

Esperanto and the UN

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Message of the Universal Esperanto Association emphasizes language rights on the International Day of Families, 15 May 2024

On the occasion of the UN's International Day of Families, UEA issued the following message:

Because humankind is bound together through families, in various forms, it is essential that we consider the problems and needs of families if we are to construct a world of rights and development for all. From the rights of children, women, and older persons, to working conditions and environmental protection, families play an important role in promoting positive change.

Because families form the basis of society and provide for the coming generation economically and emotionally, family-directed policies are necessary, particularly for the more vulnerable. Such policies must recognize family structure and other characteristics, and support and improve the material, relational and individual well-being of families.

In 2024 we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of Families – an occasion for awareness of the effect on families of changes in technology, demography, urbanization, migration, and climate change. With respect to migration, for example, 1.9 million people migrated in 2018 for family reasons or with their family members.

A resolution of the 78th UN General Assembly calls on governments to develop new strategies and programmes on the needs of families. We believe such strategies and programmes must include language policies. Families are both preservers of languages and possessors of human rights. All families have the right to use and disseminate their own or adopted languages. As individuals, children have a right to learn in languages that use from birth, all have a right to public services in languages they understand, and, particularly, everyone has a right to participate in general public debate.

In truth, language barriers also hinder achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We should listen to the voices of all families in all languages to guarantee access to justice and information, to advance inclusivity and participation, and to leave no one behind.

The Universal Esperanto Association, through its use of the International Language Esperanto, aims both to guarantee worldwide language rights and to form a linguistic bridge between languages, peoples and families everywhere in the world.

Arusha: People, Language and Environment for a Better World



“People, Language and Environment” will be the theme of the World Congress of Esperanto in Arusha, Tanzania, from 3 to 10 August this year. Language is a means of communication. It allows everyone to express their thoughts and feelings by voice, signs or text. These are ways in which we can convey our message to the Esperanto-speaking and non-Esperanto-speaking public. Language differences are and always have been the basis for numerous ethnic conflicts, creating walls and barriers between people. This is evident in many conflicts that have caused millions of injuries and deaths and created refugees all across the world.

Faced with such problems, Esperanto presents a good alternative. The language seeks to advance peace and understanding among people. It is a language of discovery, of openness and of reconciliation among all people because it does not exclude other languages. Esperanto is used as a language of cultural and social integration. Through it, people learn other languages, which they would otherwise never discover or learn. A good example is the case of the Ewe language (a West African language spoken in Togo, Ghana and Benin) or Swahili (an East African language spoken by over 200 million people). Lessons in Swahili will be offered during the Congress in Arusha.

Esperanto speakers feel at home and secure in their personal and cultural identities., This confidence is illustrated by Pasporta Servo, which facilitates free homestays for Esperantists across the world. Esperantists tend to have common values, such as respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, the advancement of peace and international co-operation, and engagement in sustainable and interdependent development.

We face environmental problems, such as natural catastrophes, climate change, reduction of biodiversity, and pollution. Tanzania is an appropriate host for such a congress theme – one of the few African countries where a local language, Swahili, is used officially in the education programme and in public agencies. In Tanzania advanced research on the environment is ongoing. Accordingly, congress participants will be able to study the phenomenon of language and environment also in other parts of the world. We will also analyze the topic from a wider natural science perspective: the vision of a better world inspires questions of environmental protection, biological agriculture, use and non-use of fossil energy, and a healthy environment. We will analyse the role to be played by the Esperanto movement in solving problems resulting from human activity from the perspective of language and climate change.

Coordinating the congress topic will be François Hounsounou (Benin). Assisting him will be Espoir Kasati (DR Congo), Cyprien Guiya (Benin) and Miora Raveloharinson (Madagascar). All are long-established Esperantists and are active locally on Esperanto, languages, human rights, and environmental action. To contact the coordinating team, write to KongresaTemo@groups.io.

UEA welcomes strategic document on UN languages

A new United Nations report and guide on multilingualism has been published, the Strategic Framework on Multilingualism, which appeared in March 2024 and is available in the six official languages of the UN ([Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#)).

