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WHY IT MATTERS:

Multilingualism

AT THE UNITED NATIONS

تعدد اللغات 使用多种语文 Multilingualism Multilinguisme Многоязычие Multilingüismo

United Nations | Dag Hammarskjöld Library

Multilingualism matters because it is about people understanding each other; it enables us to work together to continue cultivating a brighter future for all. Languages connect our past, present and future; they connect all ages, all ethnicities, all of us.
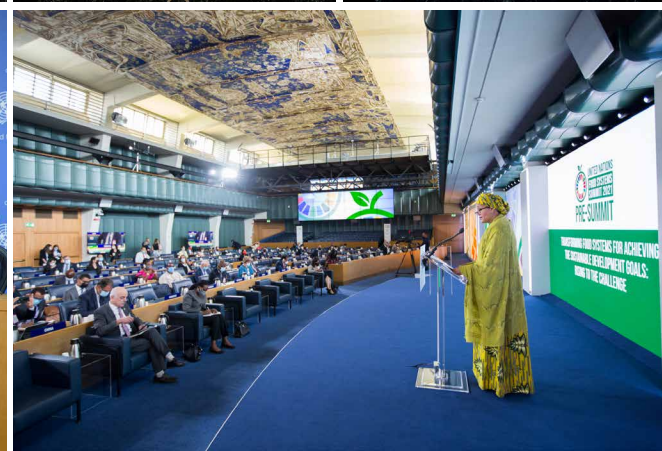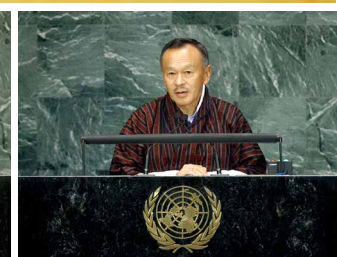
WHY IT MATTERS, AN ANNUAL SERIES
VOL. II, *MULTILINGUALISM AT THE UNITED NATIONS*

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WHY IT MATTERS:
MULTILINGUALISM AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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FOREWORD

Multilingualism is a fundamental value in international diplomacy.

Multilingualism strengthens dialogue between people from all backgrounds and ensures tolerance among countries. Without multilingualism, the United Nations would not be able to function effectively.

United Nations communications are more impactful and meaningful when our messages are delivered in ways that people easily understand. In the early years of the United Nations, there was often an intermediary – such as radio, newspaper or national authorities – between the messages coming out of the United Nations and the global public.

As communication platforms and mediums evolve, thanks to technological advancements, the messages and content of the United Nations also reach the public directly, in the languages people speak and on the platforms that they use. The public is diverse – culturally and linguistically. So should our communications be.

This is why the Dag Hammarskjöld Library delves into the important issue of multilingualism. In this second volume of the series "Why it Matters", the Library presents an overview of some of the cornerstone resolutions and historical records documenting the development of multilingualism in the United Nations.

The volume begins with the Charter of the United Nations. It explores the addition of multilingualism as a General Assembly agenda item in 1995 and covers the period until multilingualism's present-day recognition as a core value of the United Nations.

I am grateful to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library team for creating a reference work for the work done by the United Nations on multilingualism – an informed, documented chronicle to be used by colleagues, researchers and people around the world.

I am also thankful for the collaboration with the Office of the Coordinator for Multilingualism, and to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for producing this volume in the six official languages of the United Nations. Not least of all, I want to express my gratitude for the work many colleagues in my Department undertake, daily and arduously, to adhere to the United Nations principle of multilingualism.

Melissa Fleming

Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications

INTRODUCTION

The vision of a multilingual United Nations is not new: it emerged at the San Francisco Conference even before the Organization was officially pronounced into being. Over the years, "languages" appeared in a number of milestone instruments adopted under the auspices of the United Nations, starting with its Charter, and later the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At its first session, in London in 1946, the United Nations General Assembly devoted the second resolution it adopted to language matters, a fair recognition that multilingualism effectively served as an enabler and a prerequisite to multilateralism.

Today, more than 75 years after the Organization was established, multilingualism is recognized by the General Assembly as a core value of the United Nations, and by the Secretary-General as one of his priorities. Being one of the main vehicles of human communication, language permeates every aspect of the work of the United Nations, as language-related choices are made daily, either intentionally or unconsciously. To project itself and function as a multilingual organization, meeting the expectations of its Member States and the people it serves, the United Nations endeavours to strategically integrate multilingualism into the manner in which it operates so as to give a voice to the voiceless and leave no one behind.

It is hoped that this volume in the "Why it Matters" series, which brings together a wealth of documents and information about multilingualism at the United Nations, will serve interested diplomats, scholars and the general public in learning more about the role of languages in the Organization.

Movses Abelian

Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and
Conference Management, Coordinator for Multilingualism

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Multilingualism

A FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Multilinguisme

Многоязычие

Multilingüismo

MULTILINGUALISM – A FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Multilingualism can be considered a founding principle of the United Nations, even though it is not mentioned in the Charter of the Organization. Signed in five equally authentic language versions and "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion", the Charter enshrines the principles of equality of its official languages and of non-discrimination among languages, which are to this day regarded as critical to ensuring the equal sovereignty and participation of the Member States.

The choice to make the United Nations a multilingual organization was not a mere legacy of the League of Nations; it was a deliberate choice. At the time of its founding, the United Nations was intended to achieve universality. Enhanced multilingualism served as an instrument to achieve better representation of its then-Member States, as well as to facilitate communication.

It was in this context that, on 1 February 1946, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 2 (I) on Rules of procedure concerning languages – the second resolution it adopted – in which it outlined the ground rules for multilingualism at the United Nations. To this day, that resolution forms the basis of language policy at the United Nations.

In the decades that followed, Member States have continued to advocate for the right and the duty to make themselves understood and to understand others (see, for example, General Assembly resolution 50/11), highlighting that multilingualism is a corollary to multilateralism. In 1995, multilingualism was added to the agenda of the General Assembly in recognition of its significance as a cross-cutting matter addressed in a wide range of bodies of the United Nations system. By the mid-2010s, the General Assembly had affirmed multilingualism as a core value of the United Nations; eventually, Secretary-General António Guterres made it one of the priorities of his tenure.

Today, the United Nations has six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Behind this relatively simple fact lie more complex realities. Different organs have adopted different language arrangements, and the journey was far from linear.
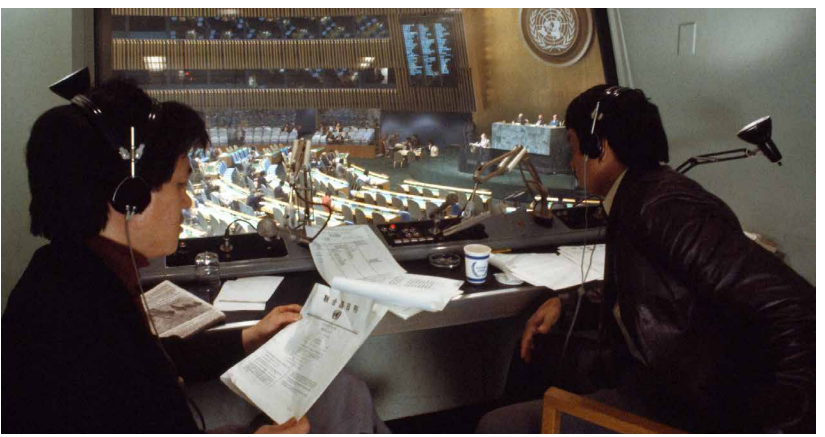
TIMELINE

26 JUNE 1945: adoption of the Charter of the United Nations, the constitutive document of the Organization, signed in Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, each language version being equally authentic.

