

[New UN Day honours unsung heroes who ensure diplomats are 'on the same page'](#)

29 September 2017 – Recognizing the unsung heroes behind international diplomacy, the United Nations is celebrating – for the first time – International Translation Day, paying tribute to the work of the language professionals who play a vital role in facilitating dialogue and understanding among peoples and nations.

The simultaneous issuance of UN documents in the six official languages of Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish is made possible by UN translators who, transpose content from the original texts into their main language.

Katherine Durnin, head of the UN English translation service, explained to UN News how her work ensures that Member States are using the correct texts during their discussions, thereby contributing to the overarching goals of the Organization.

“We ensure that when they are debating any subject, they all understand the same message, enabling their discussion to move forward in the language they know,” Ms. Durnin said.

“In that way, they can reach the proper agreement because with the translations they are all on the same page,” she added.

In declaring the [International Day](#) earlier this year, the General Assembly affirmed that “professional translation, as a trade and an art, plays an important role in upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, bringing nations together, facilitating dialogue, understanding and cooperation, contributing to development and strengthening world peace and security.”

Ms. Durnin noted that this recognition has lifted morale “amongst translators, interpreters, editors... anyone who works on documentation.”

“We play a behind-the-scenes role and we understand that,” she stated. “The idea of being a translator is that someone doesn’t actually know that the text they are looking at is a translation; we are supposed to be invisible.”

“But,” she added with a smile “it is great to have that recognition now and then. Once a year, now we can pat ourselves on the back before we recede back into the background.”



Katherine Durnin, head of the UN English translation service. Photo: Elizabeth Scaffidi

Ms. Durnin also admitted that it is nice to be acknowledged outside of the profession, saying “we ourselves understand the difficulty of the work that we do, but it is great to have that recognition across the UN in general.”

Professional translation also includes interpreters, verbatim reporters and terminologists.

Translators handle a range of documents that cover every topic on the UN’s global agenda – with new issues arising every day. They not only command multiple languages, but are also well versed in the proper way to go about translating them – indispensable in a political climate.

“We spend a lot of time doing research, becoming sort of experts in the areas that we are translating from,” said Ms. Durnin. “A lot of the behind-the-scenes work that we do involves clarifying, understanding the message and understanding the meaning that was intended,” she explained, adding that they often have to do research or go directly to the experts for explanations.

“It is very exacting, difficult work to do,” she stated, adding that interpreters have to understand and clearly express what the speaker intends to say during meetings – in real time.

Translation at the UN

The UN is one of the world’s largest employers of language professionals. Several hundred such staff work in UN offices in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, or at the UN regional commissions in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva and Santiago.

Translators are only one type of “language professionals” employed at the UN. They also include: interpreters; editors; verbatim reporters; terminologists; reference assistants; and copy preparers/proofreaders/production editors.

Some of the first UN translators had no official training, but instead spoke multiple languages at home. Over the years that has changed, and to be hired now as a UN translator one must meet several criteria, including educational requirements and passing a language exam.

It is very exacting, difficult work to do Katherine Durnin

Fortunately, more universities are training translators with the UN in mind. A number of them have signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN to ensure that their curriculums cover the different areas needed by the Organization.

“That has really helped to create a pipeline of new young well-trained translators, who even as they are graduating, already have a good grounding in the type of work we need for the United Nations,” Ms. Durnin said.

Asked about modern-day apps and software programmes that offer instant translations, her response was enthusiastic: “I think they’re wonderful!”

She credited them with bringing people on holiday together, “to communicate with the locals,” making travellers “so much more aware of the beauty of communicating with other people.”

However, she pointed out, while they do well with small segments of texts, they will not replace a professional translator, who will provide “the full complete message in proper English.”

Ms. Durnin confirmed the use of computer-assisted translation at the UN, but only to help with efficiency.

“Human language is always going to be more complex than something that machines can deal with,” she noted. “If you want to have an agreement between countries on nuclear non-proliferation, I don’t think you want to leave it up to a machine.”

[UN health agency recommends large-scale deworming to improve children’s health](#)

29 September 2017 – The suffering of those infected with parasitic intestinal can be drastically reduced with periodic deworming programmes with a single-tablet treatment, according to new guidelines approved by the United Nations health agency.

“There is now [global evidence-based consensus](#) that periodic, large-scale deworming is the best way to reduce the suffering caused by intestinal worms,” said Dirk Engels, Director of the Neglected Tropical Diseases Department at the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), which also noted that such programmes can also protect the 1.5 billion people currently estimated to be at risk.

WHO aims to eliminate the harm caused by worm infections in children by 2020 by regularly treating at least 75 per cent of the estimated 873 million children in areas where prevalence is high. In 2016, WHO Member States treated 63 per cent of children requiring treatment.

“Now that the world has agreed standards for deworming at-risk populations, we are in a better position to reach this target,” Antonio Montresor, who heads WHO’s global deworming programme.

The [guidelines](#) have been approved by WHO’s Guidelines Review Committee.

Four main species of intestinal worms, also known as [soil-transmitted helminths](#), affect almost a quarter of the world’s poorest and mostly

marginalized people. The worms disrupt people's ability to absorb nutrients and impede the growth and physical development of millions of children.

