

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UCSB to Host International Mother Language Day Conference

Sixty years ago today, a group of students from the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh (then known as East Pakistan) were killed as they participated in the Bengali Language Movement protests. The student activists were seeking to have Bengali recognized as an official language of Pakistan. In their honor, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1999 declared February 21 -- the date of the protests -- as International Mother Language Day.

The Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Santa Barbara will recognize International Mother Language Day with a two-day conference beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 23, in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building, at UCSB. It will continue at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, February 24, in the Mosher Alumni Center's Alumni Hall. It is free and open to the public.

The conference, which brings together a diverse group of international scholars, seeks to promote multilingualism, awareness of the plight of language minorities, tolerance toward different cultures, and the preservation of linguistic diversity. It will focus on "Protecting Identity and Diversity: Language and Cultural Rights," examining the topic from linguistic as well as legal perspectives.

"The protection of linguistic and cultural rights allows us, as well as future generations, to enjoy and learn from mankind's extremely diverse anthropological

characteristics," said Viola Miglio, associate professor of linguistics at UCSB, and the Barandiarán Chair of Basque Studies in the Spanish and Portuguese department. "Because of the intangible nature of this heritage, it is difficult to protect it and preserve it in an increasingly globalized world. This conference explores what exactly we should preserve and how, from a linguistic as well as a legal point of view."

Among the conference participants are Kristján Árnason of the University of Iceland; Pierre Foucher of the University of Ottawa; and Fernand De Varennes, recipient of the 2004 Linguapax Prize, and editor-in-chief of the Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law.

"We believe that being mindful of the diversity around us fosters the tolerance and understanding of differences, and allows us to live together in the respect of others," Miglio said. "These are questions that do not affect only far away lands, but also sizeable historical and immigrant communities close to home. That is why we believe that student participation in these events is as key as the participation of the international experts that will attend."

More information about the conference, including a complete schedule of speakers and topics, is available at

http://web.me.com/skarphedinn/Violas_Site/MLD_2012.html.

Related Links [International Mother Language Day Conference](#)

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.