1 February 1946: In its resolution 2 (I) the General Assembly established Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish as official languages, and English and French as working languages of the United Nations. Official languages are the languages in which the United Nations makes its official documents available. Working languages are used for internal communications among staff.

24 June 1946: in its resolution S/96, the Security Council adopted its provisional rules of procedure, designating Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish as official languages, and English and French as working languages.

7 December 1948: in its resolution 247 (III), the General Assembly resolved that Spanish should be a working language of the General Assembly.

11 December 1948: in its resolution 262 (III) the General Assembly amended its rules of procedure and added Spanish as a working language.

5 December 1952: in its resolution 664 (VII), the General Assembly endorsed the opinion that Spanish should be adopted as a working language of the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions.

21 December 1968: in its resolution 2479 (XXIII), the General Assembly decided to include Russian as a working language of the Assembly and expressed the desire that the Security Council do the same for Russian as well as Spanish.

24 January 1969: in its resolution 263 (1969), the Security Council included Russian and Spanish as working languages of the Council.

18 December 1973: in its resolution 3189 (XXVIII), the General Assembly included Chinese as a working language of the Assembly and expressed the desire that the Security Council do the same.

18 December 1973: in its resolution 3190 (XXVIII), the General Assembly decided to include Arabic as an official language and a working language of the Assembly and its Main Committees.

17 January 1974: in its resolution 345 (1974), the Security Council decided to include Chinese as a working language of the Council.

17 December 1980: in its resolution 35/219 A, the General Assembly decided to include Arabic as an official and working language of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and requested the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to do the same by 1 January 1983.

15 April 1982: in its decision 1982/147, found in E/1982/82, the Economic and Social Council included Arabic among its official languages.

21 December 1982: in its resolution 528 (1982), the Security Council included Arabic as an official and working language of the Security Council.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA   CUBA   COSTA RICA   COLOM

TIMELINE BY LANGUAGE

Arabic:

- Official and working language of the General Assembly (18 December 1973)
- Official and working language of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly (17 December 1980)
- Official language of the Economic and Social Council (15 April 1982)
- Official and working language of the Security Council (21 December 1982)

Chinese:

- Official language of the United Nations (1 February 1946)
- Working language of the General Assembly (18 December 1973)
- Working language of the Security Council (17 January 1974)

English:

- Official and working language of the United Nations[1] (1 February 1946)

French:

- Official and working language of the United Nations[1] (1 February 1946)

Russian:

- Official language of the United Nations (1 February 1946)
- Working language of the General Assembly (21 December 1968)
- Working language of the Security Council (24 January 1969)

Spanish:

- Official language of the United Nations (1 February 1946)
- Working language of the General Assembly (7 December 1948)
- Working language of the Security Council (24 January 1969)

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[1]   English and French are also the official languages of the International Court of Justice (see Statute of the Court, art. 39).

OFFICIAL AND WORKING LANGUAGES OF THE PRINCIPAL UNITED NATIONS ORGANS

General Assembly, including committees, subcommittees and subsidiary organs:

- Official and working languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish

Security Council:

- Official and working languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish

Economic and Social Council, including functional commissions:

- Official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish
- Working languages: English, French and Spanish

Trusteeship Council:

- Official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish
- Working languages: English and French

Secretariat:

- Working languages: English and French

International Court of Justice:

- Official languages: English and French
- Working languages of the secretariat of the Court: English and French
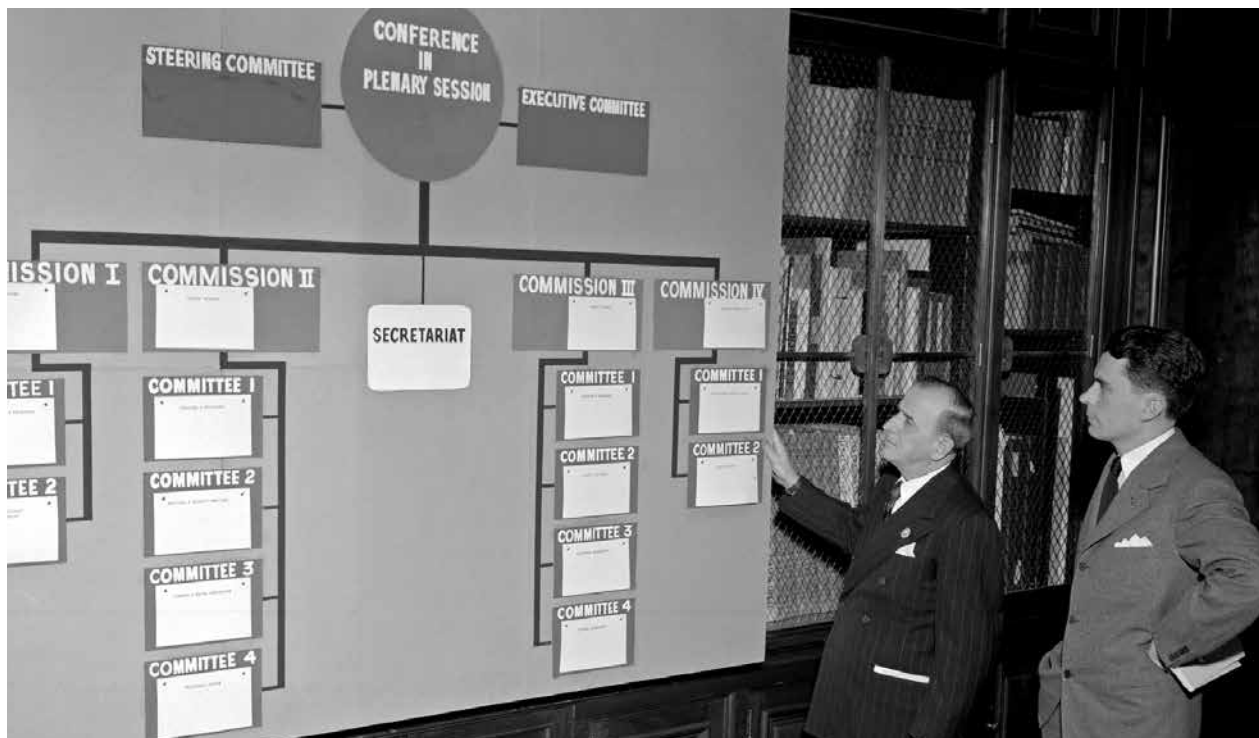
OFFICIAL AND WORKING LANGUAGES OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

With the exception of the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, neither the terms of reference nor the rules of procedure of the regional commissions provide for an official language.

