

International Mother Language Day  
21 February 2023, 3 p.m.

**Transcript of the remarks by Movses Abelian,  
Under-Secretary-General  
for**

In my capacity as Under-Secretary-General for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, overseeing all language services at the four duty stations, I want to stress how dependent our Organization is on the work conducted by the educational institutions in your respective countries, to supply the UN with qualified language staff. At the UN, we are doing our part, as part of our Outreach-to-University programme, to support the training of future generations of language professionals and allow them to reach the level of excellence required to pass our competitive examinations. But the greater part falls under the care of the Member States. A need for excellent knowledge of the mother tongue, into which interpretation and translation is done at the UN, is sometimes underestimated by the academia which focuses on teaching foreign languages.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Needless to say, this is far from being the only reason why mother tongues are important to us. Our individual mother tongues link each of us to our cultural heritage. Yet, around the world, an alarming number of languages are forever lost every year, at an accelerating rate. Regrettably, we are seeing a similar loss of language diversity within the UN Organization itself, which is not immune to this scourge.

Our latest Secretariat-wide Survey on Multilingualism, in which nearly 4,000 staff members took part, showed that, collectively, respondents represented more than 200 distinct mother languages,

probably multiple causes to such a discrepancy, and they may even come from a time preceding their entry into the Organization. But it is nevertheless an observation which is a source of concern, and which deserves our attention.

work done by our colleagues from the Department of Global Communications, who today, on International Mother Language Day, released a publication entirely dedicated to multilingualism at the UN, to which I was also happy to contribute. This publication, part of the Dag

lilingualism, which is inherent in the work of the UN, has gradually evolved over the past decades to now be considered a core value of the Organization. I would also like to congratulate the team in my department who worked on the translation and graphic design of this publication to enable its simultaneous issuance in the six official languages of the UN. And I would like also thank our own interpreters for sitting here today, making us to understand each other better. They are the best of the best in the world.

And with that, I would like to thank Ambassador Muhith once again for his invitation, and I am very happy to congratulate everyone on International Mother Language Day, and I would like to say something in my own mother language, which I will say

Thank you.