

Esperanto and the UN

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Universala Esperanto-Asocio

Universal Esperanto Association Marks 75 Years of Commitment to Human Rights



The Universal Esperanto Association did not wait until 2023 to celebrate 75 years of commitment to human rights: the Esperanto movement is celebrating its own human rights jubilee. UEA's message on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2022, points out that "our organization, the Universal Esperanto Association, meeting in Bern, Switzerland, in 1947 ... declared that 'respect for human rights is an essential condition for its work.' Thus, it anticipated the coming into force of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by over a year; and thus, from that day to this, it has supported the work of the United Nations and UNESCO for human rights generally and language rights particularly."

The message continues: "UEA's position regarding human rights, according to the resolution of 1947, 'is dictated by the ideas and goals of the Esperanto movement.' The movement for Esperanto is indeed related to the dissemination of an easy international language for everyone's use, but the ideal behind that movement is still broader: the promotion of peace and collaboration among humankind on a worldwide scale."

Zamenhof Day Celebrates Creator of Esperanto

Ludwik Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto, the international language that now spans the world, was born on December 15, 1859, a date celebrated every year by the Esperanto-speaking community. Zamenhof Day is an occasion when Esperanto speakers are encouraged to support Esperanto publishers by buying and reading the ever-growing body of literature in Esperanto. It is also a day to consider the importance of linguistic communication. "Language is the medium of everything that we do, of all progress towards comprehensive observance of human rights, comprehensive peace and development for all" reads the Universal Esperanto Association's message on Zamenhof Day 2022. "The world needs unity around these fundamental ideas, and such unity is possible only if we are capable of respecting differences and, at the same time, only if we can listen to one another." The Association emphasizes that communication is much more than speaking in languages that people can understand: it's about listening to others, hearing what they have to say, and working together for a better world.

The Esperanto calendar *Eventa Servo* lists some 35 Zamenhof Day events in various countries and a number of international virtual gatherings. Among the countries mentioned are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Madagascar, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, UK, and USA. Other countries where Zamenhof Day events took place were as geographically diverse as Brazil, Burundi, China, and Israel.

Journals in Esperanto Cover the World

While blogs, websites, videos and all manner of other electronic means of communication abound in the international language Esperanto, printed journals and magazines continue to draw readers.

- A recent issue of *Etnismo*, for example, describes the situation of Central African indigenous communities caught between pursuit of traditional ways of life and programmes for natural conservation.
- The monthly newsmagazine *Monato* reports in its November issue on a range of topics, from nuclear disarmament to the preservation of bird species in Korea and Slovakia.
- The Universal Esperanto Association's monthly journal *Esperanto* carries reports of the World Esperanto Congress in Montreal.
- The journal *Unesko-Kuriero*, the Esperanto edition of the UNESCO Courier, focuses a recent issue on the art and science of translation.

These are just four of dozens of magazines regularly published in Esperanto on a wide range of topics.

Polish Esperanto Speaker Honoured with National Award

On the initiative of the Polish Esperanto Association, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, has awarded the well-known Polish Esperanto speaker Roman Dobrzyński the bronze medal "Gloria Artis."

In its nomination, the Association stressed Dobrzyński's significant contribution to the popularization of culture generally and his particular merits while president of PEA, when he served as chief organizer of the World Congress of Esperanto in Warsaw in 1987. This congress, celebrating the centennial of Esperanto, drew crowds from throughout the world and particularly from east and west of the Iron Curtain. The congress, with some 6000 participants, remains the largest gathering of Esperanto speakers ever held.

Roman Dobrzyński is perhaps best known in his native country as a television reporter present at many historic events and author of some 300 documentary films. In 1980 the Association of Polish Journalists named him Best Publicist for International Affairs. His documentaries include several in Esperanto, and he is also well-known as author, along with Louis Christophe Zaleski-Zamenhof, of *Zamenhof Street*, a series of interviews on Esperanto and the Zamenhof family, originally written in Esperanto and subsequently translated into a number of other languages. An English-language translation is currently in preparation.

Committee Addresses Language and Minority Rights

The NGO Committee on Language and Languages (CoLL), chaired by Professor Francis M. Hult, UEA representative to the United Nations, addressed language and minority rights at its meeting on November 28. Despite Article 1 of the United Nations Charter and Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “linguistic minorities throughout the world continue to experience challenges to their language rights as well as inequitable access to other civil and human rights,” according to the announcement for the virtual meeting. The meeting took the form of a dialogue forum with the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Professor Fernand de Varennes, who outlined some of the difficulties faced by linguistic minorities and the lack of attention to discrimination based on difference of language.

The Committee, which brings together NGOs interested in language issues, is now in its second year of operation. Its board includes two major organizations with strong ties to the United Nations: the International Association of Conference Interpreters and the International Federation of Translators. Among committee sessions planned for the coming year are meetings on the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and on new horizons for interpretation and translation technologies.

The NGO community is insufficiently engaged by the UN, says UEA’s representative

In remarks at a December 13 consultation with NGOs organized by the Committee on NGOs of ECOSOC, the UN’s Economic and Social Council, UEA representative Humphrey Tonkin took the committee, and by implication the UN as a whole, to task for lack of attention to NGOs and their needs. According to Tonkin, ECOSOC’s liaison with NGOs is grossly underfunded – one effect of which is lack of attention to multilingualism and the importance of engaging civil society in languages that it speaks and understands.

The United Nations is an organization of governments, and governments can only do so much, Tonkin remarked. Civil society is an essential ally “if we are ever to solve the massive existential problems that humankind faces.” But that means reaching out to civil society organizations in languages that they and the people they represent can understand – and, above all, listening to what these organizations have to say, on *their* linguistic terms rather than those of the UN, with its heavy reliance on English and certain of the major languages.

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