

Esperanto and the UN

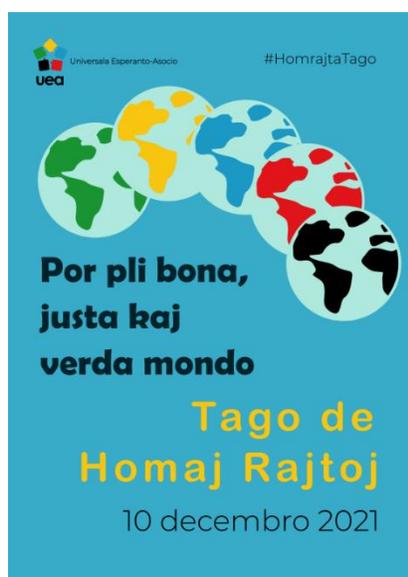
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10 December – Human Rights Day 2021: UEA highlights its history



The Universal Esperanto Association has once again sent a message of support to the United Nations on the occasion of Human Rights Day 2021 – at a time when it seems that attacks on human rights are more and more frequent.

This year's message looks at the Association's history, which has featured human rights from the very beginning of the Association's 113-year history: "When Hector Hodler founded the Universal Esperanto Association in 1908, human rights were a part of the Association's internationalist agenda from the beginning: Hodler believed strongly in tolerance, in equality (including gender equality) and in peaceful relations among nations. He saw in Esperanto a means of realizing these ideals." The Association was founded in Switzerland, home of the international peace movement of the day, and of international organizations such as the Red Cross and the Universal Postal Union.

Following World War II and the catastrophic loss of life not only in the war itself but among civilians, including Holocaust victims and also victims of Stalin's campaign against Esperanto speakers, the Association reaffirmed its commitment to human rights: "Respect for human rights was formally written into the basic principles of the Universal Esperanto Association when, in its first congress after the Second World War, in Bern in July-August 1947, it approved a resolution declaring that respect for human rights was an essential condition for the work of the Association. It accordingly accepted with enthusiasm the news of the adoption of the Universal Declaration [of Human Rights] a year later."

"Respect for human rights continues as a fundamental condition for UEA's work," as the Association's message on Human Rights Day made clear. "The Association welcomes the attention given to human rights in Secretary General António Guterres's recent plan for the future, *Our Common Agenda*, with his call for 'a renewed social contract anchored in human rights.'"

UEA's message quoted the statement of Secretary General Guterres that "people wish to be heard and to participate in the decisions that affect them." As the message points out, "They can exercise the right

to be heard only if the United Nations listens in their languages, and only if the UN explores all linguistic avenues, including the International Language, in its search for genuine and substantive two-way communication.”

“Too much of our global communication is from the top down,” said UEA’s message. “We must, in the spirit of Hector Hodler and of today’s movement for Esperanto, respect that part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that calls for equality of language.”

The Association’s message concludes: “The Esperanto movement, a model of international civil society, is tied to no government, subject to no country’s political agenda, and spans the world, with speakers in most countries of the world. Our Association will continue to work with the United Nations and all people of good will to bring about that spirit of trust and of respect for human rights that the world so desperately desires and needs.”

A few days later, celebrating the birth of the initiator of Esperanto, Dr. L.L. Zamenhof, on December 15, 1859, UEA again asserted its goal of using the international language as a path to cooperation, the building of consensus, and international understanding. In a separate message, our Association supported the call of Secretary-General António Guterres for a new multilateralism “to build sustainable, inclusive societies and economies, based on human rights and human dignity for all.”

New NGO Committee on Language and Languages holds first briefing meeting

Some two hundred people attended the first briefing meeting of the new Committee of Nongovernmental Organizations on Language and Languages, on December 7. The virtual meeting had as its topic “Multilingualism and the United Nations: Policy, Practice and Prospects”. Principal speaker was Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, H.E. Mr Moses Abelian. Mr Abelian also serves as Coordinator for Multilingualism at the UN. He emphasized the fact that, among the priorities of UN Secretary-General António Guterres is a policy of multilingualism that should include all elements within the UN and also the larger public. Following Mr. Abelian, H.E. Ms Rabab Fatima, Permanent Representative of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, took the floor. Bangladesh was the country that initiated the UN’s celebration of the annual International Mother Language Day on February 21. Final major speaker was Ms Mita Hosali, Deputy Director of the News and Media Division for the UN Department of Global Communications.

