

International Mother Language Day
21 February 2019, 5 p.m.

**Transcript of the remarks by Ruth de Miranda
Director, General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division,
on behalf of Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General
for General Assembly and Conference Management
and Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

Today, 21st February, as we celebrate International Mother Language Day, I'd like, first, to reflect on the concept of "mother language". Interestingly, most nations refer to the language that children receive at birth as the mother's language. Although the concept of 'mother tongue' has faced challenges in the recent past, with more gender-neutral terms being increasingly in use, such as 'native language', these considerations do not cast any doubt on the inalienable bond between human beings and the language that was spoken to them during their early childhood and in which they formed their first structured thoughts.

Today, it is this very special bond that we are celebrating, this unique and immovable relationship between a person and a language that is an integral part of their identity, their culture and, oftentimes, their sense of belonging.

Through International Mother Language Day, we are not only celebrating our humanity's immense language diversity— with today an estimated 7000 languages and dialects spoken worldwide. We're also hoping that it will serve as an incentive to nurture such diversity.

While preserving language diversity and promoting multilingualism is primarily a responsibility of the Member States, so is it a necessity for and within the United Nations Secretariat if we are to be capable of implementing the wide array of the mandates that have been given to us, including Agenda 2030, and to achieve, ultimately, the noble goals of our Organization.

Multilingualism, a recognized core value of the United Nations that improves the Organization's efficiency, performance and transparency, also contributes to strengthening accountability to the peoples that we are serving. As UN Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism, and as a member of the UN Senior Management Group, I am proud of the progress made, under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres, to achieve greater diversity in our workforce and a more inclusive approach to every aspect of the work we do. It is my commitment that I will continue to build on this solid foundation to support the realization of an inclusive United Nations, including linguistically, in the spirit of the aspirations of its founders.

As a final point, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh for hosting these celebrations, again this year, on International Year of Indigenous Languages, and I wish you a happy International Mother Language Day.

Thank you.