

Languages make a difference, stresses senior UN official on International Day



21 February 2009 – The United Nations pursues multilingualism as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving the **diversity** of the world's languages and cultures, the world body's top official responsible for its communications said in a message marking International Mother Language Day.

Today also signals the end of the International Year of Languages, which was launched by the General Assembly with the message "languages matter!" to promote "unity in diversity" and international understanding through multilingualism.

"Languages, which ones you understand or speak, read or write, whether on the Internet or in your society, can make the difference between knowing and not knowing," Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Kiyo Akasaka, said in his message.

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They can also make the difference between "being able to participate and being excluded," added Mr. Akasaka, who is also UN Coordinator for Multilingualism.

He noted that International Mother Language Day, which has been celebrated on 21 February each year since 2000, marks another opportunity to encourage and support linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

In his message Mr. Akasaka went on to outline how the UN's Department of Public Information communicates with the world through traditional and new media in the Organization's six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

"But it also goes far beyond these six languages to reach millions of people locally and across linguistic regions. Our radio programmes, for example, are also produced in Kiswahili and Portuguese," he noted.

"With the capacity to work in almost 50 different languages, and produce informational material in over 100 languages, our network of 63 UN information centres actively promotes multilingualism and indigenous languages."