Large-scale deworming programmes use medicines donated by pharmaceutical companies. These medicines are shipped to countries requesting them, and distributed during mass treatment campaigns.

"Providing medicines to populations at risk reduces the intensity of intestinal helminth infections," said Francesco Branca, Director of WHO's Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, adding however that improving basic hygiene, sanitation, health education and providing access to safe drinking-water are also keys to resolving the health and nutritional problems caused by intestinal worms.

Many countries combine deworming activities for pre-school children with other health campaigns, such as vaccination, child health and vitamin supplementation days.

[Over half of schools remain closed in epicentre of Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria – UNICEF](#)

29 September 2017 – About 57 per cent of all schools are closed in Nigeria's Borno state, worst hit by the Boko Haram insurgency and the subsequent humanitarian crisis, leaving an estimated 3 million children in need of emergency education support, even as the new school year begins, the United Nations child agency said today.

Children in northeast Nigeria are living through [so much horror](#), said Justin Forsyth, Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), in a press release on his three-day visit to Maiduguri, the epicentre of the crisis.

Since 2009, over 2,295 teachers have been killed and 19,000 have been displaced across the northeast. Almost 1,400 schools have been destroyed with the majority unable to open because of extensive damage or because they are in areas that remain unsafe.

The use of children as human bombs has sown a climate of mistrust among communities in the northeast, and a cholera outbreak has affected more than 3,900 people, including over 2,450 children.

In addition to devastating malnutrition, violence and an outbreak of cholera, the attacks on schools are in danger of creating a lost generation of children, threatening their and the countries future, Mr. Forsyth

added.

However, some displaced children in Borno state are benefiting from education for the first time in their lives. In the Muna Garage camp on the outskirts of Maiduguri, an estimated 90 per cent of students are enrolled in school for the first time.

In the three most-affected states of northeast Nigeria, UNICEF and partners have enrolled nearly 750,000 children in school this year, establishing over 350 temporary learning spaces, and distributing almost 94,000 packs of learning material that will help children to get an education.

UNICEF is also working with partners to rehabilitate schools and classrooms and training teachers to build a stronger education system for the future.

UNICEF's life-saving emergency programmes in northeast Nigeria remain underfunded. With only three months left in the year, UNICEF has a 40 per cent finding gap in its needs for 2017.

UN chief urges all parties to refrain from acts that could escalate tension in Cameroon

28 September 2017 – Expressing “deep concern” over the deteriorating security situation in parts of Cameroon as well as heightened tensions related to planned events this Sunday, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called all parties to refrain from acts that could lead to further tensions and violence.

According to a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres encouraged the Cameroonian authorities to continue their efforts to address the grievances of the Anglophone community.

“He urges the authorities to promote measures of national reconciliation aimed at finding a durable solution to the crisis, including by addressing its root causes,” the statement added.

It also noted that the UN chief supports upholding the unity and territorial integrity of the country and believes that genuine and inclusive dialogue between the Government and the communities in the South-West and North-West regions is the best way to preserve the unity and stability of the country.

The Secretary-General stands ready to support these efforts, including through the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa ([UNOCA](#)), the statement read.

Lake Chad Basin: Vulnerable people 'a step away from starvation,' says UN aid chief

28 September 2017 – The scale up of international assistance to the Lake Chad Basin this year has averted a famine in north-east Nigeria, even though millions of people are still suffering, according to the United Nations aid chief.

Having visited Niger and Nigeria earlier this month, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, told reporters today at UN Headquarters in New York: “There are still millions of people who have suffered a lot and continue to suffer, many of them [just a step away from starvation](#).”

He said that in field visits to Ngagam in Diffa – “the poorest region in the poorest country in the world” – and to Maiduguri, Pulka, and Gwoza in Borno state in Nigeria, he met “extremely vulnerable people” displaced by conflict.

“Those people want to go home, they want a chance to rebuild their lives. But they want to do that when it’s safe to do so,” stressed Mr. Lowcock.

About 1.8 million people in Niger are food-insecure. Some 800,000 children are affected by acute malnutrition and almost 250,000 people are either internally displaced persons, returnees or refugees from Nigeria, he highlighted.

In north-east Nigeria, around 6.5 million people need life-saving assistance. Nearly 5.2 million are severely food-insecure and 450,000 children will suffer from severe acute malnutrition, this year.

The crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, which covers Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad, is complex as countries grapple with insecurity, climatic shocks, extreme poverty, the legacy of inadequate governance across vast parts of the region.

“But the way forward is also clear,” he asserted, highlighting the need to sustain the effective humanitarian response, and to ensure see better protection for people.

“Access has improved in many towns, but there’s also been a recent upsurge in horrific attacks on civilians in all four countries. In Niger, hostage-taking has increased, while in Nigeria children have been used as ‘human bombs,’” he said.

Turning to other areas of the world, Mr. Lowcock said “so far in Somalia,

famine has been averted” while in South Sudan, there was “a famine declaration in a couple of counties in Unity state, that affected about 50,000 people earlier in the year, but that situation was brought under control pretty quickly.”

Calling it the world’s biggest humanitarian crisis, Mr. Lowcock pointed out that in Yemen, “we have so far again averted formal famine declaration, but the levels of suffering in Yemen are really astronomical. I mean, there’s a really dreadful situation.”