

**Remarks of USG Alison Smale
on International Mother Language Day event
Thursday 21 February 2019
5:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Conference Room 2**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Colleagues,

Happy International Mother Language Day! It is my great pleasure to be here today to welcome you all to the United Nations and to celebrate this very important occasion.

I would like to first express my gratitude to the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, along with the Permanent Missions of Guatemala, Mozambique, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, and in collaboration with our friends at the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the UN Postal Administration and UNESCO, for hosting this annual observance.

I have the honor to be able to represent the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, who is unfortunately unable to join us this evening, but sends his best wishes.

This evening's event and this day in general remind us of the important role played by mother languages in sustaining cultural heritage worldwide.

And it's an increasingly critical one given we live at a time when so many languages are on the verge of disappearing. Indeed, the latest estimates are that around 40 per cent of the almost 7,000 languages currently spoken in the world are classed as endangered.

The General Assembly's designation of 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages is thus an opportunity both to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages, and to raise global awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

Multilingualism is central to the DNA of the United Nations, and therefore to our work at the Department of Global Communications, which I have the honor to lead.

Our aim is to tell the UN story to the world, and to do so in languages with which they are most familiar – their mother tongues.

Through our news, digital and social media platforms, every day we create original content about the UN in nine languages – the six official languages as well as Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese.

Our global network of 59 active UN Information Centres further strengthen our multilingual capacity by creating, translating and disseminating information materials to local audiences in up to 97 languages.

And our campaigns about the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights and other issues are also multilingual. Just last year, for example, people from 125 countries participated in the "Add Your Voice" video campaign in the lead-up to the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recording themselves reading articles of the Declaration in more than 80 languages.

And our tour guides in Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna and here in New York welcome some 500,000 visitors each year, leading tours in 20 different languages.

That's just a small sample of what we are trying to do. We will continue to explore innovative ways to share more content about the UN and engage more people in our agenda in as many languages as possible. The multilingual journey is never complete!

Thank you, and Happy International Mother Language Day once more!
