was on Bangladesh’s initiative in 1999 that the UN General Assembly established International Mother Language Day, celebrated each year on 21 February.

A Joint Inspection Unit Report (2020) provides insight into the current situation of multilingualism at the United Nations:

https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/review_highlights_jiu_rep_2020_6.pdf

Unesco Celebrates

Following a year or more in which all UNESCO events took place virtually, several celebrations have recently taken place in the Unesco building.

On 25 October, the day following United Nations Day, the Association of Former Unesco Staff Members celebrated the 100th birthday of Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, former Director-General (1974-1987). UEA’s representative to Unesco attended, and video contributions were received from, among others, the Directors-General who succeeded Director-General M’Bow. In fact, Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow reached

100 on 20 March (French Language Day) – an occasion celebrated at the time by Senegal, where he now lives. As the first African to lead a major international organization, he advanced multilateralism and paid particular attention to communication, including Esperanto. He travelled to Reykjavik in 1977 to address the World Congress of Esperanto and received the Zamenhof Prize in 1986. He aimed to make Unesco “the foundry in which yesterday's utopias become tomorrow's realities.

On 12 November, separately from the General Conference, Unesco celebrated its 75th anniversary in the presence of 26 heads of government and many well-known artists from across the world. Space was insufficient to accommodate NGO representatives, who were able to watch the ceremony on CCTV or the web.

The 41st Unesco General Conference runs from 9 to 24 November, somewhat hampered by the pandemic (there is, for example, no separate NGO programme). Audrey Azoulay has been re-elected as Director General, and several international days have been approved without debate, among them Kiswahili Language Day (7 July). UEA was represented by a five-person team, and on 13 November UEA representative François Lo Jacomo addressed the plenary in the context of the General Political Debate: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7Hk-RrCmQc&list=PLWuYED1WVJIOsFXvWDpkeiUzEtI9IMOHp&index=12&t=9643s>

The International League of Esperantist Teachers (ILEI) also sent a two-person delegation. Numerous contacts were made, and Max Garcia addressed the Education Commission, announcing “Kungfu Rabbit,” a joint project with the Ningna Foundation, for animated films to teach children how to save the planet.

Esperanto Geneva Team Reorganizes

A reconstituted team of UEA representatives has begun work at UN Geneva under the guidance of Francesco Reale, former deputy representative. Members of the team are Alain Favre, Alessio Sacha Giordano, Mireille Grosjean, Nicole Margot, and Adrian Tanner.

Multilingualism in Europe

The European Day of Languages, 26 September, was created to advance multilingualism and inter-cultural understanding in Europe, and to recognize linguistic diversity as part of the European cultural inheritance. The Universal Esperanto Association encouraged Esperanto speakers to participate in a number of events across Europe celebrating the diversity of languages and cultures. Among the proposals: recognition of Esperanto as a bridge between European languages, and the use of Esperanto as an introduction to language study in European schools.

Esperanto Speakers Work for Tolerance and Understanding

The Universal Esperanto Association, in recent statements, has been particularly vocal on the need for multilateral cooperation and tolerance in the face of growing world crises. “To show tolerance we must understand each other,” declares UEA’s statement on the International Day for Tolerance, 16 November 2021. “And to understand each other, we must look for ways of crossing the boundaries of language.”

Just days earlier, on October 24, United Nations Day, the Association issued a similar statement, declaring that “Trust and solidarity constitute the essential means to restore the world to health and to build a better future. We welcome the words of UN Secretary General António Guterres, in his Common Agenda, that we are at a turning-point in history: moving towards a more sustainable and peaceful future for the peoples of the world and for the world as a whole depends on us, today’s humanity – and on the decisions that we make.”

The UN Day statement continues: “A few days from now, in Glasgow, the UN Conference on Climate Change will open. Discussed at the conference will not be merely local problems or regional difficulties, nor minor worldwide issues, but the very future of the planet and, with it, of the human species. Is it possible that, in this International Year of Peace and Trust, the UN and its members might find the courage to address this question directly? Will the voices of the people, in all their languages, be listened to by the UN and the various states?”

UEA’s message for Tolerance Day references the UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995): “Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.” That means that to be truly tolerant, we must relate to one another and work with one another harmoniously, to build open and safe communities for all.

“Tolerance is more and more necessary in the face of today’s challenges,” the statement continues. “Faced with a climate crisis, a health crisis, forced migration, racism, extremism and other challenges, we must all learn about diversity and openness, and discover the cultures and beliefs of others. We need better laws, education, access to information, and awareness.”

Amid such massive challenges, UEA points out that “the United Nations and UNESCO have declared the year 2021 the International Year of Peace and Trust. We today face a crisis of trust, in which the individual states often do not succeed in breaking mutual mistrust to come together to solve world problems. Lacking, among other things, is the tolerance that underlies trust and thus the trust that underlies peace.”

As Humphrey Tonkin, Representative of UEA to the United Nations, points out, there is a certain irony that, in the midst of world crises and out-and-out hostilities, UN Member States are willing to call this year the Year of Peace and Trust. “General Assembly resolutions are easy,” Tonkin commented. “How about doing the hard work that such resolutions call for, before it’s too late?”