

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 approves \$22 million loan to boost agricultural work to prevent famine in Somalia

21 March 2017 – The United Nations agricultural agency will be further scaling up its activities in drought-hit regions of Somalia thanks to a \$22 million loan approved this week by the UN emergency response fund.

More than 2.9 million people are at risk of famine and many will predictably die from hunger if we do not act now," said the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, in a news release.

As under-secretary-general, Mr. O'Brien heads the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which manages the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

CERF is one of the fastest ways to enable urgent response to people most in need," he said, explaining that the loan will bridge a crucial gap and allow FAO to immediately save lives and livelihoods of farmers and herders until additional funds from donors are received.

This effort is part of the international response to prevent another famine in Somalia five years after the previous one devastated the country.

Across Somalia, 6.2 million people will face acute food insecurity through June 2017. Of these, nearly three million people are in Phases 3 (crisis) and 4 (emergency) of the five-phase International Phase Classification for Food Security (IPC), representing more than a two-fold increase from six months ago. Phase 5 is famine.

Livelihoods are people's best defence against famine and this \$22 million loan is critical to FAO's famine prevention and drought response in Somalia," said FAO Deputy Director-General for Programmes, Daniel Gustafson.

Deteriorating security situation in DR Congo 'a source of major concern,' warns UN envoy

21 March 2017 – The United Nations envoy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) today stressed the need for both the Government and the opposition groups there to show the same level of commitment and compromise which led to the signing on 31 December of an agreement on the electoral process, while also citing the UN peacekeeping mission's readiness to adapt to the deteriorating security situation.

The primary responsibility for the implementation of the Agreement rests with its signatories, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for DRC, Maman Sidikou, told the Security Council in a briefing.

Under the agreement, President Joseph Kabila would stay in office until elections are held by the end of 2017. During this period, a 'National Council for Overseeing the Electoral Agreement and Process (CNSAP)' would be set up, and a new prime minister named from opposition ranks.

However, some discord has delayed the implementation of the agreement, and the death of opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi, who was to head the CNSAP, had had a significant impact on the political process.

Mr. Sidikou said that the situation seems to have evolved in the right direction over the last few days, with negotiations on the "Special Arrangement" resuming, and the Presidents of the two Houses of Parliament called for an irreversible and credible electoral process and expressed their support.

Significant progress has been made in updating the electoral roll. To date, more than 19 million voters have been enrolled and the enrollment process is about to begin in the two remaining enrollment areas, said Mr. Sidikou, who is also the head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

MONUSCO's logistical and technical support for the enrollment process will be completed by the end of this month, and if authorized by the Security Council, MONUSCO is prepared to provide technical and logistical support for the electoral process, which would go beyond updating the electoral roll.

VIDEO: Concerns over deteriorating security in the DRC in briefing to the Security Council

On the security front, Mr. Sidikou said that violence and threats to civilians are no longer concentrated in the eastern DRC, noting that community-based violence and inter-ethnic clashes have spread from areas already affected by armed conflict, such as the Kivus, to Tanganyika, the three Kasai provinces, Lomami and Kongo Central.

The Secretary-General has set out a package of measures aimed at enhancing the ability of the MONUSCO Force to support the achievement of the Mission's strategic objectives in the current challenging security context through the adoption of a more mobile, flexible and agile posture. He has recommended the deployment of two additional formed police units (FPUs) to help the Congolese authorities address the potential threat of electoral and politically motivated violence in key urban centers where there is no FPU presence.

Mr. Sidikou said that MONUSCO has already undertaken adjustments to its posture and operations, and that the Mission will continue to make such adjustments as may be required in the months ahead.

MONUSCO will continue to provide support for the implementation of the Agreement, while supporting efforts to address the mounting threats faced by the civilian population during the transition period," he concluded.

Warming earth threatens to release huge amounts of carbon – UN agency

21 March 2017 – Rising temperatures could release massive amounts of carbon trapped in the Earth's soil, the United Nations agricultural agency today reported, warning that soil management could make or break climate change response efforts.

Plants and organic residues take in carbon and then sequester it into soil, creating a vast reservoir of carbon. But when soil is disturbed or degraded, trapped carbon and other greenhouse gases resulting from decay are re-released back into the atmosphere, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) explained in a press release.

"This means that the Earth's soil carbon reservoir could either release massive amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, or sequester more of them, depending on the management decisions we make going forward," according to the report, *Soil Organic Carbon: The Hidden Potential*.

The report is being presented today at the start of the Global Symposium on Soil Organic Carbon, in Rome.

Speaking at the event, the FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva said that beyond its role as carbon sinks, healthy soils are the foundation for

global food security.

Soils with high organic carbon content are likely to be more fertile and productive, better able to purify water, and help to increase the resilience of livelihoods to the impacts of climate change," Mr. da Silva said.

Improving the health of the planet's soils and boosting their organic carbon content is critical to achieving several of the international development goals established by the Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to eradicating hunger and malnutrition, he added.

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.