

Esperanto and the UN

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Universal Esperanto Association emphasizes linguistic and cultural diversity, invites Esperanto speakers to Montreal congress, August 6-13

“Multilingualism is a way of protecting and conserving the diversity of languages and cultures,” according to the Universal Esperanto Association’s message on the occasion of the World Day for Cultural Diversity, 21 May. UEA’s message particularly emphasized the need to protect cultures and languages across the world, stressing that 2022 is the first year of the Decade of Indigenous Languages, proclaimed by the UN and UNESCO.

The Decade will form the main theme of this year’s World Congress of Esperanto, to take place in Montreal, Canada, from August 6 to August 13. The Congress will meet at the University of Quebec at Montreal. According to a recent press release, “Nearly a thousand participants are expected. Through the World Esperanto Congress, Montreal will welcome delegates from dozens of countries around the world, communicating in a neutral language aimed at respecting linguistic and cultural diversity. Esperanto is a constructed language for international communication, first published by L. L. Zamenhof, a native of present-day Poland, in 1887. Montreal will have the honour of welcoming Margaret Zaleski-Zamenhof, great-granddaughter of L. L. Zamenhof, who speaks Esperanto fluently and will officially represent the Zamenhof family.

“The presence of so many Esperanto speakers in Montreal is an opportunity for the Montreal population to discover the international, open – yet often overlooked – culture, which has been nurtured by Esperanto for over 130 years with its music, books, magazines, and more. Beginners’ courses will be offered ahead of the Congress for people wishing to improve their knowledge of Esperanto before participating.

“The World Esperanto Congress has already received the support of several local personalities: journalist and author Jean-Benoit Nadeau, the historian Georges Sioui, founder of the First Peoples’ Festival André Dudemaine, musician Yves Desrosiers (who released a show in Esperanto in 2020), filmmaker Matthew Rankin, author Claudia Larochelle, singer Bïa and artist Chlag.”

UEA representative reminds WSIS Forum: Fundamental to human communication is language; fundamental to lack of communication is language difference

Speaking remotely during the final week of the 2022 WSIS Forum (WSIS: World Summit on the Information Society) in Geneva, the Universal Esperanto Association's representative to the UN, Humphrey Tonkin, emphasized that language difference is a fundamental issue in addressing the needs of today's information society and that information technology should focus on making the voices of the world intelligible to policymakers.

"As we sit here in our international environment," Dr Tonkin remarked, "it is easy to imagine that we have essentially solved the problem of linguistic diversity. We use English – or we are assisted by skilled interpreters and translators and by the communications technologies that they have at their disposal. We feel that we can converse with the world. In truth we can *speak* to the world, but most of civil society cannot *hear* us: we have created a hierarchy of languages, elevating some and marginalising others."

"Sustainable development must include the marginalised, must include reciprocity," he added.

While praising the UN for its efforts to promote multilingualism, Dr Tonkin pointed out that policymakers continue to pay little attention to language difference: "Civil society speaks many languages and often can neither contribute to the international debate nor answer back."

The session in which Dr Tonkin was a panellist was organized by CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations.

Committee on Language and Languages to be headed by UEA representative

An NGO Committee on Language and Languages has been established in New York under the auspices of CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. Some 23 NGOs have joined as founding members. The committee aims to give greater attention to language issues in the policies, practice and outreach of the United Nations, especially as these relate to the overall importance of language, linguistic justice, and linguistic non-discrimination.

The by-laws of the new committee were approved at a May 18 meeting and an executive board elected. The well-attended meeting featured briefings by UNESCO personnel on that organization's programmes in the field of languages, particularly multilingual education, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, and the new World Atlas of Languages.

Francis M. Hult and Humphrey Tonkin, representatives of the Universal Esperanto Association to the UN, were elected as chair and vice-chair respectively. Francis Hult is Professor of Education at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), and Humphrey Tonkin is President Emeritus of the University of Hartford.

Elected as secretary was Linda Fitchett, former president of the International Association of Conference Interpreters. Hans E. Becklin, of the Esperanto youth organization TEJO, was elected as treasurer. Daniel LeBlanc, of VIVAT International, and Allison Rodriguez, of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) were elected as at-large members of the board.

Esperanto movement works for the environment on many fronts

June 5 marked World Environment Day, celebrated in the Esperanto movement by many organizations and groups, including the Universal Esperanto Association. “Fifty years ago, in 1972,” declared UEA’s 2022 message on Environment Day, “international policy on the environment succeeded in achieving a clear collective direction by organizing the Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference), following which, in the same year, on December 15, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/2994 (XXVII) declaring June 5 World Environment Day. The resolution called on governments and organizations to undertake annually on that day worldwide activities reasserting concern for the conservation and restoration of the environment, with the goal of deepening ecological awareness in the minds of all people.”

As UEA stated in its message, “This day should help to emphasize that protection, health, restoration and sustainable support for the environment are important in guaranteeing the diversity of our planet both because of their direct influence on the well-being of its peoples and for worldwide economic development. The day provides us all with an occasion to educate ourselves and others on the topic and to call on individuals and groups to exercise responsible collective behaviour to conserve and restore nature on our planet.”

The message drew attention to UEA’s publication of a guide to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and to Esperanto speakers’ establishment of the Climate Foundation, to the work of the Association of Green Esperantists, and to the campaign Tutmonda Arbo-Plantado for the worldwide planting of trees. In 2022 the campaign is working closely with ATE, the Association of Esperantist Agriculturalists, on a programme to plant fruit trees in Benin. So far, 700 trees have been planted.

Esperanto Day 2022

Speakers of Esperanto across the world will turn out for celebrations of Esperanto Day, July 26. The day marks the date of the first publication in Esperanto, published in Warsaw by Dr Ludwik Lazar Zamenhof on July 26, 1887. This pamphlet, subsequently issued in numerous languages, launched the Esperanto movement.

The date is an occasion for local and national Esperanto organizations to celebrate the language and culture of Esperanto, to buy Esperanto books, to picnic in the park with local Esperanto speakers, to embark on projects for the betterment of the local community, to discuss Esperanto on social media, to show support for refugees or other displaced persons, and a host of other activities.

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