Economic Commission for Africa

Working languages: Arabic, English and French

Economic Commission for Europe

Working languages: English, French and Russian
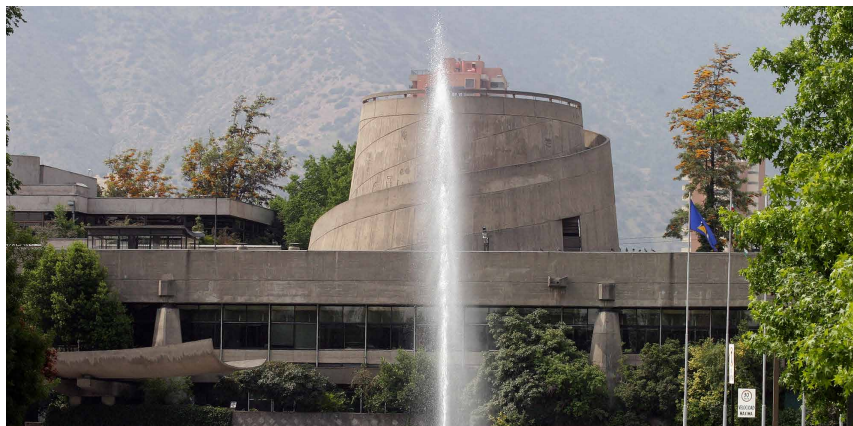
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Official languages: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish
Working languages: English, French and Spanish

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Working languages: Chinese, English, French and Russian

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Working languages: Arabic, English and French

UNITED NATIONS LANGUAGE SERVICES

Editing

Editorial and desktop publishing

Interpretation

Précis-writing
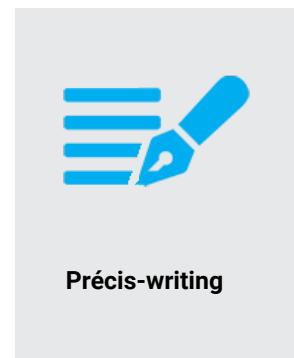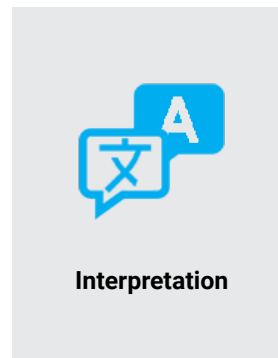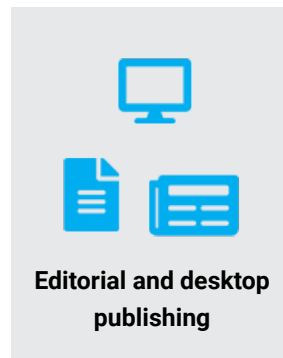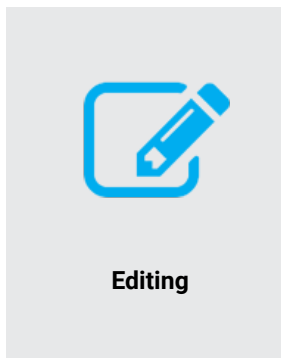
Resolution 2 (I) of 1 February 1946, in which the original language arrangements of the United Nations were set out, paved the way for the establishment of United Nations language services to support the Organization's intergovernmental proceedings. To this day, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management provides language services ranging from editing to translation, from terminology to interpretation, from verbatim reporting to précis-writing to production editing. The Department provides its services at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and the Organization's regional commissions.

While technologies have drastically evolved over time and will continue to do so, a wide range of language professionals specializing in various disciplines and languages continue to serve as the backbone of the multilateral machinery of the United Nations, building bridges across languages, cultures and countries, and, effectively, across the aisles of United Nations conference rooms.

United Nations system bodies may have different language arrangements and entitlements. Language professionals – who are recruited on the basis of highly rigorous competitive examinations – have different language combinations and specializations. In practice, this means that language services are a complex ecosystem to manage, sustain and nurture. Every addition of an official language and every technological breakthrough carries new challenges and opportunities for United Nations language services.

Production editing

Translation

Verbatim reporting
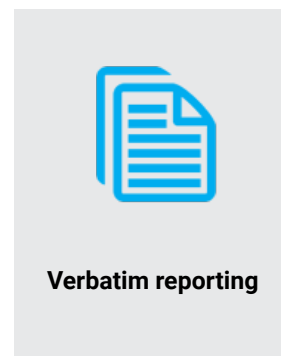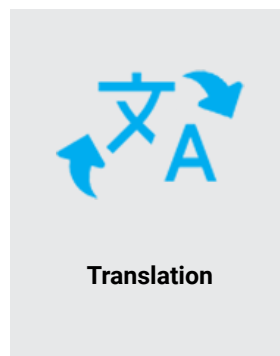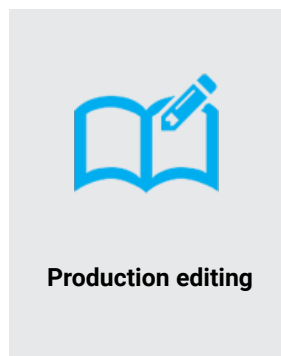
OTHER LANGUAGES AT THE UNITED NATIONS

In addition to the six official languages, other languages, such as Kiswahili and Portuguese, are regularly used by the **Department of Global Communications** in its information products such as United Nations News, the Organization's flagship social media accounts, as well as radio and television programmes. In 2018, Hindi was added to the list of non-official languages receiving daily coverage, thanks to the funding received from the Government of India. The Department continues to disseminate information in more non-official languages. In its resolution 76/268, the General Assembly expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Department in highlighting some recent important communications and messages of the Secretary-General in non-official languages, such as Portuguese, Hindi, Kiswahili, Persian, Bangla and Urdu, in addition to official languages, in order to promote multilingualism, and encouraged the Department to disseminate them in all six official languages, as well as in non-official languages whenever appropriate, within existing resources.
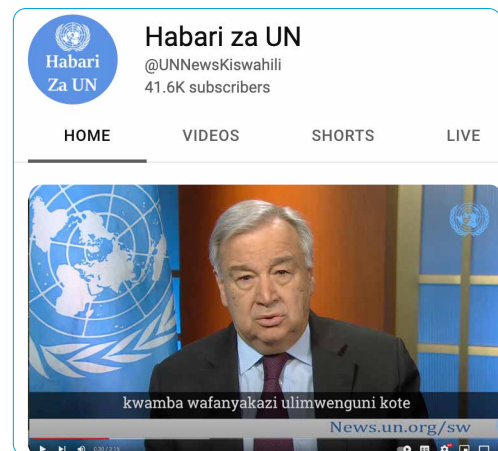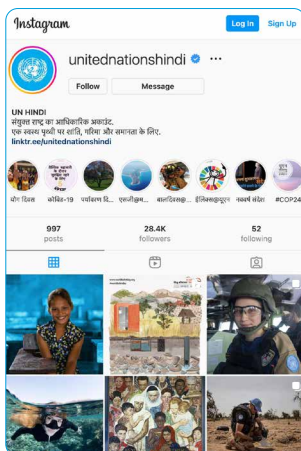
UNITED NATIONS RADIO – A MULTILINGUAL SERVICE

United Nations Radio was established at the birth of the United Nations as a multilingual service, in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946. It began broadcasting in 1946 from makeshift studios and offices at the United Nations Headquarters in Lake Success, New York, where it transmitted its first call sign: "This is the United Nations calling the peoples of the world".

From "The Story of the United Nations Radio", UNESCO Courier (vol. 1, No. 6, July 1948):

"This is the United Nations calling the peoples of the world."

In practically every language under the sun this statement has gone out over the air, and in the four corners of the world people have become aware of this new voice speaking directly to them.
…
From the very first, the United Nations Radio facilities have been at the disposal of accredited radio correspondents and of Delegations who, speaking in their own languages, have been able to present their own un-censored reports to listeners in their own lands; and many hundreds of correspondents and Delegates have availed themselves of this opportunity during the various important meetings that have been held since.
…
A special programme in 1947, celebrating the anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, was recorded in the main languages of the world, distributed by airmail, and relayed over national and local stations. Another important programme, prepared on the eve of the General Assembly held at Flushing Meadows in the autumn of 1947, and prophetically and perhaps grimly titled "THE TIME IS NOW" was broadcast on all UN transmitters and widely relayed.

