

## 'Our values, beliefs and identity' are embedded within language, UNESCO says on Mother Language Day

Every two weeks, one of the world's languages disappears, along with the human history and cultural heritage that accompanies it, the chief of the United Nations cultural agency warned on Wednesday, calling for greater efforts to preserve and promote mother languages and indigenous languages, to bolster inclusion, diversity and ultimately, sustainable development.

"A language is far more than a means of communication; it is the very [condition of our humanity](#). Our values, our beliefs and our identity are embedded within it," said Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the occasion of International Mother Language Day.

"It is through language that we transmit our experiences, our traditions and our knowledge. The diversity of languages reflects the incontestable wealth of our imaginations and ways of life," she added.

The 2018 theme for Mother Language Day is "Linguistic diversity and multilingualism count for sustainable development."

Calling the Day an "essential component of the intangible heritage of humanity," Ms. Azoulay underscored UNESCO's long-standing commitment to preserving and vitalizing language, defending linguistic diversity and promoting multilingual education.

"This commitment concerns mother languages in particular, which shape millions of developing young minds, and are the indispensable vector for inclusion in the human community, first at the local level, then at the global level," she elaborated.

UNESCO supports policies, particularly in multilingual countries, which promote mother languages and indigenous languages and recommends using them from the first years of schooling, because children learn best in their mother language.

The UN agency also encourages their use in public spaces and especially on the Internet, where multilingualism should become the rule.

"Everyone, regardless of their first language, should be able to access resources in cyberspace and build online communities of exchange and dialogue," said Ms. Azoulay, calling it "one of the major challenges of sustainable development, at the heart of the United Nations 2030 Agenda."

According to the UN, at least 43 per cent of the estimated 6,000 [languages spoken](#) in the world are endangered. Only a few hundred languages have

genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world.

Pointing out that every two weeks a language disappears, Ms. Azoulay underscored that “promoting multilingualism also helps to stop this programmed extinction.”

Ms. Azoulay quoted Nelson Mandela in saying: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

“On the occasion of this international day, UNESCO invites its Member States to celebrate, through a variety of educational and cultural initiatives, the linguistic diversity and multilingualism that make up the living wealth of our world,” she concluded.

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## [UN chief ‘deeply alarmed’ by escalating hostilities in Syria’s east Ghouta](#)

Deeply alarmed by the escalating violence in Syria’s east Ghouta, the United Nations has reiterated a call for an end to hostilities so that the sick and wounded can be immediately evacuated and humanitarian aid deliveries can reach those in need.

“Nearly 400,000 people in Eastern Ghouta have been subjected to [airstrikes, shelling and bombardment](#),” said a statement issued Monday by UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

Secretary-General António Guterres “is deeply alarmed by the escalating situation in Eastern Ghouta and its devastating impact on civilians,” noted the statement, adding that more than 100 people were reportedly killed since Monday, including at least 13 children, while five hospitals or medical clinics were hit by airstrikes.

Over 700 individuals require immediate medical evacuation. In addition, there are reports of shelling from Eastern Ghouta on Damascus.

“Eastern Ghouta is part of a de-escalation agreement reached in Astana,” the statement said, referring to the Syria talks brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey in the Kazak capital.

“The Secretary-General reminds all parties, particularly the guarantors of the Astana agreements, of their commitments in this regard,” the statement

added.

The Secretary-General urges all stakeholders to ensure basic principles of international humanitarian law are adhered to, including unhindered humanitarian access, unconditional medical evacuations, and the protection of civilians and their infrastructure, the statement said.

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## [Targeted support, reconstruction needed as displaced Iraqis return and rebuild their lives, urges UN agency](#)

Iraqi civilians, driven from their homes in fear by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, Da'esh), are now starting to make their way back home after the terrorist group has been uprooted from its bastions in the country, the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported.

According to [data](#) as of 31 January, more than 3.3 million Iraqis have returned to their areas of origin, with most coming back to their homes in the governorates of Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk and Anbar. In all, some six million Iraqis were displaced due to ISIL and the subsequent military operation to drive the group away.

"As Iraq enters the recovery phase after three years of conflict, we should remember that real reconstruction of the country will not only be based on rebuilding infrastructure," said the head of the IOM operations in the country, Gerard Waite, in a [news release](#) Tuesday.

"Provision of specialized support to all who survived the conflict is also needed, alongside reconstruction of infrastructure."

At the recent Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, the UN system launched a two-year [Recovery and Resilience Programme](#), as part of which IOM will assist the Government of Iraq in addressing the multiple needs for rebuilding and reconstruction in the country.

The UN migration agency is also working on assistance efforts in areas of return, specific programmes include mobile community information centres, light infrastructure projects, housing rehabilitation, strengthening health facilities, relief kit distribution and livelihood support.

As of the some 2.5 million Iraqis yet to return to their origins, about half (51 per cent) are reportedly living in private settings – such as with families or friends – and about a quarter (26 per cent) in camps.

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## South-eastern DR Congo at risk of humanitarian disaster of 'extraordinary proportions,' warns UN refugee agency

Cautioning that the Tanganyika region in south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo could be engulfed by a humanitarian disaster of "extraordinary proportions," the United Nations refugee agency on Tuesday urged the Government to ensure protection of civilians.

"The violence spreading across Tanganyika, which is three times the size of Switzerland with a population of some three million, has now internally displaced over 630,000 people," Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [said](#) at the regular news briefing in Geneva, adding that this number is almost double the 370,000 who were displaced within Tanganyika in December 2016.

