

Chinese Language Day at the United Nations, 19 April 2024

Remarks by Mr. Movses Abelian, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and UN Coordinator for Multilingualism

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Excellency [Fu Cong],
Distinguished guests and colleagues,

Wan shang hao (Good evening).

It is a pleasure to join you on this special occasion to celebrate Chinese Language Day.

As I walked through the exhibit earlier, I was impressed by the stories behind these characters and the splendid display of traditional and modern artistic expressions associated with them.

The theme of today's event reflects the unique journey of Chinese characters in China's 5,000 years of history, from their ancient origins to their dynamic contemporary forms.

We are here to honour the profound history of Chinese characters and the enduring role of the Chinese language in facilitating cultural exchange and mutual understanding among civilizations. While it is one of the oldest languages, it is also one of the fastest-growing languages in the world.

The language provides a gateway to understanding the Chinese culture on a deeper level. They, the Chinese language and culture, are tightly interlaced and indispensable to each other. Any student of the language will soon understand that it opens a gateway to Chinese history, customs, traditions.

For example, the concept of harmony is one of the most important Chinese cultural values. It is the basis for respect, wisdom, kindness and loyalty. The character for harmony itself has the meaning of "together" and represents balance and equilibrium. It also reflects the relationship between nature and

humanity. It is the basis for several other characters such as peace, serenity, agreement, consensus, all of which are fundamental ideals of what we strive for at the United Nations. And that is what we are celebrating today, the beauty of the Chinese language and its deep symbolism.

Today, is also an occasion to celebrate multilingualism as an enabler of multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations and beyond. In today's interconnected world, the role of languages in fostering mutual understanding and harmonious relations among nations cannot be overstated.

While monolingualism can divide different linguistic groups and put-up walls between them, multilingualism, can move us from incomprehension to comprehension, from the unknown to the known and from doubt to trust. It allows exchange, communication and dialogue and ultimately empowers us as an Organization.

Here at the United Nations, Chinese language professionals play a vital role in facilitating the intergovernmental process.

Our interpreters provide simultaneous interpretation in meetings and our translators, verbatim reporters, editors and text processors work behind the scenes to produce parliamentary documents. Their expertise ensures that the voices of the Member States are heard, understood, and respected. They are the life blood of these meetings.

Thank you to the organizers, in particular, our colleagues in the Chinese Translation Service as well as the Chinese Book Club for their exceptional contribution to this year's celebrations.

I also wish to extend my warm gratitude to Ambassador Fu Cong for his Mission's continuous commitment to multilingualism, and to all co-sponsors and speakers.

Zhong wen ri kuai le. (Happy Chinese Language Day).

** *** **