

Poetry gives us hope to scale and climb 'cloudy summits of our time' – UN cultural agency

21 March 2017 – Poetry gives us hope, the United Nations cultural agency today said, lauding verse's ability to shake us from everyday life and remind us of the surrounding beauty and the resilience of the shared human spirit.

In her message for World Poetry Day, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova quoted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

We have not wings, we cannot soar;

But we have feet to scale and climb

By slow degrees, by more and more,

The cloudy summits of our time.

“As old as language itself, poetry remains more vital than ever, in a time of turbulence, as a source of hope, as a way to share what it means to live in this world,” Ms. Bokova said.

“By celebrating poetry today, we celebrate our ability to join together, in a spirit of solidarity, to scale and climb ‘the cloudy summits of our time’,” she noted, in reference to Mr. Longfellow’s poem.

UNESCO proclaimed 21 March as World Poetry Day in 1999, calling poetry a “social need” which anchors people to their roots.

One of the main objectives of the Day is to support linguistic diversity through poetic expression and to offer endangered languages the opportunity to be heard within their communities.

UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity includes dozens of forms of oral expression and poetry, from the Tsiattista poetic duelling of Cyprus, the Ca trù sung poetry of Viet Nam and Al-Taghrooda to the traditional Bedouin chanted poetry of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

World Poetry Day also celebrates poetry’s power to aid peace. UNESCO’s new Goodwill Ambassador for Artistic Freedom and Creativity, Deeyah Khan, has said, all art, including poetry, “has the extraordinary capacity to express resistance and rebellion, protest and hope.”

In her message today, the Director-General said that the spirit of solidarity created by poetry is essential to reaching the goals set by the international community to fight inequality, poverty and climate change.

“We need this to take forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to implement the Paris Climate Agreement, to ensure no woman or man is left behind,” said Ms. Bokova.

Deteriorating security situation in DR Congo ‘a source of major concern,’ warns UN envoy

21 March 2017 – The United Nations envoy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) today stressed the need for both the Government and the opposition groups there to show the same level of commitment and compromise which led to the signing on 31 December of an agreement on the electoral process, while also citing the UN peacekeeping mission’s readiness to adapt to the deteriorating security situation.

“The primary responsibility for the implementation of the Agreement rests with its signatories,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for DRC, Maman Sidikou, told the Security Council in a briefing.

Under the agreement, President Joseph Kabila would stay in office until elections are held by the end of 2017. During this period, a ‘National Council for Overseeing the Electoral Agreement and Process (CNSAP)’ would be set up, and a new prime minister named from opposition ranks.

However, some discord has delayed the implementation of the agreement, and the death of opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi, who was to head the CNSAP, had had a significant impact on the political process.

Mr. Sidikou said that the situation seems to have evolved in the right direction over the last few days, with negotiations on the “Special Arrangement” resuming, and the Presidents of the two Houses of Parliament called for an irreversible and credible electoral process and expressed their support.

Significant progress has been made in updating the electoral roll. To date, more than 19 million voters have been enrolled and the enrollment process is about to begin in the two remaining enrollment areas, said Mr. Sidikou, who is also the head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

MONUSCO’s logistical and technical support for the enrollment process will be completed by the end of this month, and if authorized by the Security Council, MONUSCO is prepared to provide technical and logistical support for the electoral process, which would go beyond updating the electoral roll.

VIDEO: Concerns over deteriorating security in the DRC in briefing to the Security Council

On the security front, Mr. Sidikou said that violence and threats to civilians are no longer concentrated in the eastern DRC, noting that community-based violence and inter-ethnic clashes have spread from areas already affected by armed conflict, such as the Kivus, to Tanganyika, the three Kasai provinces, Lomami and Kongo Central.

The Secretary-General has set out a package of measures aimed at enhancing the ability of the MONUSCO Force to support the achievement of the Mission's strategic objectives in the current challenging security context through the adoption of a more mobile, flexible and agile posture. He has recommended the deployment of two additional formed police units (FPUs) to help the Congolese authorities address the potential threat of electoral and politically motivated violence in key urban centers where there is no FPU presence.

Mr. Sidikou said that MONUSCO has already undertaken adjustments to its posture and operations, and that the Mission will continue to make such adjustments as may be required in the months ahead.

MONUSCO will continue to provide support for the implementation of the Agreement, while supporting efforts to address the mounting threats faced by the civilian population during the transition period, he concluded.

[UN urges building more just, equal societies to increase happiness and well-being worldwide](#)

20 March 2017 – Speaking at an event today marking the International Day of Happiness, the deputy United Nations chief called for more inclusive, equitable and balanced approaches to development that promote sustainability, poverty eradication, happiness and well-being of all peoples.

