

# Esperanto and the UN

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## Brazil, China, Togo, Germany: A round-up of recent Esperanto events

Fortaleza, **Brazil**, was the venue for the November 2023 American Congress of Esperanto, attended by some 200 people from across North and South America, among them Universal Esperanto Association president Dr. Duncan Charters.

In December, President Charters was in **China** to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Esperanto Museum at Zaozhuang University. The February issue of UEA's journal *Esperanto* reports on the visit, and also on Dr. Charters' meetings with officials of the Chinese Esperanto League, in Beijing. Also featured is a report on the use of Esperanto as an introduction to language study for the 1400 pupils at Baiyangshujie Elementary School, and an account of the celebration of Human Rights Day in Shenyang, focused on UEA's annual message on human rights published on that day.

Human Rights Day is celebrated by the UN on December 10. December 15 is known to Esperanto speakers as the birthday of the founder of the Esperanto language, Dr. Ludvik Zamenhof. In the Esperanto movement the two celebrations are often celebrated together, and related events, as reported in the February journal, extend over several days. In **Togo's** capital Lome, for example, on December 16 a special Day of Esperanto Culture was observed at the St Jean University Centre, followed by an excursion day on December 17 for Togolese participants and visitors from neighbouring countries.

Finally, the journal reports on the traditional New Year celebration organized by the German Esperanto Association. This year, the event took place on the island of Norderney, **Germany**. Speakers included retired German ambassador to Moscow Ulrich Brandenburg, and Professor of Astrophysics at Hebrew University in Jerusalem Dr. Amri Wandel. As in Brazil and Togo, all meetings were conducted in Esperanto.

## International Mother Language Day widely celebrated by Esperanto speakers

In a strongly worded statement published by the Universal Esperanto Association on Mother Language Day, 21 February, UEA endorsed UNESCO's call for teaching in the mother tongue, multilingual education at all levels, and intercultural education. "Languages are the very foundation of understanding and cooperation," says the statement: "Language rights are directly

related to democracy and to truly common decision-making on common problems.”But, the statement suggests, many children are denied an elementary education that uses the language that they understand best – their mother tongue. As a result, many of these children, even if they can enter the school-room door, are denied equality of opportunity and personal development.



Of all United Nations observances, it is Mother Language Day that unites the Esperanto movement, since it is so directly linked both to language for personal development and to language for democracy. UEA’s message was widely available in nineteen languages, and Esperanto organizations published posters for Mother Language Day in no less than 34 languages. These posters circulated, and were posted, all over the world.

A constant refrain in Esperanto meetings, articles, and on social media was the same: “Why is it that in the debate over world priorities so little attention is given to the issue of languages? Why are they not given prominence in the SDGs? Why is unfair discrimination on grounds of language largely ignored in debates on human rights?”

Speaking on behalf of all NGOs at the Observance of International Mother Language Day 2024 at the United Nations on February 21, UEA Representative to the UN Professor Francis M. Hult, in his role as chair of the NGO Committee on Language and Languages, had this to say:

***“Our mother tongues are the seeds from which our multilingual repertoires grow across the lifespan as we seek to venture into an ever-expanding scope of domains for educational, cultural, social, and economic opportunities and learn the regional languages, indigenous languages, national languages, world languages, and international languages like Esperanto that will open the doors to those domains. It all starts with the mother tongue, the gateway to education, cultural expression, civic participation, and justice.”***

Professor Hult cited a list of international agreements addressing language rights, among them the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. “Language rights,” he concluded, “are fundamental to inclusion, equity and justice.”

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