It was estimated that, at the time, probably over 200 million people may have heard this programme, and that it had one of the largest audiences of any single programme.

For over 30 years, until 1985, United Nations Radio programmes were broadcast worldwide in partnership with national networks. In 1983, the General Assembly increased the linguistic capacity of the United Nations regional radio services in its resolution 38/82 B. By that resolution, Radio programming in Portuguese was added to the languages of the African Unit of the Radio Service, Bengali, Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia to those of the Asian Unit.

Subsequently, United Nations Radio programmes were distributed only on tape, in 15 languages. In 1998, United Nations Radio began to use the Internet for dissemination: in March of that year, a daily United Nations Radio news service in English and French was added to the website, followed by Spanish soon thereafter. On 4 March 1999, the first United Nations audiovisual website was launched. It included United Nations Radio feature programmes illustrated with photographs and other graphics, as well as audio and video clips. In 2000, United Nations Radio launched live radio broadcasts in the six official languages.

United Nations audio programming continues into the digital age, with daily news bulletins, weekly magazine shows and monthly podcasts produced by teams working in the six official languages as well as Hindi, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Urdu.
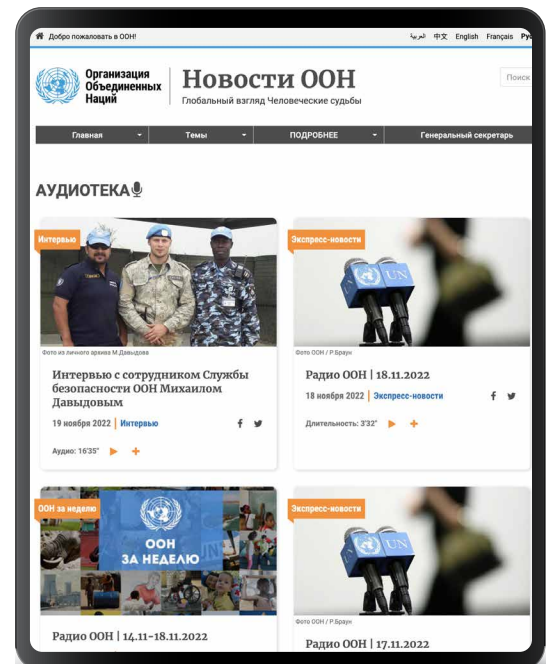
UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES –
BRINGING THE UNITED NATIONS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

United Nations information centres around the world translate and produce public information materials in a broad range of local languages, enabling the wide distribution of the message of the United Nations to the general public. In 2021, in his report on questions relating to information (A/76/278), the Secretary-General observed that the global network of United Nations information centres operated daily in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as in 125 additional languages. According to the report, a core aspect of the information centres' mission was to reach audiences in their own language, in addition to Braille and sign languages, using traditional media such as radio and television, as well as social media, and direct contacts with the press.

GERMAN IN THE DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT

In its resolution 3355 (XXIX) the General Assembly decided that, as from 1 July 1975, certain documents of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council were to be issued in German with assurances given by the requesting Member States (Austria, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany) that they were prepared to contribute collectively to cover the related costs. Pursuant to the resolution, the German Translation Section (*Deutscher Übersetzungsdienst*) was established within the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. It is the smallest translation service in the United Nations and the only one representing a non-official language. It is now funded by the German-speaking Member States Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.
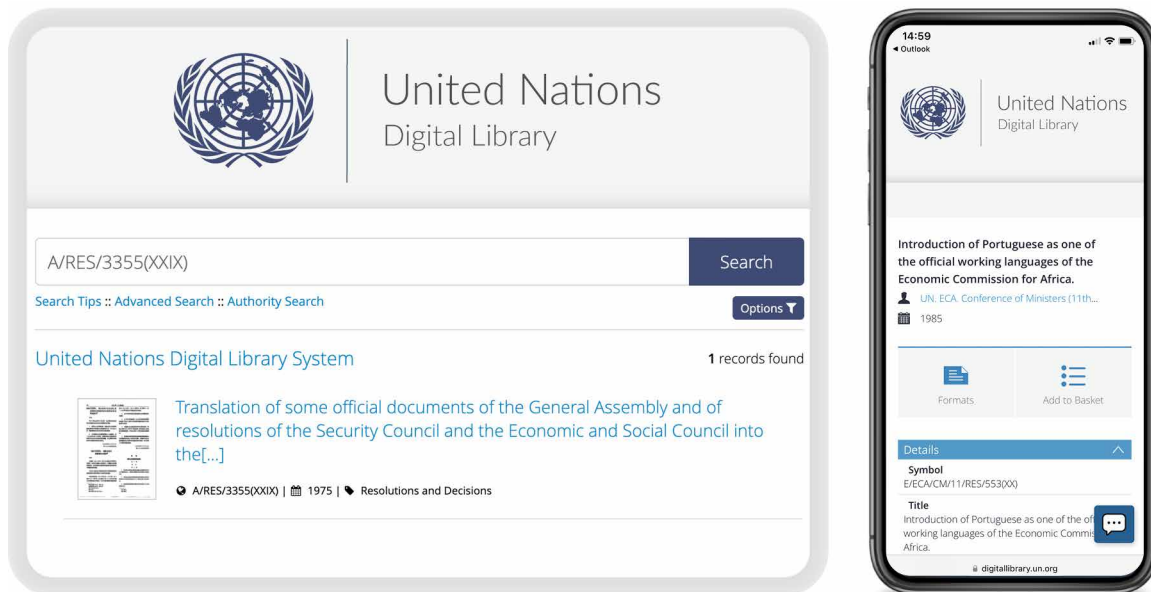
ATTEMPT TO ELEVATE PORTUGUESE IN THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

In the mid-1980s, an attempt was made to include Portuguese as what was termed an "official working language" of the Economic Commission for Africa, but it was unsuccessful. The eleventh Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa adopted a resolution on the introduction of Portuguese as one of the official working languages of the Commission, (E/ECA/CM/11/RES/553(XX)) which was subsequently referred to the Economic and Social Council. In July 1985, the Council adopted E/RES/1985/68 in which it approved, by a vote of 34 for, 12 against, and 5 abstentions, the gradual introduction of Portuguese as an "official working language" of the Commission. Some Member States raised concerns about the costs and about setting a precedent by having a non-official language used as a working language in a regional commission (see E/1985/SR.52). Following the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1986–1987 (A/C.5/40/13) and the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/40/7/Add.5 para 10-18), the General Assembly adopted resolution 40/252 in section VIII of which it assigned no budgetary resources and referred the matter back to the Economic and Social Council and the Economic Commission for Africa for further clarification; "official working language" was not a term that had been used previously. In 1986, the Council referred the matter back to the Commission in its decision 1986/106 (see E/1986/86).
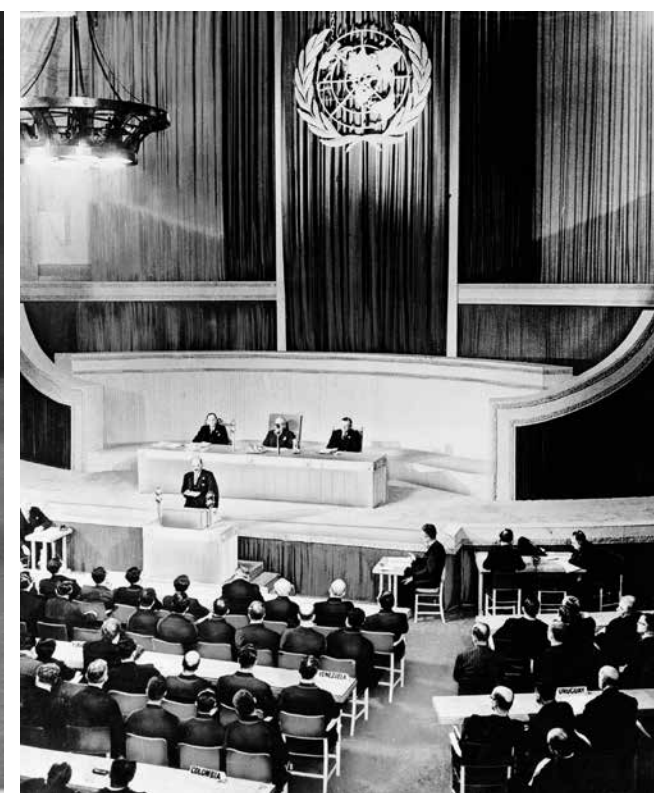
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使用多种语文

