

International Mother Language Day
22 February 2021, 12 p.m.

**Transcript of the remarks by Movses Abelian,
Under-Secretary-General
for General Assembly and Conference Management
and UN Coordinator for Multilingualism**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the twenty-first International Mother Language Day. For most of us, hearing the expression “mother language” summons the idea of the mother, sister, grandmother or any other caregiver with whom we learned to speak, and formed our first structured thoughts. This expression underlines the essential – or even disproportionate – role women play in the education of children all around the world. As we mark the end of the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to take this opportunity to recognize the even more pivotal role mothers have assumed these past months, across the world, with an entire generation of children embarking on full or partial homeschooling.

The theme of this year’s celebrations, “Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society,” recognizes that languages and multilingualism can advance inclusion, and I would like to thank Her Excellency Ms. Rabab Fatima, and all the co-sponsoring Permanent Missions, for inviting me to be with you today, in my capacity as UN Coordinator for Multilingualism.

At the United Nations, multilingualism and inclusion are not only mutually reinforcing, they are fully integrated into each other. By providing multilingual conference services and communication services, to name only a couple of the many services provided by the UN, the Organization is more inclusive. It enables delegates to take the floor in any language as provided by the rules of procedure of the respective bodies. It ensures that the decisions made by these bodies reflect the will of the community of nations, thereby confirming the legitimacy of these decisions. Providing multilingual communication services also makes the peoples of the world receive the technical assistance, training, information, and overall support they need from the UN, in a language that they can understand and interact in. To demonstrate this, in his last report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General noted that in 2019, the UN produced information in 106 languages, as well as Braille, to strengthen communication on the Organization’s work.

Only by pursuing an inclusive approach will the UN become the multilingual Organization it aims to be. The UN seeks to attract and retain a diverse workforce, which reflects not only today’s world, but can also address tomorrow’s needs. I truly believe that a multilingual workforce is instrumental to achieving a nimbler, more flexible and adaptable Organization, capable of tackling the challenges that rest ahead of us in the twenty-first century. I am also confident that education, through language training, is a key in this transition.

A famous Armenian poetess, Silva Kaputikyan, in her poem titled “A Word to my Son”, which became a standard work in recognition of national identity said the following: “Look, my son, wherever you are, wherever you go under the skies, if you forget your mother, don’t forget your mother tongue”. With that, I can close saying “Happy International Mother Language Day”. I would say the same now, in Armenian: “Շնորհավոր մայրենի լեզվի միջազգային օրը”.

Thank you, Ambassador and Excellencies. Thank you.