



The position of the Universal Esperanto Association



Universala Esperanto-Asocio

(en oficialaj rilatoj kun UN kaj Unesko)



on linguistic rights

Linguistic rights are vital to all peoples, whatever the size of their population. This right needs to be preserved especially for small groups. The Universal 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.

We would like the United Nations to give some consideration to this as regards their own meetings. The discrepancy is very obvious when one hears delegates expressing themselves in English, French or Spanish for whom it is either the second or third language. When a mother-tongue speaker takes the floor, often the difference is striking - what they say has much more weight and attracts much more attention than a speaker who is speaking a foreign language.

The great hope of Esperantists is that the world will become a more peaceful place, and we believe that effective communication plays a very important role in achieving this.