Multilingualism

FROM FOUNDING PRINCIPLE TO CORE VALUE

Multilinguisme

Многоязычие

Multilingüismo

MULTILINGUALISM – FROM FOUNDING PRINCIPLE TO CORE VALUE

As we have seen, the initial resolution on the use of languages was General Assembly resolution 2(I) of 1 February 1946. To this day, it provides the general framework for multilingualism at the United Nations. It provides that Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are the official languages of all organs of the Organization other than the International Court of Justice, while English and French are the working languages. In the same resolution, the General Assembly recommended that all United Nations organs adopt language rules in conformity with this general guidance. Over time, many United Nations system bodies adopted more precise rules or expanded the number of their official or working languages beyond the initial recommendation set forth in resolution 2 (I). This is the case for the General Assembly itself, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. However, the working languages of the Secretariat – which is an executive, not a deliberative body – have remained unchanged since 1946.[2]

Resolution 2 (I) also provided more clarity on the point of entitlements to conference services for each language. For instance, it provided that speeches made in either of the working languages were to be interpreted into the other working language, while those made in any of the other three official languages were to be interpreted into both working languages. A notable provision in this resolution is that any representative may make a speech in a language other than the official languages if that delegate provides interpretation into one of the working languages. Thus, while interpretation into the six official languages is the established standard at the United Nations, it is not unusual to see statements being delivered in other languages, especially during the general debate of the General Assembly.

Following the adoption of resolution 2 (I), many provisions in resolutions of United Nations system bodies touched upon questions relating to multilingualism and/or languages. However, those provisions were scattered across different agenda items and were being discussed by various United Nations organs. It was in that context that, in the mid-1990s, on the margins of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, several Member States started to advocate for the inclusion in the agenda of the General Assembly of a separate item on multilingualism. The proposal was prompted by growing imbalances that were being perceived in the use of languages in the Organization and its operations. Thus, in a letter dated 20 July 1995 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/50/147), 18 countries noted that the principle of equality of the official languages and of the working languages was being called into question with increasing frequency. Among other things, the proposed agenda item was to provide an opportunity to discuss multilingualism in a cross-cutting manner.

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[2]   The regional commissions are an exception; they have adopted their own language provisions as part of their terms of reference and rules of procedure.

1995: MULTILINGUALISM IS ADDED TO THE AGENDA

In its letter of 1995, the group of 18 Member States further requested the inclusion in the agenda of the General Assembly of an item entitled "Multilingualism" and the adoption of a resolution on the matter, for which they provided a draft. They asserted that the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations should serve as a reminder of the fundamental importance of the diversity of cultures in the development of a rich and harmonious international life, a principle on which, they stated, there was general agreement. In accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, that principle should be reflected in the Organization's functioning in the equal treatment accorded to the official and working languages of the United Nations.

Twenty-nine additional Member States supported the request and the accompanying draft resolution (A/50/147/Add.1 and A/50/147/Add.2). On 22 September 1995, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the General Committee, to include multilingualism in its agenda and to consider it periodically, directly in plenary meetings without reference to a Main Committee, in recognition of its cross-cutting nature (see A/50/PV.3 and A/50/250).

The draft resolution contained in the letter was then brought before the assembly as A/50/L.6, sponsored by 68 Member States, and was adopted on 2 November 1995 as resolution 50/11 with a vote of 100 in favour, 35 against and 29 abstentions.

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In the resolution, the General Assembly recalled that the universality of the United Nations and its corollary, multilingualism, entail for each State Member of the Organization, irrespective of the official language in which it expresses itself, the right and the duty to make itself understood and to understand others. The Assembly also emphasized the importance of providing access for all Governments and all sectors of civil society to the Organization's documentation, archives and data banks in all the official languages. It further requested the Secretary-General to ensure the strict implementation of the resolutions establishing language arrangements for both the official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat and invited Member States to do likewise.

In the resolution, the General Assembly further stressed the need for appropriate human and financial resources for the interpretation of meetings and the translation of documents across the Secretariat and emphasized the importance of providing access for all Governments and all sectors of civil society to the Organization's documentation, archives and data banks in all the official languages. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report, at its fifty-second session, on the implementation of the resolution and particularly on the use of the official languages of the United Nations and the working languages of the Secretariat.

Every other year since 1995, with rare exceptions, multilingualism has been on the agenda of the General Assembly and a resolution on the matter has been adopted.[3] Since the initial resolution, which was adopted following a recorded vote, all have been adopted without a vote.

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[3] The General Assembly deferred consideration of the item from the fifty-eighth to the fifty-ninth session and from the seventy-fifth to the seventy-sixth session.

REPORTS SUBMITTED, MEETINGS HELD AND ACTIONS TAKEN

SESSION/YEAR	REPORT OF SECRETARY-GENERAL	MEETINGS	RESOLUTION/DECISION ADOPTED
Fiftieth (1995/96)	-	A/50/PV.18 A/50/PV.34 A/50/PV.47 A/50/PV.48 A/50/PV.49	Resolution 50/11
Fifty-second (1997/98)	A/52/577	A/52/PV.55	Resolution 52/23
Fifty-fourth (1999/ 2000)	A/54/478	A/54/PV.70	Resolution 54/64
Fifty-sixth (2001/02)	A/56/656	A/56/PV.90 A/56/PV.94	Resolution 56/262
Fifty-eighth (2003/04)	A/58/363	A/58/PV.93	Decision 58/571[a]
Fifty-ninth (2004/05)	-	A/59/PV.104	Resolution 59/309
Sixty-first (2006/07)	A/61/317	A/61/PV.96	Resolution 61/266
Sixty-third (2008/09)	A/63/338	A/63/PV.104	Resolution 63/306
Sixty-fifth (2010/11)	A/65/488	A/65/PV.109	Resolution 65/311
Sixty-seventh (2012/13)	A/67/311	A/67/PV.92	Resolution 67/292
Sixty-ninth (2014/15)	A/69/282	A/69/PV.103	Resolution 69/324
Seventy-first (2016/17)	A/71/757	A/71/PV.82 A/71/PV.97	Resolution 71/328
Seventy-third (2018/19)	A/73/761	A/73/PV.107	Resolution 73/346
Seventy-fifth (2020/21)	A/75/798	-	Decision 75/584[b]
Seventy-sixth (2021/22)	-	A/76/PV.81	Resolution 76/268

[a] See A/58/49 (Vol. III), sect. IV.B.

