

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.

[Nowruz a reminder that heritage helps make resilient, sustainable societies – UN cultural agency](#)

21 March 2017 – In a message on the occasion of Nowruz – the day that celebrates the arrival of the spring season – the head of the United Nations cultural agency urged everyone to embrace the day’s values and be inspired by its universal message of peace and solidarity.

“At a time when violent extremism seeks to destroy diversity and freedoms, Nowruz is a reminder of the power of culture and heritage to build resilient and sustainable societies,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in her message.

Highlighting that in the midst of global challenges such as violent extremism, Nowruz is a source of confidence and belonging for all, Ms. Bokova noted that the message it conveys is all the more important given the efforts around the globe to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

“Through dance, poems, songs, meals and other social practices, the celebration of Nowruz is a moment for men and women, boys and girls, to pay their respect to nature and wish for a better future,” she added.

Nowruz, which marks the first day of spring and the renewal of nature, is celebrated by more than 300 million people all around the world and has been celebrated for over 3,000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions.

In 2009, Nowruz was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as a festivity of rich diversity promoting peace and solidarity across regions and generations. The following year, the UN General Assembly welcomed its inclusion on the List.

Quoting Rumi, the famous poet, Ms. Bokova said: “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.” Nowruz is a field where reconciliation and dialogue can take their roots.

“It is a field where traditions and rituals are passed from generation to generation, to share moments of togetherness, tolerance, harmony and

joy,” she noted.

Also today, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) highlighted the importance of Nowruz in promoting cultural diversity and friendship among people.

Extending its best wishes to the people of the country on Nowruz, the UN Mission said that it was a time for renewal and celebration, as well as for promoting values of peace and solidarity between generations and communities.

“On the eve of this important day, the UN family in Afghanistan expresses hope that the year ahead brings peace to the Afghan people, who deserve a future free from conflict and filled with hope,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA.

[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.

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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.

[UN aid ‘pushed to limits’ as 320,000 more civilians may flee west Mosul](#)

20 March 2017 – Humanitarian agencies are bracing for the possibility that in coming weeks about 300,000 to 320,000 civilians may flee the western districts of Iraqi’s Mosul city where Government forces are fighting to oust the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists, a senior United Nations aid official in the country has said.

That is in addition to some 180,000 civilians who have already fled the fighting in western Mosul since mid-February.

“The humanitarian operation in western Mosul is far larger and far more complex than in the east” said the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Lise Grande, in a news release issued yesterday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The main difference, she explained, is that tens of thousands of families stayed in their homes in the east, but in the west, tens of thousands are fleeing.

“We’ve been planning and preparing for the Mosul operation for months. But the truth is that the crisis is pushing all of us to our limits. We’re going to be doing the best we can to ensure the people who need assistance

receive it.” said Ms. Grande.

Humanitarian agencies are deeply worried that civilians are at grave risk in western Mosul. The use of explosives in the densely populated Old City is likely to cause extensive damage, and people fleeing are telling humanitarian workers that it's very difficult to enter or leave the Old City, said Ms. Grande.

“Families are at risk of being shot if they leave and they are at risk if they stay. It's horrible. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped and they are in terrible danger,” she said.

RELATED: Relief operations in western Mosul reaching 'breaking point'

The main supply route into western Mosul has been cut since mid-November. Families fleeing the city are reporting that shelves are empty and that the only food available is what they already have at home. Water and electricity supplies have been cut and medicines are running out.

Under the leadership of the Government of Iraq, a massive national effort is underway to address the crisis. Civilians fleeing the western districts in the city are being accommodated in 17 camps and emergency sites near the city. The Government and partners are rushing to construct and expand 10 of these.

“Every day, more space is becoming available,” said Ms. Grande. “It's a race against time. So far, families are receiving support and being sheltered. But if the number of people leaving the city increases faster than we can construct new plots, the situation could deteriorate very quickly.”

Since 17 October, over 330,000 people have been displaced by the Mosul crisis, over 70,000 of whom have returned to their homes. Humanitarian agencies have been working around the clock to provide life-saving support to more than 1.3 million people from eastern and western Mosul including families who have stayed in their homes, and those who have fled.