

Nowruz promotes sense of fresh possibility, 'a chance to renew our commitment to peace' – UN chief

The world needs the spirit of Nowruz to bring all populations together in the most noble values of peace, justice and understanding, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said commemorating [International Nowruz Day](#).

“I think we all recognize that [nothing in our world is more important](#) than the spirit of Nowruz,” he underscored, pointing to the world’s conflicts, the plight of [refugees and migrants](#), and the rise of xenophobia and racism in so many parts of the world.

For more than 300 million people, Nowruz is about new beginnings. The beginning of a new year. The arrival of spring. The renewal of nature.

It is an ancestral festivity that promotes values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighbourliness – thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and different communities.

“Nowruz unites communities beyond borders,” Mr. Guterres told a special event held at UN Headquarters on Tuesday, on the eve of the international celebration of the Day. “Its values echo those that we together promote at the United Nations every day and everywhere. The beginning of a new year brings with it a sense of fresh possibility,” he stated.

According to the Secretary-General, Nowruz provides a chance to renew our commitment to peace, sustainable development and human rights.

“It is an opportunity to renew our pledge to human dignity and our promise to leave no one behind. It is an occasion to strengthen our new resolve to our path towards building a prosperous future for all while living in harmony with nature,” he stressed, echoing the pledge of the landmark UN [2030 Agenda](#) and its Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#))

Nowruz is a reminder of commonalities and our rich diversity.

Mr. Guterres concluded his message wishing “a prosperous, happy, healthy and peaceful Nowruz,” to everyone, adding “And may its spirit of friendship, harmony and respect for nature serve as an inspiration to us all.”

People with Down syndrome can drive positive changes in their workplaces, communities and beyond

People with Down syndrome, their advocates and supporters gathered at UN Headquarters in New York on Wednesday to rally employers and make sure they saw the benefits of enabling people with Down syndrome and disabilities to make meaningful contributions in the workplace.

The event, marking the 2018 edition of [World Down Syndrome Day](#) under the theme 'What I bring to the Workplace,' was a chance to show everyone people with Down syndrome can and should contribute and live valued working lives, and to be fully included in their communities.

"Inclusion within the normative and valued pathways of family and community life is one of the primary means to a life of meaning, belonging and possibilities," said Bruce Uditsky, Chief Executive Officer of Inclusion Alberta Canada.

In the afternoon, a range of employers engaged in an open dialogue on the benefits and challenges companies face in employing people with disabilities.

One speaker, Debra Ruh, CEO of United States-based CEO of Ruh Global Communications, told the event that she refused to listen when experts said that her daughter Sara, born with Down syndrome, 'would be lucky just to be able to push shopping carts at the local grocery store.'

With such comments ringing in her ears, Ms. Ruh left the banking industry and created TecAccess, a company with the core mission of making information and communication technologies (ICT) more accessible, notably to those with disabilities. Some 80 per cent of her employees are technologists with disabilities.

"Employees with disabilities in most sectors stay on the job longer, resulting in up to a 6 per cent turnover rate improvement," she noted in her [presentation](#), adding: "People with disabilities who are employed have less overall absenteeism and the number of compensation claims are no different."

A parallel event was held at the [Palais des Nations](#), the home of the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva, where people with Down syndrome spoke up on "What I bring to my community."

The hashtag #WhatIBringToMyCommunity encompasses how people with Down syndrome can and make meaningful contributions throughout their lives – whether in schools, workplaces, the community, culture, media, and sports.

Among other things, the campaign also draws from the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs); Goal [10](#) sets out to reduce inequalities within and among

countries, Goal 10.2 aims by 2030 to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

All the SDGs that ensure the opportunity of persons with Down syndrome to participate and contribute fully in society by 2030, including for quality education ([SDG 4](#)) and decent work and economic growth ([SDG 8](#)) are relevant to the campaign.

Down syndrome is a naturally occurring chromosomal arrangement that has always been a part of the human condition, exists in all regions across the globe and commonly results in variable effects on learning styles, physical characteristics or health.

World Down Syndrome Day is commemorated annually on 21 March.

[DR Congo: UN report finds 47 protestors killed, freedom of assembly curtailed by use of force](#)

The security services and defence forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) killed at least 47 people during anti-government protests over a 13-month period through 31 January 2018, a United Nations human rights report has found.

“It is particularly disturbing that security services and defence forces carry out this violence with almost [full impunity](#) which can be perceived as encouraging such repression,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN human rights chief, said in a press release on the report, which concluded that freedom of peaceful assembly was “severely restricted and often violently suppressed” by the authorities in 2017.

