

A GREETING FOR JOSHUA FISHMAN ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY

Dear Joshua,

I have just come away from the 10th International Conference on Language and Law, at the National University of Ireland, Galway. This is the most recent of a series of conferences which are convened annually by the International Academy of Linguistic Law, and this year's conference was hosted by both the Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge and the Irish Centre for Human Rights here at NUI Galway.

I came away elated after hearing the papers and the earnest discussions regarding linguistic rights and their implementation in societies all over the globe. You were there in spirit, and your name was echoed again and again, directly or indirectly, as the preservation of linguistic rights in various social domains, societal diglossia (with full credit given to Charles Ferguson), intergenerational transmission of mother tongues, etc., were earnestly discussed. Here was a group of lawyers (and others) definitely on the side of the angels, and all singing from the same hymn book! I had the strong feeling that the ideals that you have fought for all your life are on the verge of being achieved on a massive scale all over the globe.

You know me as an optimist, but I have long experience of the trenches, and I am really astonished at which has been achieved over the last 37 years or so since I was a student of yours at Stanford University. The pace of progress in the area of personal linguistic rights and of solutions to complex sociolinguistic problems in problematic multilingual societies has really quickened – especially in the last decade, and many people are now seriously engaged in creating a far better atmosphere for the survival of minority languages across the entire globe. Representation from the People's Republic of China at the conference was strong, and areas as disparate as southern Africa and central Asia were represented as well. Above all, the general camaraderie and openness was striking as we all realized that we were dealing with substantially the same issues from the same perspectives – and that agenda was largely set by you, Joshua!

I wish you, Gella, and the whole family a long and happy life, and a joyous celebration of your 80th birthday!

Sincerely,
Séamas Ó Direáin (Jim Duran)
NUI Galway, Ireland