

Message to the 1st Sri Lankan Esperanto Congress
23rd May 2014

Esperanto, la Internacia Lingvo
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எஸ்பெராண்டோ, சர்வதேச மொழி
Esperanto, the International Language

Saluton !
ආයුබෝවන් !
வணக்கம் !
Good afternoon!

Mayor Anju Perera, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

This day is of special significance in the history of Sri Lanka: it sees the opening of the country's first Esperanto congress. And for me this event is particularly meaningful and moving, for 30 years ago I came to your beautiful island and met many friendly and helpful people, speaking Sinhalese or Tamil or even only English, or indeed Esperanto with Mr Jesudasan, Mr Dharmatilake and Mr Peiris, while I arranged and gave lectures and Esperanto courses at the Colombo Public Library thanks to contacts with the Chief Librarian Mrs Ishvari Corea, in the Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya with Dr George Mendis and Mrs Daya Wickramasinghe, and at the Ministry of Labour with Mr Premaratne.

And while I am happy to say that I kept in touch by post with some of my students from that time (that was before the days of the Internet), it is sad that I cannot be among you today. However, through this message I am somehow in attendance, and our online contacts will bring you to me, here in Switzerland.

The theme of the congress is "Esperanto in the Asian Miracle". That is derived from a slogan launched by Sri Lankans, who are now, in a time of peace in their country, building a new society of prosperous coexistence. There is an official programme for creating a trilingual Sri Lanka, respecting everyone's ethnic and linguistic identity and additionally using for the time being the possibilities of English, inherited from previous periods of the country's history.

Esperanto can contribute to that process of harmonization and pacification, as the most appropriate and powerful tool for fair communication in a multicultural, multilingual and multireligious society. It can give Sri Lankans access on an equal footing to a global dialogue of all mankind.

Zamenhof, the initiator of Esperanto was not only a genius as a linguistic pioneer, but also a profound thinker who endeavoured to create a clear and practical path toward the future welfare and happiness of all mankind. To attain this goal, he not only launched the neutral international auxiliary language Esperanto, but also put forward ethical principles.

We must remain faithful to the ideal of understanding and tolerance between peoples. Zamenhof always regarded this ideal as inseparable from the Esperanto language.

It is for that dual ideal that the Esperanto movement strives throughout the world: to offer humanity a neutral, fair means of communication as a second language for all, and to promote harmonious, fraternal and peaceful coexistence between peoples, preserving their enriching diversity while respecting everyone and everyone's identity, under the motto "Unity in diversity".

According to UNESCO there are more than 6000 languages in the world, and most of them are threatened and likely to disappear in the near future. The death of a language means the disappearance of part of the culture and experience of all mankind.

The World Esperanto Association promotes Esperanto, the international language with 127 years of history, as a solution to the problem of communication between peoples on an egalitarian basis, maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity, which is an asset for the whole world and for all of humanity. That is a way to the sustainable continuation of humanity, of its cultures and of all languages. For these efforts of UEA, in 2008 members of the Swiss Parliament recommended the World Esperanto Association for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Dr Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, a linguist of worldwide repute, says: *"... as opposed to any big dominant language, Esperanto has (and can have) no imperialist tendencies. It is genuinely not connected to anybody's economic or political interests. I see Esperanto as a possible viable alternative to today's languages for international communication. Ignorance and prejudices may prevent useful solutions."*

Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, may the recently elected young mayor be a symbol of a new generation of young Sri Lankans, who does not even mind coming to a council meeting by tractor, thereby identifying himself with ordinary people. May he be among our supporters, who will allow Esperanto to develop in your region and in the whole of Sri Lanka.

I wish you a very enjoyable, happy and lively Esperanto Congress in Sri Lanka, with discussions on the various possibilities for developing the movement in the country and also time for learning and learning Esperanto. Have a successful congress!



Stefano Keller

Board Member of the World Esperanto Association,
with responsibility for external relations,
President of "Esperanto for the UN",
Chief representative at the UN, Geneva.

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