“We are seeing the quashing of dissent at all costs – even at the cost of human life – in the DRC by the systematic deployment of armed forces alongside the Police Nationale Congolaise to handle protests,” added the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While some people armed with sticks and broomsticks attempted to perpetrate violence during some protests, the vast majority of demonstrators were peaceful, according to the report published on Monday by the UN human rights wing and the UN peacekeeping mission in the African country.

The report concluded that the use of excessive force – including lethal force – by the authorities was thus “unlawful, unjustified and disproportionate.”

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 January 2018, at least 47 people, including women and children, were killed in the context of demonstrations and there are indications that Congolese security services have attempted to cover up these serious human rights violations by removing the bodies of victims and obstructing the work of national and international observers, the report states.

The report describes the lack of compliance with national law and international standards related to the use of force during the suppression of peaceful demonstrations.

For her part, Leila Zerrougui, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in the DRC, said the report highlights a continued shrinking of the democratic space in the country since the beginning of 2015.

"Demonstrations are intrinsically related to freedom of expression and it is absolutely necessary that all voices can be heard in the context of the forthcoming elections," said Ms. Zerrougui, also the head of the UN peacekeeping mission, known as its French acronym [MONUSCO](#).

The two UN officials urged the Government to allow the exercise of the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, warning that repression would only breed frustration, could lead to serious deteriorations in the security situation in the country and could pose a threat to the electoral process.

For credible elections to be held at the end of this year, the Government has an obligation to ensure that people's civil and political rights are respected and their exercise is facilitated, they said.

[UN condemns attack that kills dozens near shrine in Kabul](#)

The United Nations strongly condemned the deadly attack earlier Wednesday in the Afghan capital, Kabul, near a major religious shrine where people had gathered to celebrate Nowruz – the traditional New Year and the arrival of spring.

In a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) offered his condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

"[Nowruz](#) is a time of renewal and celebration, and should be a time for promoting the values of peace and solidarity," he said, reiterating that those organized the attack "must be brought to justice."

The UN chief also expressed his solidarity with the Government and the people of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the violence.

According to the UN Assistance Mission in the country, UNAMA, initial reports indicate that at least 25 civilians were killed and many others injured. There are fears the numbers could rise. Media reports suggest a suicide bomber blew himself up near the shrine.

In a separate statement, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the head of the UN Mission, echoed the Secretary-General's condemnation.

"I reiterate that [under no circumstances are such attacks justifiable](#), and I once again call on all parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, at all times."

[As cities boom, forests key to meeting demands for water, food and energy – UN](#)

With two-thirds of the world's population expected to live in urban areas by 2050, forests are a critical part of the solution to the unprecedented demand for water, food and energy that these cities will face, senior United Nations officials said Wednesday, on the International Day of Forests.

"How we manage forests [will determine how we meet this demand](#)," said Manoel Sobral Filho, Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS).

He noted that growth and shifts in population, changes in climate, and innovation in knowledge and technology will undoubtedly impact future forests. "One thing I am certain of, investing in forests is essential for securing a sustainable future for communities the world over," he added.

In his video message for the Day, José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), said that "[well-managed forests and trees](#) in and around cities provide habitats, food and protection for many plants and animals, helping to maintain and increase biodiversity."

This year, the [International Day](#), observed annually on 21 March, will focus on the interlinkages between the sustainable management of forest and sustainable cities.



Source: FAO

The theme provides an opportunity to highlight the benefits forests and trees provide to urban communities.

It is estimated that by 2050, more than half of the world's population will face water stress. Given that forested catchments provide three-quarters of all freshwater used worldwide, safeguarding the water-providing capacity of forests is even more urgent.

Trees in cities help regulate climate, store carbon, and reduce flooding and storm water runoff. Sustainable forest management and sustainable forest products offers some of the most effective and cost-competitive natural carbon capture and storage options available.

Forests are home to over 80 per cent of biodiversity on land, and urban forests and city parks can provide important habitat for migratory birds and other fauna and flora.

[Sustainable Development Goal 15](#) of the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015 by world leaders, calls for action to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” by 2030.

[The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030](#) envisions “a world in which all types of forests and trees outside forests are sustainably managed, contribute to sustainable development and provide economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits for present and future generations.”

At UN Headquarters in New York, the Day is being celebrated with a [special event](#) featuring speeches by prominent officials, including Liu Zhenmin, UN

Under-Secretary-General for Social and Economic Affairs.