"People fleeing for their lives near the provincial capital Kalemie have shared stories of horrific violence during attacks against their villages, including killings, abductions and rape."

[According](#) to UNHCR, fierce clashes between the Congolese armed forces and militias have continued since the end of January. At the same time, insecurity has increased due to violence by new armed groups and entrenched intercommunal conflict, fuelling mass displacement.

In the first two weeks of February alone, the UN agency's partners have documented some 800 protection incidents.

Last year, more than 12,000 reports of human rights violations in Tanganyika and the nearby area of Pweto in the Haut Katanga province were documented, including violations to property rights, physical abuse, torture, murders, arbitrary arrests, forced labour, rape and forced marriages.

"Overall, already vulnerable displaced populations most often fell victim to the latest atrocities," added the UNHCR spokesperson, noting that such acts were not only committed in the context of the ethnic conflict, but also by the soldiers deployed to fight the renegade militias and armed groups.

### **Less than \$1 per person in need received in 2017 – UNHCR**

The UN agency together with its partners are responding to the crisis. But given the scale of the calamity, is appealing for increased assistance to help the population cope.

Last year, the agency received less than \$1 per person in need in donor contributions for its programmes for the internally displaced in the country. This severe lack of funding left many Tanganyika receiving hardly any humanitarian aid.

“For 2018, [we are] appealing for \$368.7 million for the Congolese situation,” said Mr. Mahecic, noting that \$80 million is required to support the internally displaced populations inside the country.

“[We also] call on the Congolese authorities to ensure the protection of the civilian population, to effectively follow-up any reports of crimes attributed to the armed forces and to put an end to the perception of impunity related to human rights abuses,” he added.

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## [‘There is no plan B,’ says Guterres, reiterating UN’s commitment to two-state solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#)

After over a century of hostilities including 50 years of continued military occupation, Israelis and Palestinians are still no closer to peace, a United Nations special envoy said on Tuesday, warning that even as many in the region have lost hope for positive change, the enemies of peace are growing more confident by the day.

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process [Nikolay Mladenov](#) delivered his latest monthly briefing to the Security Council, noting that he was doing so at a time when “regional tensions are taking an [increasingly perilous turn.](#)”

His comments echoed remarks by UN Secretary-General António Guterres who opened the meeting by underscoring his commitment to achieving two democratic States living side-by-side in peace.

Mr. Guterres emphasized the Organization’s long-held support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stressing: “[There is no Plan B.](#)”

“This is a time for dialogue, for reconciliation, for reason,” the UN chief said, expressing concern that global consensus on the issue may be eroding.

Warning that “obstacles on the ground have the potential to create an irreversible one-state reality,” Mr. Guterres underscored however that: “It

is simply impossible to square the circle of a one-state reality with the legitimate national, historic and democratic aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.”

“At this moment of grave consequence, I appeal for effective concerted action by all parties. It is more important than ever.”

Mr. Mladenov reported on developments such as the need to maintain support for the UN agency assisting Palestinian refugees across the region, [UNRWA](#), as it faces a substantial funding shortfall.

He also spoke of the violence affecting both sides, including the killing of seven Palestinians by the Israeli security forces and the stabbing death of an Israeli civilian by a Palestinian in the West Bank.

Mr. Mladenov also said it was time to “break the cycle” in Gaza, which has been under the control of Hamas for a decade and which currently is facing what he described as a “humanitarian, economic and ecological calamity.”

He called for Gaza to be returned to the control of the Palestinian Authority, adding that “there can be no Palestinian state without Palestinian unity.”

Mr. Mladenov also urged the international community to continue advocating for “substantial” Israeli policy changes related to the West Bank, including halting settlement construction there: something the UN considers illegal under international law.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, briefs the Security Council.

“In this chamber, we have often spoken of the need for leadership on both sides to reach a deal, a compromise, through negotiations that would allow

Israelis and Palestinians to separate and be master of their own fate. But these negotiations would not be negotiations between equals," he said.

"For one side is under military occupation. Its leadership has committed to a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiation. I urge, in closing, the international community not to give up on support for the moderate Palestinian leadership or on building up the institutions that will increase the chances of success. Our window of opportunity is closing and, if we do not seize it quickly, the Israeli- Palestinian conflict will be engulfed in the whirlwind of religious radicalization that remains present in the region."

Also addressing the Council, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed concerns surrounding the status of Jerusalem, considered holy by both Jews and Muslims as well as Christians.

He recalled the decision announced last December by United States President Donald Trump to recognize the city as Israel's capital.

"It did so ignoring that East Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian territory. It is occupied since 1967. And it is our capital open to all the faithful of the three monotheistic religions," he said.

Mr. Abbas described the situation of the Palestinian people as "no longer bearable," and he called for an international peace conference to be convened this year as a means to find a solution to the stalemate.

Israel's representative to the United Nations Danny Danon also touched on the issue of Jerusalem, observing that the Palestinian leader had left the room prior to his presentation.

"Let me be clear: for thousands of years, Jerusalem has been the heart and soul of our people. Jerusalem has been our capital since the days of King David and Jerusalem will remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel forever," he said.

"We will always insist on Israeli sovereignty but even fair-minded observers would agree that under any possible agreement, Jerusalem would be recognized internationally as our capital."

Prior to the start of Tuesday's meeting, ambassadors observed a moment of silence in honour of one of their former colleagues, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation, who died a year ago that day.