Every year, we mark Nowruz as a day of new beginnings, when we step into a new year with hope and joy. We celebrate the renewal of nature and the first day of spring.

This year, for many, Nowruz comes at a time of sadness and anxiety. The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, is casting a shadow around the world, including the regions that mark this ancient festival. I send my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my best wishes to all who have been affected.

I hope the festival of Nowruz will provide a welcome break to relax and spend time with close family, enjoy the beauty of the changing seasons, and to remember and celebrate our common humanity.

Nowruz is renewal. As you mark its arrival with fire, special dishes, green shoots and other rituals, I hope you will find a shared sense of friendship and harmony with nature.

I wish you a happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous Nowruz.