



Esperanto Day 2024: For a World for All Languages, without Linguistic Discrimination

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

This statement in itself clearly condemns the denial of linguistic human rights to peoples, groups, ethnicities, or communities small, weak, or without political influence, and positively asserts the need to oppose linguistic discrimination.

What is linguistic discrimination? Such discrimination occurs when people stronger, more powerful, more educated, or more wealthy speak in their mother tongues to people who use other languages and are forced to try to understand or try to reply, if they can. It constitutes unjust treatment of others – mistreatment as old as slavery, or treatment of women as inferior, or summary execution of the weak, or the economic exploitation of weaker countries, or racism, or similar unjust practices.

But there is one difference compared to other forms of discrimination: linguistic discrimination often goes unrecognised by those who practise it, or even by those who are discriminated against.

Even the United Nations, which is the only point of dialogue available to our planet, does not fully apply what the Declaration of Human Rights implies: everyone’s right to understand and be understood. It has several major languages as its official languages, but in practice for the most part it uses only a few major languages to speak to the world. As a result, it tends to listen only to that small part of the world that is capable of responding in those major languages. Is that the most effective way to mobilise the citizens of the world to achieve solutions to globally important problems, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, dialogue on climate or the search for peace?

A few leading African politicians have quite clearly acknowledged the relationship between the use of mother tongues and development, among them Julius Nyerere, and particularly Nelson Mandela, who once said: “If you speak to a person in a language that he understands, you speak to his head, but if you speak to him in his own language, you speak to his heart.”

We need to mobilize hearts around the goals of the United Nations.

The solution proposed by speakers of the neutral world language Esperanto may seem too futuristic to be applied on a grand scale, but it is worth our attention, because it is a language created so that everyone in the world would have the right to speak their own language at home without the pressure of the major languages. Esperanto was created so that all languages could live, and so that dialogue among groups with different languages could take place without the pressure of one language against another, in a spirit of equality, without discrimination.

We do not call on you, on this year's Esperanto Day, July 26, to learn Esperanto just to learn another language, even if it is relatively easy, but to understand the nature of linguistic discrimination, who practises it and how we can overcome it through equality of communication.