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**Remarks by the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, Alison Smale
International Mother Language Day event, New York
Wednesday 21 February 2018**

Good evening! Bonsoir!

Buenas noches! Guten Abend!

Dobry vecher! Masa al-khayr!

Wanshang hao! Habari za jioni!

Boa noite! Subha Sandhya!

My heartfelt thanks to the Permanent Missions of Colombia, Fiji and Tanzania, and of course in particular to our hosts, the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, for bringing us all together this evening to celebrate a cause dear to all of our hearts: multilingualism.

As a former journalist and a fluent linguist, it is particularly dear to my heart too.

I have the great fortune to lead a Department, the Department of Public Information, whose *raison d'être* is to communicate to the world what the United Nations is doing. To tell the UN story, if you like.

Telling the UN story is especially important in an era when Member States are increasingly expected to be able to demonstrate to their publics the value of their political and financial investment in the Organization.

If we are to communicate effectively with a global audience, we must do so in a language they understand. That means local languages – mother tongues in which people feel they can best express themselves.

DPI is able to communicate with the global public in at least 60 languages on a regular basis, thanks to our network of UN Information Centres. But we are always searching for ways to expand that roster of languages and our capacity to use them.

The UN Charter starts with the famous phrase “We the peoples”. As an Organization we can give that phrase substance by amplifying the voice of the peoples.

One way we are doing that is through a powerful and moving new video campaign that my Department has launched, together with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

For the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we celebrate this year, we jointly launched a multimedia project asking people around the world to record themselves reading an article of the Universal Declaration in their native language.

We have so far collected more than 2,000 videos from people speaking in over 60 languages from more than 100 countries. Out of this total, we have featured at least 700 on our website.

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I urge you to have a listen. There's something very powerful about listening to hundreds of people expressing themselves in their native languages but all saying essentially the same thing.

We are all humans, our human rights matter, and we all deserve our human rights.

This project truly makes you understand that celebrating multilingualism is celebrating our universality. We may say things differently, but what we are saying, about our needs and desire, are essentially the same. I encourage you to add your voice.

Thank you.
