



**H.E. Ralph Lindsay Harry, C.B. E. (1917—2002)**  
Australian Delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights  
Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations  
UEA Honorary Patron Committee Member (1967)

### A Tribute

With the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA)'s celebration of 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>1</sup> the lifelong work of Ralph L. Harry merits recognition.

With a Rhodes Scholarship, Ralph Harry earned a degree at Lincoln College, Oxford University, in addition to his degree in law with first class honours.<sup>2</sup> As a young diplomat, attorney, and Esperantist, he served as a member of the Delegation from Australia to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (HR Commission). He had been a member of the Australian delegation to the San Francisco Conference to form the Charter of the United Nations (UN Charter) (1945) and subsequently served as a member of the Australian delegation to the HR Commission (1946-1948). His son, John Harry, wrote that his father's "proudest accomplishments were his substantial contribution, in the UN commission, to the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights . . . achieved while he was barely 30 years old."<sup>3</sup>

In 1952, Ralph Harry presented the first complete translation of the UN Charter into Esperanto to the Australian Association for the United Nations.<sup>4</sup> Ivo Lapenna, Eskil Svane, and Ralph Harry revisited this early translation in 1970; the official version is available online here. <https://uea.org/teko/un/charto>.) He subsequently translated into Esperanto the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, among other significant international documents.<sup>5</sup> (The Esperanto translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is available online here. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/esperanto>. The Esperanto translation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is available online here. [https://uea.org/teko/UN/deklaracio\\_koloniai\\_landoj](https://uea.org/teko/UN/deklaracio_koloniai_landoj))

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (1999) and *Article by Article: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights for a New Generation* (2022), Johannes Morsink offers his findings based on research at the Dag Hammarskjöld UN Library in New York City, commencing in 1983.<sup>6</sup> Annemarie Devereux focuses on the contributions by the Australian delegates, including Ralph Harry, toward the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, subsequently, the International Bill of Rights, in her study, *Australia and the Birth of the International Bill of Human Rights 1946–1966*. Both scholars mention Harry's contributions as an alternate delegate and delegate from Australia. Morsink mentions

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Esperanto Association Office for Liaison with the United Nations, *Esperanto and the UN*, no. 62 (January-February 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey Tonkin, email message to author, November 27, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> John Harry, "Benign Master of Diplomacy," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 24, 2002, 10.00 am.

<sup>4</sup> "Translation of U.N. Charter into Esperanto," *Canberra Times*, December 6, 1952, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Trevor Steele, "Ralph Harry (1917-2002)," *Esperanto* 1154, no. 12 (December 2002): 256.

<sup>6</sup> Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 379.

Harry's work on the redraft of Article 26, the Right to an Education, at the specific request of Eleanor Roosevelt, chairperson, HR Commission.<sup>7</sup>

Ralph Harry had just turned 28 years old when he attended the UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, April 25-26, 1945. In January 1947, Australia was among the 18 countries represented in the initial HR Commission as it convened in full. Under the leadership<sup>8</sup> of Dr Herbert V. Evatt<sup>9</sup> and W. M. J. McNamara<sup>10</sup> plus second-tier drafters Colonel William Hodgson<sup>11 10</sup> and Alan Watt<sup>12</sup>, Australia, Harry's individual contributions to discussions and draft developments are noted by both Morsink and Devereux. In addition to those of the collective Australian delegation, Harry is cited for his work on:

- Article 4, Freedom from Slavery<sup>13</sup>
- Article 5, Torture and Relativism<sup>14</sup>
- Article 10, Fair Public Hearing<sup>15</sup>
- Article 13, Freedom of Movement<sup>16</sup>
- Article 14, The Right to Asylum<sup>17</sup>
- Article 17, Property and Essential Needs<sup>18 19</sup>
- Article 23, The Right to Work<sup>20</sup>
- Article 26, The Right to an Education<sup>21</sup>
- Article 28, The Right to a Good World Order<sup>22</sup>

Through his retirement in 1978, Ralph Harry served his country in varying capacities as a diplomat. In his tribute to his father's life, "Benign master of diplomacy," John Harry described the distinguished chronology of his father's diplomatic service. His longstanding commitment to "the ultimate triumph of peace and justice . . . included the promotion of collective security between nations through the UN, the foundation and development of regional groupings in the economic and security area, the development and enforcement of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>8</sup> N.B. Evatt served as President of the UN General Assembly, 1948-1949. McNamara served as director of the UN Information Centre for Australia and New Zealand. Hodgson served as Australia's first delegate to the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. Watt served as Secretary to Australia's Department of External Affairs, 1950-1954. Author's Internet search, December 6, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Annemarie Devereux, *Australia and the Birth of the International Bill of Human Rights 1946–1966* (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2005), 18–19.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Morsink, *Article by Article: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights for a New Generation* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 16, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Morsink, *Article by Article: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights for a New Generation* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 51.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 75–76.

