

# Universal Esperanto Association

UNESCO General Conference - Plenary - 6th November 2017

**Rakoen Maertens**

Honourable President of the General Conference,

Honourable Director-General,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

***Communication.** That is why we are all here. We are here, to find common ground. We are here, to increase the understanding of each other. We all want to build partnerships around our values, our beliefs and our shared vision. Yet, communication is not always what it seems. There are barriers. One of those barriers can be language. Differences in language level and linguistic background, depending on where we are born. The interpretation of symbols and gestures, linked to culture. Inequality in self-expression, because a certain language may not be recognised, while others are. Using a specific language, linked to a certain culture, creates a communication bias.*

The Universal Esperanto Association, tries to address these issues. Together with more than 100 national Esperanto associations and more than 60 specialised Esperanto agencies, our association advocates **depth of communication, equality of language and culture, language diversity** and **intercultural exchange**. Founded in 1908, our association has a long history in advocating these values. For over sixty years, our association has been in consultative relations with the UN and UNESCO. During the UNESCO General Conference in Montevideo in 1954 and Sofia in 1985, our work and achievements were officially recognised as advancing mutual understanding among the peoples of the world.

The starting point of the international language Esperanto is the need for better communication, and this through a shared - equitable language. A language that is easy to learn and not bound to any specific political power. This year we are, together with UNESCO, commemorating the humanist who created Esperanto, Ludwik Zamenhof, as it is the 100th year of his passing. We sincerely thank UNESCO and the Polish delegation for helping us realise this celebration, and kindly invite you all to join us on December 11<sup>th</sup> in this building. We are also happy to announce that as of this year, the revived UNESCO Courier has an Esperanto edition.

**Communication.** I began these comments by emphasising the importance of quality communication. Let me finish by wishing you a profound, meaningful and productive dialogue in a spirit of openness and understanding.

Thank you.