[b] See A/75/49 (Vol. III), sect. IV.B, and A/75/49 (Vol. III)/Corr.1.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM: MULTILINGUALISM GAINS PROMINENCE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In December 1999, the General Assembly adopted resolution 54/64, in which it requested the Secretary-General to appoint a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat. In a matter of a few years, multilingualism had thus been given significantly more prominence as it rose from being an auxiliary topic under various substantive agenda items to becoming a topic in its own right with its own agenda item, to be monitored throughout the Secretariat.

Throughout the 2000s and into the early 2010s, Member States developed a more concerted approach to multilingualism and language-related matters, coordinating their positions within and among language groupings in different forums, harmonizing their national interventions delivered under different agenda items or in different United Nations system bodies. This resulted in increased interest in language matters at the Organization and led to broader monitoring and progress reporting to the Secretary-General.

In 2013, the first reference to integrating multilingualism into the activities of the Secretariat – also known as "mainstreaming" – was made in General Assembly resolution 67/292, in the following passage: "The General Assembly … also underlines the responsibility of the Secretariat in integrating multilingualism into its activities, from within existing resources, on an equitable basis". In the same resolution, the General Assembly recognized that multilingualism contributed to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations, as set out in Article 1 of the Charter. In resolution 68/86 B on United Nations information policies and activities, also adopted in 2013, the General Assembly underlined the responsibility of the Secretariat in mainstreaming multilingualism into all its communication and information activities, within existing resources on an equitable basis.

Inclusive education is the foundation for improving lives.

The following year, in its resolution 69/96 B, the General Assembly started to provide more detailed guidance to the Department of Public Information[4] on the mainstreaming of multilingualism into its activities, including celebrations and observances, outreach activities and knowledge services. It further introduced a mandate for the Department to put an overall emphasis on multilingualism from the planning stage of its communications strategies in an effort to ensure adequate budgeting of resources across languages.

In 2015, in its resolution 69/270 on cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie, the General Assembly recalled that it was up to the Secretariat to integrate multilingualism into the activities of peacekeeping operations. That same year, multilingualism was also thoroughly discussed under the agenda item on revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, in the context of the selection of the next Secretary-General. In its resolution 69/321, the Assembly invited Member States to present candidates with proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills.

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[4]   With effect from 1 January 2019, the Department of Public Information was renamed Department of Global Communications.

In the year 2016, in its resolution 70/9 on the pattern of conferences, the General Assembly was the first body of the United Nations system to refer to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization. The Assembly further recognized that multilingualism entailed the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, including all United Nations duty stations and offices away from Headquarters.


The General Assembly again referred to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization in several resolutions, among them resolution 71/101 B on United Nations public information policies and activities. In 2017, in its resolution 71/288 on the role of professional translation in connecting nations and fostering peace, understanding and development, the General Assembly recognized the role of multilingualism not only in the activities of the United Nations, but also in what it termed the projection of the Organization to the world. That same year, in its resolution 71/328 on multilingualism, the Assembly recognized for the first time that multilingualism served as a means of improving the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization. In that resolution, the Assembly also covered managerial matters at greater length, addressing the question of how language requirements are set in job openings and how language skills are assessed in the staff selection process and, for the first time, invited the Secretary-General to include in senior managers' compacts a managerial indicator related to multilingualism, which to date continues to serve as the foundation of the United Nations accountability framework in relation to multilingualism. The Assembly further endorsed the terms of reference of the Coordinator for Multilingualism and called upon all departments and offices within the Secretariat to fully support the work of the Coordinator in the implementation of the relevant mandates on multilingualism (not merely those contained in the resolution on multilingualism).

In 2017 and 2018, multilingualism was referred to as a core value of the Organization in several more resolutions of the General Assembly, including resolutions 72/161 on the International Day of Sign Languages and 72/313 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. In resolution 73/161 on World Braille Day, adopted in 2018, the phrase appeared as well, while it was also being used more frequently by Member States and senior United Nations officials, in the General Assembly and in other bodies of the United Nations system. In 2021, in a note by the President of the Security Council (S/2021/648) the members of the Council reaffirmed their commitment to prioritizing multilingualism at all times.

In its resolution 76/268 on multilingualism, adopted in 2022, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to ensure that multilingualism, as a core value of the United Nations, was not undermined by the measures taken in response to the liquidity situation and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
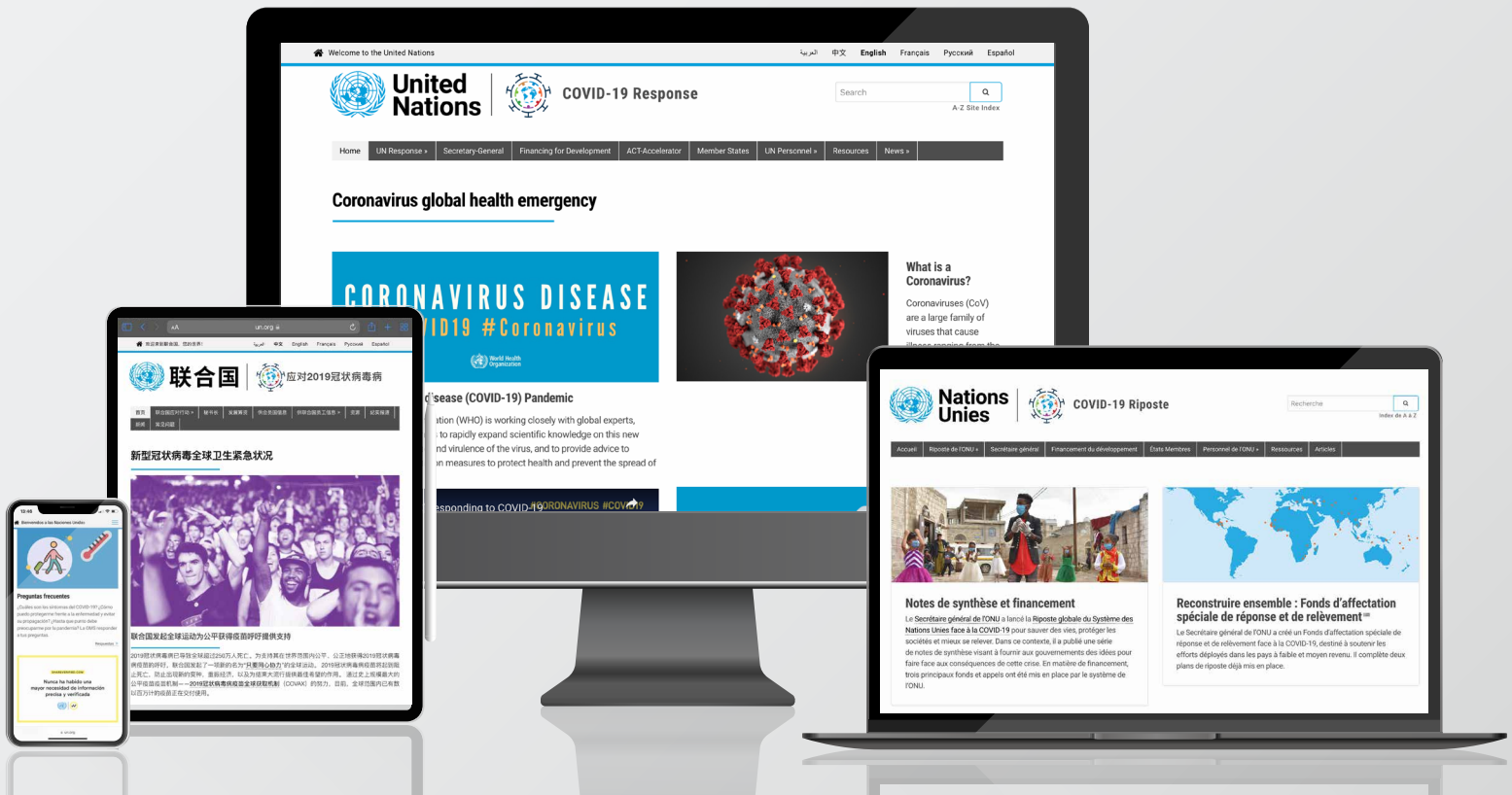
REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON MULTILINGUALISM

