



**Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller  
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva  
Arabic Language Day**

Palais des Nations, Room XXI  
Tuesday, 15 January 2019  
12.30 p.m.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Friends and colleagues,

As-salam-aleykum! It is my great pleasure to be present today to celebrate the Arabic language and to recognize its richness, its beauty and its importance. I very much regret that due to a long-standing prior engagement I can only be with you briefly. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Ambassador Al-Sammak, Permanent Representative of the League of Arab States and Ambassador Al-Rahbi, Permanent Representative of Oman for their generous contribution and support towards today's programme.

An essential factor in harmonious communication among peoples, multilingualism is of particular importance to the United Nations. By promoting tolerance, it ensures effective and increased participation of all in the Organization's work, as well as greater effectiveness, better outcomes and more involvement. As former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "tolerance is a virtue that makes peace possible".

In support of multilingualism, therefore, the United Nations dedicates a day every year to celebrate each of its six official languages and raise awareness of their history and cultural impact. It was decided to celebrate Arabic on 18 December as the day on which the General Assembly decided to designate Arabic as the sixth official UN language. We were not able to hold this ceremony on 18 December, but the breadth of its programme proves that it was well worth the wait.

As one of the most widely spoken languages in the world used daily by more than 290 million people, the Arabic language has also been a pillar of the cultural diversity of humanity. Classical Arabic spread beyond the geography of the Arab world and is now the language of worship for more than 1.8 billion of world population. Its age is estimated to be more than 5000 years and its first written records date back to about 3000 years. It encapsulates a very wide range of identities and its history demonstrates the richness of its links with other languages. The Arabic language has travelled over dozens of centuries and endless roads in all continents. Indeed, its vocabulary is markedly present in many languages from Amharic to Croatian, from Malay to Persian to Tagalog as well as French, Spanish, Portuguese and other European languages.

In the diversity of its forms, from oral expression to poetic calligraphy, the Arabic language has led to beautiful aesthetic in fields as varied as architecture, poetry, philosophy and song. Some of those you will be able to witness today in the presentation on the Bodmer Foundation's remarkable collection -and I thank Mr. Ducimetière for his presence among us - and the calligraphy display by Mr. Abdel Razak Hammouda.

Arabic, however, is also very much a living and dynamic language, an important medium for political, economic and scientific exchanges. It is permanently adapting to changing times, and the internet age has brought as many opportunities as challenges. It has a vibrant literary scene which is well represented here by the two prominent writers, Ms. Aicha Bassry and Mr. Soufiane Ben Farhat, who have already spoken. We also have dozens of colleagues in UN Geneva whose first language is Arabic, and all of them have texts that they cherish particularly, some of which will be read today, or special stories to share, such as the one you will hear from Mr. Mbacke.

I hope therefore that you will enjoy the rest of the programme and wish you a very happy Arabic Language Day.

Thank you! Shokran!