



Universala Esperanto-Asocio

Nieuwe Binnenweg 176, NL-3015 BJ Rotterdam, Nederland
tel. +31 10 436 1044 | fax 436 1751 | info@uea.org | www.uea.org

Address to the
Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism - BIFM, 19-21 01 2009
from the
World Esperanto Association

We are happy to have the opportunity to send this address to the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism, organized by the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN, the African Union), under the MAAYA Network (World Network for Linguistic Diversity) and in partnership with UNESCO, OIF, the Latin Union and others.

We in the World Esperanto Movement have always been in favour of multilingualism and the linguistic human rights of everyone. We do not agree with the use of just one language in the world. We support the preservation of as many mother tongues as possible.

We think that linguistic rights are vital to all peoples, whatever the size of their population. This right needs to be preserved especially for small groups. The World Esperanto Association (UEA) has been supporting minority languages for over 100 years.

The right of children to learn their mother tongue and continue their education using their mother tongue is not only important for their culture, it is essential for their psychological development. It has been shown in many large-scale studies in several countries that if indigenous and minority children have their education mainly using their own languages as the teaching language for the first 6-8 years (with good teaching of the dominant language as a second language, given by bilingual teachers), their general school achievement is better and they learn the dominant language better than if their teaching is through the medium of the dominant language. If they have only a year or two in the mother tongue and are then transferred to the dominant language, they may manage fairly well at the beginning, but from approximately fourth grade on, their progress starts slowing down and the gap between them and dominant language children continues to widen.

It is also important for people to be able to communicate at different levels. The UEA advocates learning 2, 3 or 4 languages, according to the circumstances, i.e.:

1. - mother tongue
2. - regional language, if different
3. - national language, if different from the first two
4. - an international language, that does not belong to any nation - that is Esperanto.

Esperantists know that when a multinational group uses one neutral, common language, the quality of communication is very special. The ultimate aim of Esperanto is to promote peace between people by making communication easier and more equitable. Using a common language avoids a situation where people who are using their mother tongue have a huge advantage over those who are not.

For more than a century Esperanto, which was launched in 1887 as a project for an auxiliary language for international communication and quickly developed into a rich living language in its own right, has functioned as a means of bringing people together across the barriers of language and culture. The aims that inspire the users of Esperanto are still as important and relevant as ever. Neither the worldwide use of a few national languages, nor advances in communications technology, nor the development of new methods of language teaching is likely to result in a fair and effective language order based on the following principles, which we hold to be essential.

1. DEMOCRACY.

Any system of communication which confers lifelong privileges on some while requiring others to devote years of effort to achieving a lesser degree of competence is fundamentally antidemocratic. While Esperanto, like any language, is not perfect, it far outstrips other languages as a means of egalitarian communication on a world scale.

We maintain that language inequality gives rise to communicative inequality at all levels, including the international level. We are a movement for democratic communication.

2. GLOBAL EDUCATION.

All ethnic languages are bound to certain cultures and nations. For example, the child who learns English learns about the culture, geography and political systems of the English-speaking world, primarily the United States and the United Kingdom. The child who learns Esperanto learns about a world without borders, where every country is home.

We maintain that education in any language is bound to a certain view of the world. We are a movement for global education.

3. EFFECTIVE EDUCATION.

Only a small percentage of foreign-language students attain fluency in the target language. In Esperanto, fluency is attainable even through home study. Various studies have shown that Esperanto is useful as a preparation for learning other languages. It has also been recommended as a core element in courses in language awareness.

We maintain that the difficulties in learning ethnic languages will always be a barrier for many students who would benefit from knowing a second language. We are a movement for effective language learning.

4. MULTILINGUALISM.

The Esperanto community is almost unique as a worldwide community whose members are universally bilingual or multilingual. Every member of the community has made the effort to learn at least one foreign language to a communicative level. In many cases this leads to a love and knowledge of several languages and to broader personal horizons in general.

We maintain that the speakers of all languages, large and small, should have a real chance of learning a second language to a high communicative level. We are a movement for providing that opportunity to all.

5. LANGUAGE RIGHTS.

The unequal distribution of power between languages is a recipe for permanent language insecurity, or outright language oppression, for a large part of the world's population. In the Esperanto community the speakers of languages large and small, official and unofficial meet on equal terms through a mutual willingness to compromise. This balance of language rights and responsibilities provides a

benchmark for developing and judging other solutions to language inequality and conflict.

We maintain that the wide variations in power among languages undermine the guarantees, expressed in many international instruments, of equal treatment regardless of language. We are a movement for language rights.

6. LANGUAGE DIVERSITY.

National governments tend to treat the great diversity of languages in the world as a barrier to communication and development. In the Esperanto community, however, language diversity is experienced as a constant and indispensable source of enrichment. Consequently every language, like every biological species, is inherently valuable and worthy of protection and support.

We maintain that communication and development policies which are not based on respect and support for all languages amount to a death sentence for the majority of languages in the world. We are a movement for language diversity.

7. HUMAN EMANCIPATION.

Every language both liberates and imprisons its users, giving them the ability to communicate among themselves but barring them from communication with others. Designed as a universally accessible means of communication, Esperanto is one of the great functional projects for the emancipation of humankind – one which aims to let every individual citizen participate fully in the human community, securely rooted in his or her local cultural and language identity yet not limited by it.

We maintain that exclusive reliance on national languages inevitable puts up barriers to the freedoms of expression, communication and association. We are a movement for human emancipation.

The great hope of Esperanto-speaking people is that the world will become a more peaceful place, when people will be able to communicate on an equal basis, when the linguistic rights of everyone are respected and when cultures will have the right to evolve. We think that for establishing a sustainable multilingualism the use of a neutral bridge language is essential.

The World Esperanto Association
(Universala Esperanto-Asocio)
Nieuwe Binnenweg 176
NL-3015 BJ Rotterdam, Nederland
tel. +31 10 436 1044; fax 436 1751;
e-mail info@uea.org
<http://www.uea.org>