



ESPERANTO AND UNESCO: 70 YEARS OF COLLABORATION ON LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS

December 10, 2024, will be an important day for the Esperanto movement since it will mark the 70th anniversary of the Montevideo Resolution, which was the first and most significant official recognition of Esperanto by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The resolution, which was accepted by the General Conference of UNESCO in the Uruguayan capital in 1954, recommended that the UNESCO Director General follow the development and use of Esperanto and recognized that the achievements of the Esperanto movement “correspond with the aims and ideals of UNESCO.”

The resolution was the result of long and persistent work by the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) and other Esperanto organizations, which collected and delivered to the UN a petition favouring Esperanto, signed by almost 900,000 people and by representatives of close to 500 organizations with a total of more than 15 million members.

The petition, which was sent to the United Nations in 1950, called for the UN to study the language problems in the world and the possible role of Esperanto in their just solution. However, the petition was not taken up by the UN, but forwarded to UNESCO for consideration.

And, although the Esperanto observer at the 1954 General Conference, Ivo Lapenna, did not have high hopes for success of the matter, the situation changed when the Mexican delegation, impressed by the Esperanto exhibition organized by local Esperanto speakers and by UEA, proposed a draft resolution recommending that the member-states encourage the use of Esperanto, which they considered the most suitable solution.

After much discussion and compromise, the resolution was finally accepted in the plenary session of the General Conference on 10 December 1954, Friday afternoon, but with a less radical text which did not include the recommendation to member-states. None the less, the resolution was a major success for the Esperanto movement, which in this way acquired official consultative status at UNESCO.

From then on, relations between UEA and UNESCO have steadily advanced, and on various occasions UNESCO has shown interest and appreciation regarding Esperanto and its cultural and educational contributions. The most significant example was the visit of the Director-General of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, to the World Congress of Esperanto in Reykjavik in 1977. Later, in 1985, UNESCO accepted a second resolution on Esperanto on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the language. The resolution strengthened the earlier recognition and recommended to the member-states that they introduce programmes of study on language problems and on Esperanto in schools and universities.

The 70th anniversary of the Montevideo resolution is a good opportunity to recall the history and significance of that document, which recognizes the common goals and ideals of UNESCO and Esperanto: to build peace in the world through culture, education and science. We commemorate this anniversary on December 10, 2024, in the Parliamentary Palace where the General Assembly took place in 1954.