Many countries have undertaken efforts to develop broader measures of progress, often through public consultations, parliamentary commissions, and efforts to develop new indicators and understanding of well-being, said Amina Mohammed, the UN Deputy Secretary-General.

Cautioning that pursuing only economic growth and disregarding social and environmental dimensions can have negative impact on human well-being and can result in growing inequalities and environmental degradation, she underlined that development should not take place at all costs.

“Not at the cost of environment or the marginalization of the poor and other vulnerable groups,” she added.

In her remarks, Ms. Mohammed noted that well-being did not depend solely on income but also included other factors such as personal and job security, fundamental freedoms, a clean environment, as well as having strong family and social relations.

VIDEO: Global Happiness Council launched at the United Nations

“These human needs can be fulfilled in societies where people are empowered to pursue their own goals that ensure their personal well-being in societies that are inclusive and egalitarian, and where human rights are cherished and respected,” she said.

The deputy UN chief recalled that the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided a blue print to collectively building such societies and their recognition that ending poverty needs to go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

Highlighting the organization’s work to promote and secure the well-being and happiness of all peoples she urged everyone to renew the commitment to continue building more just and equal societies to increase people’s happiness and well-being worldwide.

Bicycling for love

Also today, commemorating the International Day, the UN Bookshop in New York hosted the launch of *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love* that recounted the story of artist Pradyumna Kumar, or PK.

Born in a poor family belonging to the so called “untouchable” caste in India, PK undertook a bicycle journey through Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, (former) Yugoslavia, Germany, Austria and Denmark to be reunited with the love of his life, Charlotte, in Sweden, whose portrait he had drawn a few months earlier, in India.

They have been happily married for more than 40 years now.

[UN disability rights committee opens with a call to spotlight gender issues](#)

20 March 2017 – The United Nations committee monitoring efforts to protect

rights of persons with disabilities today opened its spring session today in Geneva with a call to pay special attention to gender issues.

“We do urge you to ensure a strong gender basis is built in to your agenda this year, and we urge you to take special care to ensure that the voice and experience of girls and women resonates within your deliberations,” the UN’s Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore told the 17th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which runs 12 April.

Ms. Gilmore spoke on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who has made gender parity and the equal representation of women a centrepiece of his term in office.

In this session, the Committee, consisting of 18 international independent experts, will review the rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova, Iran, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, Armenia, Honduras and Canada.

These countries are among the 172 State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was adopted on 13 December 2006 by the General Assembly.

Rather than considering disability as an issue of medicine, charity or dependency, the CRPD challenges people worldwide to understand disability as a human rights issue.

It covers many areas where obstacles can arise, such as physical access to buildings, roads and transportation, and access to information through written and electronic communications while it also aims to reduce stigma and discrimination, which are often reasons why people with disabilities are excluded from education, employment and health and other services.

RELATED: FEATURE: Visually impaired professor to light way forward on UN disability agenda

There are around one billion people with disabilities in the world.

At today’s meeting, the Committee adopted its agenda and programme of work while newly elected members of the Committee were sworn in.

The fact that only one woman has been elected by Member States to serve on the Committee is “fundamentally not appropriate,” Ms. Gilmore said, urging Member States to “rectify this unacceptable situation” at the next elections.

Ahead of International Day, UN rights chief urges governments to target hate speech, crimes

20 March 2017 – On the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations human rights chief today reminded Governments around the world that they have a legal obligation to stop hate speech and hate crimes, and called on people everywhere to “stand up for someone’s rights.”

“Politics of division and the rhetoric of intolerance are targeting racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, and migrants and refugees. Words of fear and loathing can, and do, have real consequences,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said.

The “Words of fear and loathing can, and do, have real consequences” UN High Commissioner’s statement comes ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, marked annually on 21 March. The theme for this year is ending racial profiling and incitement to hatred, including as it relates to people’s attitudes and actions towards migration.

At the Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016, UN Member States adopted a Declaration strongly condemning acts and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The Summit also sparked the UN’s Together initiative to change negative perceptions and attitudes aimed at refugees and migrants.

In his statement, Mr. Zeid said that States do not have any excuse to allow racism and xenophobia to fester.

States “have the legal obligation to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination, to guarantee the right of everyone, no matter their race, colour, national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law,” the senior UN official said.

He urged Governments to adopt legislation expressly prohibiting racist hate speech, including the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, and threats or incitement to violence.

“It is not an attack on free speech or the silencing of controversial ideas or criticism, but a recognition that the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities,” Mr. Zeid said.

To promote human rights, the UN High Commissioner’s office, known by its acronym OHCHR, is asking people around the world to , “Stand up for Someone’s Rights Today”. The campaign urges people to take practical steps in their own communities to take a stand for humanity.