The principal role in the formation of the new committee has been played by the Universal Esperanto Association and its representatives to the UN Humphrey Tonkin and Francis M. Hult. Professor Hult spoke on behalf of UEA, and representatives of the International Association of Conference Interpreters and the International Federation of Translators also addressed the meeting. Some 22 NGOs constitute the founding members of the Committee, which is now planning its second meeting, probably in February or early March.

UEA re-elected to the CoNGO board

“According a strong role to non-governmental organizations and to civil society generally is essential for the healthy development of the United Nations, which faces challenges that touch every level of the world community.” It was with these words that Humphrey Tonkin, New York representative of UEA to the United Nations, commented on the occasion of the re-election of the Association to the board of CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. CoNGO is particularly concerned with reciprocal relations between the UN and its Economic and Social Council on the one hand and civil society organizations on the other.

The CoNGO Assembly occurs every third year and, among other duties, elects the president and other officers, plus the board. The Assembly, which took place at the end of November and beginning of December, partly virtually and partly in person, heard messages from UN Secretary-General António Guterres, President of the General Assembly Amb. Abdulla Shahid, and President of the Economic and Social Council Collen Vixen Kolepile. A separate keynote address was given by the Director-General of UN Geneva, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya. Re-elected were CoNGO president Liberato C. Bautista, representative of the General Committee on Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, and vice-president Cyril Ritchie, representative of the Union of International Associations.

UEA observes World Children’s Day

“Building the Future NOW” formed the essence of the message of the Universal Esperanto Association on World Children’s Day, November 20. The Association had particular praise for the work of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF): UNICEF “was created in 1946, early in the history of the UN. This year it celebrates its 75th anniversary. Its vibrant and effective intervention to protect children across the world reminds us how important it is to protect the rights of children everywhere, and how important the role of the UN is in that protection.”

“Every child has the right to enjoy basic services and to benefit from opportunities for full development,” the message noted. Protection and care for children is a universal basis for peace, human rights, and sustainable development ... Before the COVID-19 pandemic, around one in five young people said that they already experienced depression. And the pandemic has increased feelings of uncertainty, loneliness and unhappiness. For these reasons, governments must invest more strongly in the mental health of young people.”

“Through Esperanto, the Universal Esperanto Association and the Esperanto youth organization TEJO encourage friendship and understanding among young people of the whole world. Through Esperanto, young people can participate in volunteer work; meet to talk about their lives, studies and challenges; work in international organizations; and much more. Practising a single international language independent of individual nationalities, they join an authentically worldwide movement where they can learn and practise principles of internationalism, globalism, and working together to create a better world.”

UEA to coordinate project on sustainability and transport.

The first planning session of VERDEN, a new project financed by the European Union and coordinated by the Universal Esperanto Association recently took place in Parma, Italy.

Sustainability is an important topic for today's society. UEA has frequently discussed the topic, for example at World Congresses of Esperanto and in specialized conferences. The Association coordinated the publication of an Esperanto-language Guide to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, which can be [purchased](#) from UEA or [downloaded](#) from the website of the group Esperanto por UN. In 2019, UEA also set up a new fund, [Klimato](#), to offset carbon emissions resulting from the organization of World Congresses of Esperanto (uea.org/alighoj/donacoj/co2).

The VERDEN project is taking place in cooperation with the Esperanto Federation of Railway Workers (IFEFF), and the Esperanto Bicycling Movement (BEMI), affiliated with the World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO), and with the support of the Parma Esperanto Group and the Flemish Esperanto League.

VERDEN has a double direction: on the one hand it aims to advance green sustainability practices, and on the other hand it wants to show that Esperanto can deal with significant international issues and have a significant effect – a point stressed by Francesco Maurelli, coordinator of the project for UEA. One of the goals of the project is to prepare a handbook with concrete, practical advice for organizers of meetings and other activists.

As part of the same funding programme, the German Esperanto Association and Esperanto Netherlands have begun another EU-financed partner project focused on sustainability.

Universal Esperanto Association Office for Liaison with the United Nations, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017. [1] 212-687-7041. www.esperantoporun.org.