Esperanto and the UN

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In Message on International Translation Day, 30 September, UEA stresses the importance of communication across languages

To translate is to bring languages, cultures and people closer to one another. It is in this spirit that we celebrate International Translation Day, at a time when we need to strengthen our ability to understand one another and to recognize our common humanity. Translation and interpretation are, along with the search for community of language, paths for peaceful coexistence.

We particularly welcome this year's theme of the International Federation of Translators: "Translation: Shaping a Future You Can Trust." Every language, including those least commonly spoken, has its own humanly created approach to reality that merits attention and preservation. Only human intervention can faithfully carry meaning from one language to another, even if there are many technological aids to doing so. Languages are created by people: translation and interpretation depend on human judgment.

With International Translation Day, the United Nations honours translators and interpreters, expressing support for their important, but often invisible or even disrespected, work of bridging the languages of the world. Translation and interpretation are a path to the equal treatment of all languages, and thus of all people – because everyone has a fundamental right to free expression, and to be heard and understood, in his or her mother tongue.

Languages play a fundamental role in cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and education. Through languages, we can strengthen collaboration, build more inclusive societies, preserve our cultural heritage, and gather political will. However, all of this can occur only if also accompanied by dialogue across differences of language. Multilingualism means that everyone can speak and think in their own language. Translation makes it possible to acknowledge other languages and cultures and at the same time reassess one's own.

On this special day, we again express our support for multilingualism as a core value of the UN, we salute the international organizations of translators and interpreters, and we reassert our goal to advance, also through the International Language Esperanto, understanding and esteem among the peoples of the world. Let us remove the walls of misunderstanding, distrust and discrimination, so that people can see and hear one another as brothers and sisters in a rich and harmonious world

Long live linguistic diversity; but also long live contact and understanding across languages and peoples – though translation, interpretation, and also the International Language Esperanto.

United Nations works for multilingualism

The NGO Committee on Language and Languages, together with the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), on September 8 hosted a special briefing on the multilingualism initiatives of the Office of the President of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (OPGA). This event, held virtually with interpretation in all six official UN languages, marked the first time the OPGA multilingualism task force shared its internal work publicly.

The President of the 79th Session, H.E. Mr. Philemon Yang, identified multilingualism and multiculturalism as cornerstones of his presidency, describing them as “the bedrocks of cultural diversity” that reflect the richness of peoples and nations worldwide. His administration established a multilingualism task force to mainstream language inclusivity across the OPGA’s portfolio, including sustainable development, human rights, humanitarian affairs, political affairs, peace, and security.

Opening remarks were delivered by Professor Francis Hult, Chair of the NGO Committee on Language and Languages, who emphasized that multilingualism is not only a matter of language services or rights, but a foundation for inclusive participation and effective international cooperation. The Permanent Observer of OIF, H.E. Mr. Michel Xavier Biang, also addressed participants, affirming OIF’s longstanding dedication to advancing multilingualism at the UN.

The primary presentation was delivered by Blanca Montejo, Deputy Chef de Cabinet to the President of the General Assembly, alongside task force members Noof Alotaishan and Felix Eboa.

They outlined the task force’s year-long efforts to integrate multilingualism into the OPGA’s work, highlighting both achievements and ongoing challenges. Among the achievements, the task force described practical steps taken to ensure multilingual access to major PGA communications, broader use of interpretation and translation resources, and initiatives aimed at embedding linguistic inclusivity in workstreams across sustainable development, human rights, humanitarian response, and peace and security. They also noted progress in engaging Member States and civil society actors in dialogue about language equity and raising awareness that multilingualism is essential for meaningful participation in UN processes. At the same time, they acknowledged ongoing challenges, including limited resources, uneven implementation across different parts of the UN system, and the need for stronger institutional commitments to sustain progress in future sessions.

An opportunity for open dialogue followed the formal presentations and participants posed questions to the task force. The briefing concluded with remarks from Professor Humphrey Tonkin, former president of the University of Hartford and a long-standing advocate of multilingualism at the UN.

The timing of the briefing, held just days before the close of the 79th Session, underscored the strong attention on multilingualism under President Yang’s leadership. The event brought together a wide range of UN stakeholders. Member State participants included Argentina, Cyprus, Gabon, Monaco, Morocco, Romania, and the United Arab Emirates. Representatives of numerous UN entities also joined, among them UNECA (UN Economic Commission for Africa), ITU (International Telecommunications Union), UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees), UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan), DGACM (UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management), UN Nairobi, UNMOGIP (UN Military Observer Group in India and

Pakistan), UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in Lebanon), UN Vienna, UN Geneva, ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), WHO (World Health Organization), IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), and IIIM (International Impartial and Independent Mechanism). The presentation not only showcased OPGA 79's achievements on this topic but also demonstrated how the NGO Committee on Language and Languages as a nexus linking Member States, UN staff, and civil society.

