

**Statement by Chief Conference Services Section at ESCWA
on International Arabic Language Day
Beirut, 14 December 2018**

Excellencies,
Dear colleagues and students,

When I speak in it and of it, I am filled with a sense of peace that I strongly feel but may find hard to share.

I fall back on the Arabic language time and time again when overwhelmed with concerns and priorities, silence and loudness, dreams and wounds. Letters abound through worries and joys, I imagine myself the author while, in reality, language is spelling me out, line by line, on my own pages.

I call upon it: it recalls, warns, awakens and heals. My intension is not the pretense of rhythm or eloquence, although Arabic is known for this wealth.

It reminds that roots do not end in the present, but rather extend into the future. A wise man said: the past is a different country. It warns that faltering is natural but not a nature. It awakens when it breaks the silence with a word, with a sound, with a verse that preserve the presence of wordsmiths in their absence. It heals, as Destovsky promised: the world will be saved by beauty. Many share this promise.

On Arabic Language Day, and every day, celebration does not aim to commemorate an ancient city, or an transformative innovation, or a carnival of shapes and colours, or a natural or human-made catastrophe. It is a language celebrating all of this, when letters are longing for meanings, as Mahmoud Darwich said, it flourishes in poetry and prose, carrying time and space to a borderless world.

In poetry, both old and new, letters long for imagery. Poems emerge as cities of values and civilizations, flowers and verse. Each with it is own story painted by a poet's pen, carried by the magical voice of Fairouz who said: my sense of belonging to these cities goes far beyond words.

In prose, letters longed for meaning, losing themselves in a cacophony of contradictions: hungry and saturated, poor and rich, illiterate and educated, the violent and those longing for peace; novels and stories that have become timeless and spaceless, such works that evoke and paint realities in beautiful language, which holds the promise of saving the world.

Nations are rightfully shaken when a pen falls silent. They depend on those voices of reason to remind themselves of their written heritage that serves as a solid foundation for the future, of their old cities as motivation for resilience and persistence, of their language, the Arabic language, as a window to wonders.

Today we will reclaim the Arabic language in poetry and prose for a few minutes, which may not quench the thirst of letters for imagery and meaning.

We will write the dictation for a short while, swimming against the current of social media that lacks elegance and eloquence.



We will rediscover it through various questions and answers that will stay with us once we leave this room.

We will part in the hope of meeting again to celebrate language under the auspices of an organization that cherishes multilingualism, as a core value that will quench the thirst of the world for intellectual, cultural and human diversity, forging the identity of a peaceful future.

Allow me to conclude, with confidence, that the language of Mikaeel Nuaimah, who said: my mind is too narrow unless it can reach out to all minds, is a timeless language.

Thank you.