

International Mother Language Day
21 February 2020, 4 p.m.

**Transcript of the remarks by Melissa Fleming,
Under-Secretary-General
for Global Communications,
on behalf of António Guterres, UN Secretary-General**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends and Colleagues,

Good afternoon and happy International Mother Language Day!

It is my great pleasure to be here with you at United Nations Headquarters today to celebrate the Day and what it represents about culture, inclusivity and diversity. The Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, is not able to join us today but I have the honour to represent him and convey to you his best wishes.

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, along with the Permanent Missions of Australia, Cameroon, Mexico, and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as UNESCO, for hosting this annual observance.

International Mother Language Day is a highlight on the UN's calendar, drawing our attention to the importance of preserving the world's languages and to promoting multilingualism to inspire solidarity, understanding and tolerance among peoples everywhere. These qualities are more important than ever today and must be promoted widely if we are truly committed to building a more peaceful, inclusive world.

As Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, I lead a Department responsible for informing the world about the values, goals and work of the UN. The goal of our communications is not simply to inform; it is to build compassion and get people to take action towards our common aspiration for a better world. If we want to do that, we must do so in ways and in languages that audiences can understand.

This is an essential element of the first UN global communications strategy that we are currently developing. It takes into account the importance of multilingualism, a core UN value.

Multilingualism is already a common thread tying together our work. We disseminate the latest news and information in the six official UN languages, as well as in Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese. In addition, our global network of UN Information Centres – active from Antananarivo to Asunción to Almaty – extends our audience reach by sharing and publishing content in 106 languages as well as Braille. And our tour guides at various UN duty stations around the world offer tours in numerous languages.

Those are just some examples of our efforts to promote linguistic diversity. With the new global communications strategy, we will put an even greater emphasis on multilingualism at the planning stage of our work and find innovative ways to expand multilingual content across all of our platforms, including our digital ones.

A Happy International Mother Language Day to all! Thank you.