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Forum on Minority Issues

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Speech by Mr. Stefano Keller,

UEA Representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With my colleague I represent the Universal Esperanto Association, which is the global association of speakers of the international language.

I have the honour to present to you the position of the Universal Esperanto Association on linguistic rights, and more specifically on language education in the world.

The right of children to learn their mother tongue and to be educated in their language is not only important for their culture but is also essential for their psychological development. Several studies conducted on a large scale and in several countries have shown that if indigenous children or children belonging to a linguistic minority are educated in their own language by bilingual teachers during the first 6 to 8 years of their schooling, their school results are, as a general rule, better. They will even learn the dominant language better than if they had studied only in the latter. If, however, they only attend one or two years of schooling in their mother tongue and continue their schooling in the dominant language, they manage pretty well at first, but in the fourth year their progress starts to slow down and the gap between them and children speaking the dominant language continues to widen.

It is equally important that everyone is able to communicate at different levels. Therefore the Universal Esperanto Association (Universala Esperanto-Asocio, UEA) encourages the study of two, three, or four languages depending on the circumstances, that is:

- The mother tongue;
- The regional language, if different;
- The national language, if it differs from the above;
- An international language that does not belong to any nation, that is to say, Esperanto.

The use of a common language prevents situations in which a person speaking in her mother tongue has a huge advantage over those who cannot do so.

Esperantists (Esperantophones) have the big hope that the world becomes a place of greater peace. We believe that effective communication is of particular importance for achieving this goal.

For this reason, we draw your attention to linguistic rights in schooling, in education.

Mi dankas vian atenton. I thank you for your attention.

Reference: Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 47/125 on 18 December 1992.

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/minorities.htm>