The Secretary-General has been issuing reports on multilingualism every second year since 1995 in response to General Assembly resolutions adopted under the agenda item on multilingualism. The scope of the resolutions has expanded significantly over time, and so have their operative paragraphs and corresponding reports. In his successive reports, the Secretary-General has provided updates to previous recommendations, highlighted new initiatives and brought to the attention of the Assembly areas of improvement and related remedies.

In 1997, the Secretary-General issued his first report on multilingualism (A/52/577), in which he responded to the request to address, in particular, the use of the official languages of the United Nations and the working languages of the Secretariat. In his report, the Secretary-General committed to advancing multilingualism by promoting the learning of all official languages by members of Secretariat staff by offering them incentives. He also stated that the Secretariat strictly applied the principle of simultaneous distribution of official documents in all official languages.

> **In his 1997 report on multilingualism, the Secretary-General affirmed the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's role as a multilingual research, information and training facility that maintains the archival collection of United Nations documents and publications in all languages in which they are issued.**
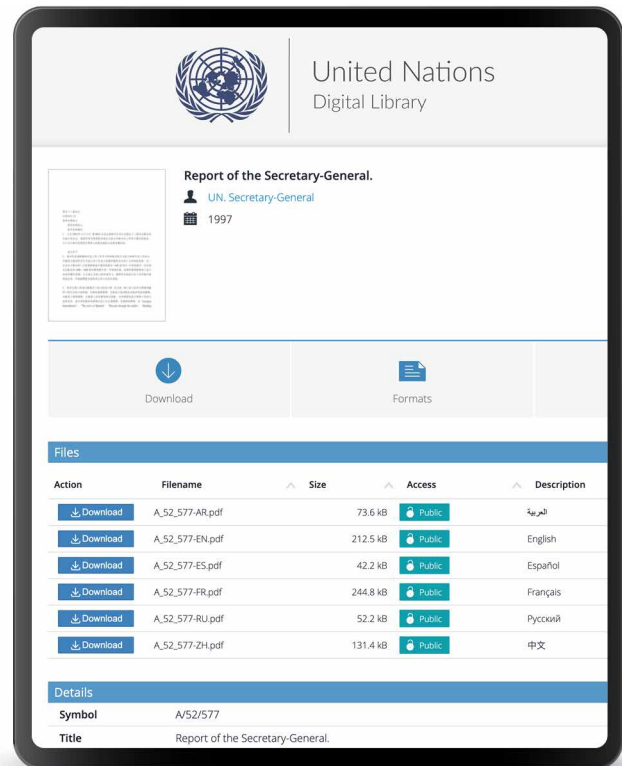
From the Assembly's fifty-second session (1997/98) to its fifty-eighth session (2003/04), key issues related to promoting the learning and the use of the official and working languages of the Organization in all its activities were consistently addressed in the reports of the Secretary-General. Issues relating to the working languages of the Secretariat, such as vacancy announcements and recruitments, language incentives and language learning opportunities in the six official languages, were examined consistently. Issues relating to public information were also continuously reviewed, such as websites, publications and other information materials, the Official Document System, United Nations Radio services, United Nations Television programmes, guided tours, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as well as the United Nations information centres and special programmes.

Over time, however, the emphasis slightly moved away from public information and conference services towards management-related matters, including the mainstreaming of multilingualism into all aspects of the work of the United Nations. This shift resulted in more wide-ranging analytical reports.

In his 2006 report (A/61/317), the Secretary-General provided a comprehensive assessment of multilingualism in the Secretariat, addressing, in particular, internal communications, conference services and the interpretation of official meetings at various conference centres. It also noted the improvement observed within the Secretariat since the introduction of iSeek, the multilingual intranet of the United Nations, in that communication among staff had been given new impetus with the introduction of a concerted strategy, supported by iSeek, the Secretariat intranet.
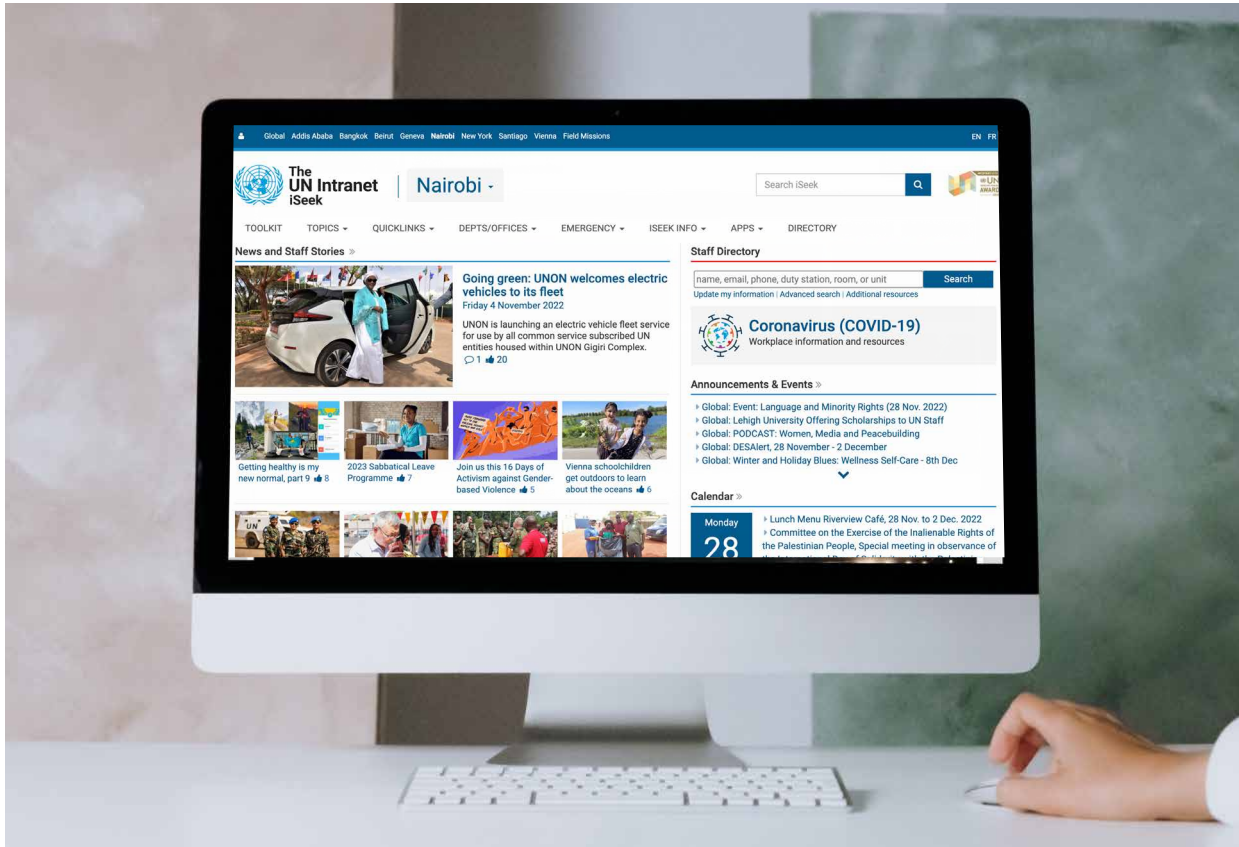
In his 2008 report (A/63/338), the Secretary-General recognized the critical importance of promoting multilingualism to foster diversity and plurality within the United Nations. He highlighted several initiatives to promote multilingualism in conference management, internal and external communications, as well as outreach and human resources management. In February 2008, the International Year of Languages was launched, which provided a targeted focus and additional avenues for the promotion of multilingualism.
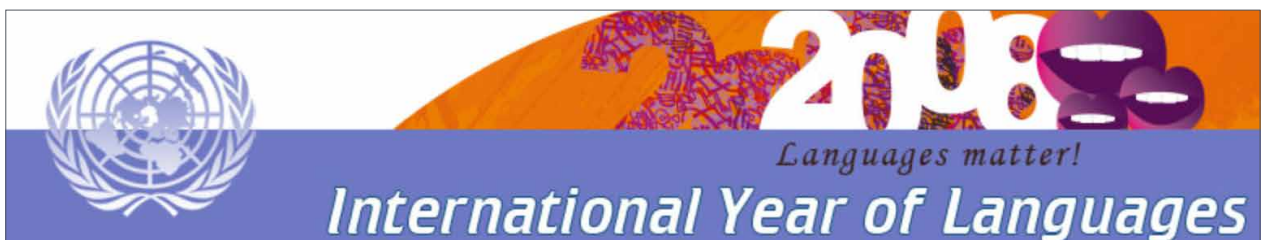
In his 2010 report (A/65/488) , the Secretary-General provided a comprehensive analysis of the measures taken to promote and embrace multilingualism across the Secretariat, including the key areas human resources, conference services and public information. He gave wider coverage, incorporating input from Secretariat entities responsible for peacekeeping, security, political, legal, oversight, humanitarian and economic affairs.

