



Message of the Universal Esperanto Association to the United Nations and civil society on the occasion of World Refugee Day, 20 June 2022

According to a recent United Nations estimate, the number of refugees and dislocated persons in the world now exceeds 100 million. This is more than ever before. They can be found in all parts of the world – for example in Eritrea and Ethiopia, in Yemen and Syria, in Myanmar, in Colombia, in Ukraine, and in surrounding countries. Causes of flight include persecution (race, religion, nationality, social identity), wars, and natural disasters. Refugees often seek flight without money, without food, and to places without health services, without education, without a language that they know. Such deracination not only causes personal catastrophes in the present but points to accumulating problems in the future.

The Universal Esperanto Association, as a worldwide nongovernmental organization, reminds everyone that safety is a fundamental human right, and that refugees are among the most vulnerable in that connection. The Refugee Convention of 1951 reaffirms basic rights to work, housing, education, assistance, access to documentation and access to justice. But even under the best of circumstances the number of refugees across the world exceeds the capability of states (who are often themselves the cause of the problem) to look after them and guarantee their rights. Among the various problems in fully accessing these rights are language barriers.

As speakers of the International Language Esperanto, members of UEA are particularly alert to essential language rights. Language support is important if refugees are to be treated justly and with dignity. Refugees need to be able to access information in languages that they understand. They also need help to learn languages and to learn about everyday life. As well as teaching refugees, it is essential to train state officials, security forces and those providing help from nongovernmental organizations – and particularly to listen to the refugees in the refugees' languages. Their children have a right to full educational services in languages that they understand.

UEA calls on everyone – the United Nations, governments, civil society and civil institutions – to work together to remove the causes of flight, and to lend their help, open their borders, and deliver services to refugees everywhere. And above all our Association calls on the international community to work together in solidarity to deal with the problem and, through peaceful and humane cooperation, eliminate its causes.