The framework reaffirms the UN's commitment to multilingualism by integrating linguistic considerations into every aspect of the secretariat's work. In addition to presenting results of extensive research on multilingualism in the secretariat, it outlines three main objectives and a series of recommended next steps. The three goals are: UN as a genuinely multilingual organization; UN as an effective multilingual workplace; and UN as a linguistically accountable organization.

The goals are promising and invite cooperation. They propose an organization that recognizes the importance of linguistic diversity throughout the world, the linguistic contexts in which it operates and the linguistic backgrounds and language skills of its staff. In that sense, linguistic diversity is an opportunity to solve problems more effectively, either on a global or a local level.

If language is the fundamental basis for communication, and thus, the basis of social, cultural and economic linkages, it can also be a source of discrimination. The guide states that the UN must ensure that organizational and communicative efficiencies do not promote language disadvantage or prejudice, such as happens, for example, when local communities are required to adapt to dominant working languages, or the linguistic backgrounds of the staff are ignored.

As Humphrey Tonkin, representative of UEA to the UN commented, the publication does indicate that little by little the UN is recognizing the importance of a more inclusive language policy. UEA argues (1) that the widest possible layers of human society must be involved if we want to mobilize that society around solving world problems, and (2) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that discrimination based on languages spoken or not spoken in given circumstances is to be condemned; but in a wide variety of ways people are discriminated against and excluded because of the languages spoken around the world.

Esperanto delegates head to Nairobi

In September 2024 the United Nations will hold the Summit of the Future, whose hoped-for outcome will be, among other things, the Pact for the Future on how to address the current urgent challenges facing the world. Unfortunately, the initial draft of the Pact for the Future, mentions neither multilingualism nor language rights at all. This is a major challenge because solving the world's crises requires inclusivity and open communication, which are impossible as long as linguistic discrimination persists.

UEA has long been a champion of language rights, and we have been strategically engaged recently in advocating for attention to language rights in the process leading up to the Pact. Beginning in the 1990s, the Centre For Research and Documentation on World Language Problems has convened its Nitobe Symposium emphasizing language rights and their relevance

to contemporary geopolitics and sustainable development. As a follow-up, and building on the momentum of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Committee on Language and Languages, a substantive committee of non-governmental organizations (whose chair, Francis M. Hult, is a representative of UEA to the UN) convened a dialogue forum in December 2023 to further reinforce to UN stakeholders that they must not forget that human rights include linguistic human rights. These events laid a foundation for advocating for the inclusion of language rights in the Pact for the Future.

UEA representatives in New York have since been active in the formal and informal mechanisms to provide civil society input on the Pact for the Future. This work has included submitting written recommendations through the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) and the NGO Major Group as well as ongoing consultations with member states that have a strong history of supporting multilingualism and language rights. The culminating opportunity for civil society input and dialogue in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future is the UN Civil Society Conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya in May. The Conference is a vital opportunity for UEA to follow through on its groundwork by advancing awareness about linguistic rights to UN stakeholders at this global forum.

UEA will be represented at the conference by Anny Joanice (Burundi) and Mana Brinson (D.R. Congo).

Preparations underway for next month's symposium on language and the UN

Selection of speakers is now nearing completion for this year's Symposium on Language and the United Nations, to be held virtually on June 10 and 11. The Symposium, an annual event bringing together UN personnel, language practitioners, educators, scholars, diplomats, and civil society, has taken place regularly over many years and is organized by a New York-based committee whose members are Francis M. Hult (Professor of Education, University of Maryland Baltimore County), Carol Benson (MLE International), Lisa McEntee-Atalianis (Professor of Sociolinguistics, Birkbeck University of London), Rosemary Salomone (Professor of Law, St. John's University), and Humphrey Tonkin (President Emeritus, University of Hartford). Details: fmhult@umbc.edu. The conference is sponsored by the NGO Committee on Language and Languages of the Conference of Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO).

Universal Esperanto Association Office for Liaison with the United Nations, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017. [1] 212-687-7041. www.esperantoporun.org.