The special briefing demonstrated how multilingualism enables meaningful access to information, education, and civic participation, and how it strengthens intercultural dialogue, combats extremism, and fosters cooperation. Participants left with a clearer understanding of the OPGA's initiatives and a shared commitment to advancing linguistic inclusivity across all areas of the UN's work. [On multilingualism at the UN, see https://www.un.org/sg/en/multilingualism/index.shtml]

[report by FMH]

Friends of multilingualism group launched at United Nations

In its work at the UN, UEA stresses the importance of multilingualism: respect for individual languages, identification of ways of bridging languages (including interpretation and translation), opposition to illegitimate language discrimination, and of course the more active use of Esperanto.

At the UN, member states often set up special groups to work together for common goals. Among them are language groups linking states to advance their languages and common interests, for example French-speaking countries, Spanish-speaking countries, and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Good news is the emergence of a new and hopeful group: Friends of Multilingualism. It is a coalition of UN Member States who seek to advance multilingualism at the UN as a path to multilateralism respecting linguistic and cultural diversity.

Prof. Francis Hult, representative of UEA to the UN and Chair of the NGO Committee on Language and Languages (established at the initiative of UEA), was invited as speaker at the launch of the Group of Friends of Multilingualism, at UN Headquarters in New York. The invitation came as a result of the special briefing session, organised by Prof. Hult and others, on the initiatives of the President of the 79th General Assembly (2024-2025) for the advancement of multilingualism. The launch was jointly organized by the NGO Committee on Language and Languages and La Francophonie, the organization of French-speaking countries.

The foreign ministers of Andorra, Côte d'Ivoire, Kuwait, Mozambique, Portugal and Spain attended to show their engagement with multilingual multilateralism, along with the Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada, the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Administration, and the Secretary-General of the International Organization of La Francophonie.

In his speech, Professor Hult reminded participants that multilingualism is not simply many monolingualisms, but communication and understanding across languages and cultures, with the special aim of building solidarity. Faced with worldwide challenges, and challenges within the UN, the new group will be a voice for the importance of multilingualism, as a value and practice, for true international justice, human rights, peace, and social development for all. [report by RL]

Young Esperanto speakers join Conference of NGOs board

With the election of TEJO, the World Esperanto Youth Organization, to the Board of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations (CoNGO), the Conference continues its interest in issues of language at the UN. The election took place at the conclusion of the CoNGO General Assembly in New York in late October.

The Universal Esperanto Association has been active in CoNGO for many years, representing the Esperanto movement and its promotion of international dialogue and language rights at the UN. In 2022, UEA and more than twenty other NGOs founded the NGO Committee on Language and Languages (CoLL) as a CoNGO Substantive Committee to bring greater attention to language issues in the UN, language equality, and the problem of linguistic discrimination. Chair of the committee is Francis M. Hult, Representative of the Universal Esperanto Association to the UN.

Previously a member of the CoNGO board, the Universal Esperanto Association reached the end of its mandate this year. The election of TEJO guarantees not only that the Esperanto movement will continue to have active representation in the governance and strengthening of the role of NGOs in the United Nations, but also that the issue of language and language rights will remain on CoNGO's agenda. As a youth organization, TEJO will also help represent the voice of youth in CoNGO and among its members. UEA wishes TEJO every success in its new role and pledges its support.

Universities to launch programme on Esperanto

'Esperanto as an Interdisciplinary Field of Transnational Innovation' is the title of a new Erasmus BIP programme launched by a coalition of universities in eight countries: France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Romania and Turkey. The programme, coordinated by the University of Tours, France, will be open to all universities participating in the Erasmus scheme.

Students will be welcome in any field of the humanities and social sciences, from undergraduate to master's and doctoral levels, as well as staff members wishing to open up their research themes to aspects of transnational innovation by means of Esperanto.

The BIP programme will consist of two parts: a distance learning phase (January to May 2026), and a face-to-face phase (1-5 June 2026) to take place in Tours, France. Applications are open until 15 November. Contact: philippe.planchon@univ-tours.fr