<sup>18</sup> Annemarie Devereux, *Australia and the Birth of the International Bill of Human Rights 1946–1966* (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2005), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 142–143 footnotes 31, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 159 (footnote 2), 168.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>22</sup> Annemarie Devereux, *Australia and the Birth of the International Bill of Human Rights 1946–1966* (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2005), 124.

international law, particularly in trade, the rights of refugees and human rights and the promotion of education. He was always willing to consider new and radical ideas.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Ralph Harry and the Introduction of Esperanto to the UN (“the Harry Plan”)**

In 1937, while still a law student in Australia, Ralph Harry began his study of Esperanto. During his time at Oxford, he attended a congress of the World Christian Youth Movement in the Hague in 1939, just prior to Germany’s invasion of Poland.<sup>24</sup> In 1952, he translated the UN Charter into Esperanto.<sup>25</sup> In advance of the 1972 Olympic Games, Harry translated into Esperanto the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other important UN publications.<sup>26 27 28</sup>

From 1975 to 1978, Ralph Harry served as Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN. During this time, he delivered several studies related to the potential for using Esperanto as a neutral, intermediary language at the UN. His March 1977 paper, “Language Barriers in the United Nations,” presents what later became known as “the Harry Plan.”<sup>29</sup>

On April 4, 1978, Harry introduced a lecture, “Language and International Communication: The Right to Communicate,” presented by Professor Humphrey Tonkin, University of Pennsylvania, and President, UEA, in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium, UN, New York. Tonkin’s talk reprised the 62<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the UEA, which took place from July 31 to August 6, 1977, in Reykjavik, Iceland, on the theme of the Right to Communicate.<sup>30</sup> At the same Congress, Harry addressed the Opening Session with “Language Differences Hinder Cooperation,” included in the conference proceedings.<sup>3132</sup> The UEA published the complete congress proceedings as “Language and the Right to Communicate,” Esperanto Documents, in 1978.<sup>33</sup>

In his 1978 article, “Esperanto: An International Language for International Law,” Harry articulated the chronology of international documents, translated into Esperanto, from the League of Nations and the early International Labour Organisation through the Treaty of Rome and International Law of the Sea.<sup>34</sup> Along with Mark Mandel, a doctoral student in linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, he co-authored “Language Equality in International Cooperation,” the following year.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John Harry, “Benign Master of Diplomacy,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 24, 2002, 10.00 am.

<sup>24</sup> Trevor Steele, “Ralph Harry (1917-2002),” *Esperanto*, Decembro 2002, 1154 (12), 256.

<sup>25</sup> *Canberra Times*, “Translation of U.N. Charter into Esperanto,” December 6, 1952, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Trevor Steele, “Ralph Harry (1917-2002),” *Esperanto*, Decembro 2002, 1154 (12), 256.

<sup>27</sup> Wikipedia, “Ralph Harry.”

<sup>28</sup> Wikipedia, “Ralph Harry.”

<sup>29</sup> Ralph L. Harry, “Language Barriers in the United Nations,” Paper presented at the 18<sup>TH</sup> Annual Convention of the International Studies Association. St. Louis, MO, March 16-20, 1977, 15-17 (probably the Harry Plan or la Harry-Plano).

<sup>30</sup> Humphrey Tonkin, “Language and International Communication: The Right to Communicate,” Lecture in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium, United Nations, NY, April 4, 1978. Introduction by Ralph L. Harry, Esperanto Documents, new series, no. 15 A, 1979, Rotterdam: Universal Esperanto Association.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph L. Harry, “Language Differences Hinder Cooperation,” *Language and the Right to Communicate*. Esperanto Documents, new series, no. 13, 1978, Rotterdam: Universal Esperanto Association, 21-22.

<sup>32</sup> Renato Corsetti, Humphrey Tonkin, and Probal Dasgupta, *Language and the Right to Communicate*, Esperanto Documents, new series, no. 13, comp 1978, Rotterdam: Universal Esperanto Association.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Ralph L. Harry, “Esperanto: An International Language for International Law,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 10:817, no. 3, (Summer 1978): 817-826.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph Harry and Mark Mandel, “Language Equality in International Cooperation,” Esperanto Documents, new series, no. 21, 1979, Rotterdam: Universal Esperanto Association.

In December 1979, the UEA opened its office at 777 United Nations Plaza, across the street from the UN's New York Headquarters, initially in space sublet from Save the Children. For more than 40 years, the UEA/UN NY office has participated actively in the NGO community and organized meetings and conferences about topics such as translation issues and language equality, in keeping with Ralph Harry's vision.

The UEA established formal relations as an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with UNESCO in 1954, per the Montevideo Resolution.<sup>36</sup> As a longstanding NGO, UEA further maintains its special consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council and membership in the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO). The website Esperanto for the UN ([www.esperantoporun.org](http://www.esperantoporun.org)) includes regular news about current activities and resources.



The Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ralph L. Harry (centre), presents Australia's statement during the UN Security Council consideration of the question of Portuguese Timor, New York, 16 December 1975. Left, Chaidir Anwar Sani (Indonesia); and right, Rashleigh Esmond Jackson (Guyana). [UN Photo/T. Chen]

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<sup>36</sup> UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference: Resolutions*, Eighth Session, Montevideo 1954, 24, 66.

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