In his 2012 report (A/67/311), the Secretary-General considered multilingualism from the perspective of human resources management, noting, for instance, the continued expansion of language learning opportunities for the staff. He also shared insights from a survey conducted by the Office of Human Resources that showed that Secretariat staff spoke some 160 languages. He also underlined how the staff's language skills helped to promote international understanding, dialogue, unity and mutual tolerance in a diverse environment. He further touched upon the renovations being conducted at United Nations Headquarters under the capital master plan and pointed out their positive impact on conference services in the form of enhanced equipment for simultaneous interpretation, which also improved the working conditions for interpreters and broadcasters. In the report, he further described the progress made in promoting multilingualism within the Secretariat, in that the United Nations had increasingly improved and sought creative ways to promote multilingualism in all areas of its work, keeping in mind the importance of communicating to the peoples of the world in their own languages, including in various accessible formats to help to bring the Organization closer to the people it serves.
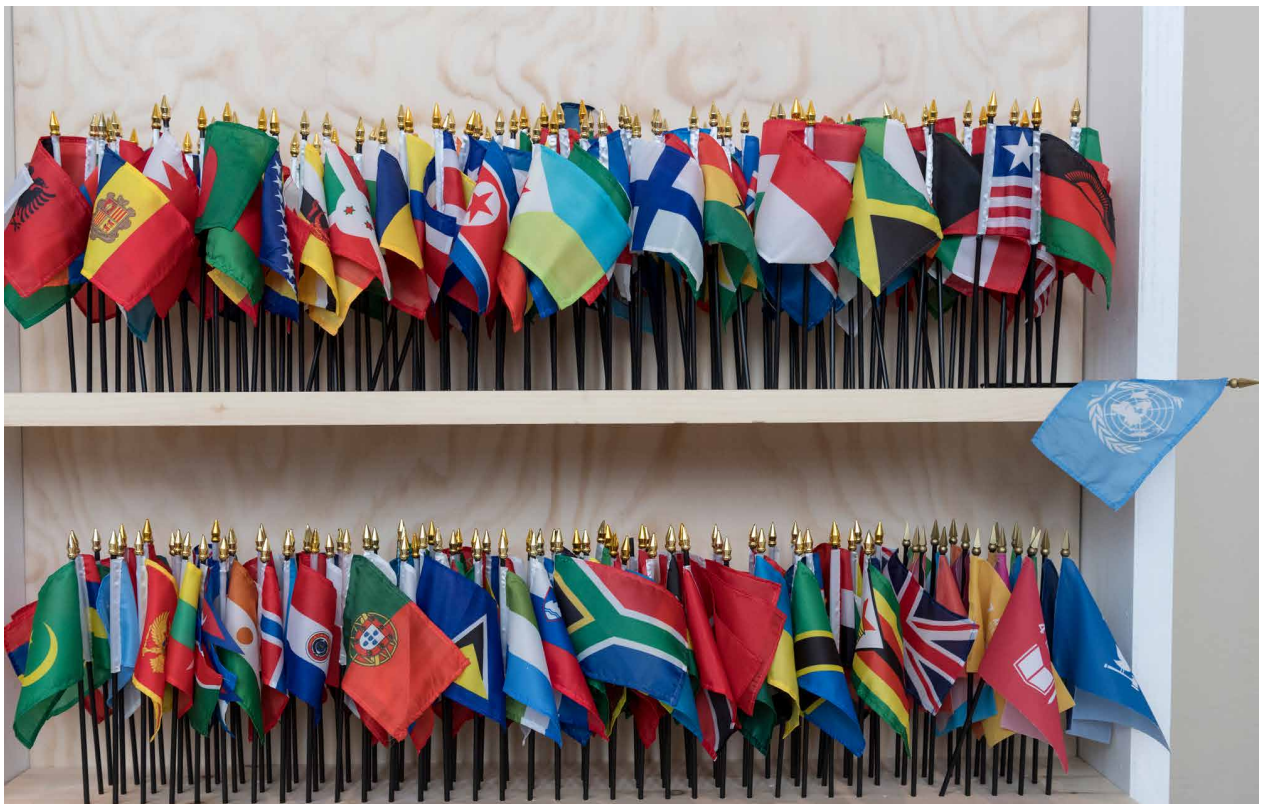
In his 2014 report (A/69/282), the Secretary-General further expanded the scope of his review, providing input from an ever-increasing number of Secretariat entities through a network of multilingualism focal points. Particular attention was given to multilingualism in information and communications. With regard to websites, he looked not only at the formal availability of different language versions, but also at the percentage of content available in each version, and the challenges faced by Secretariat entities in maintaining multilingual websites.

The 2017 report of the Secretary-General (A/71/757)[5] was published after a significant semantic shift had been observed in the General Assembly, with the first reference to multilingualism as a core value of the Organization being made in resolution 70/9 on the pattern of conferences. Subsequently, the phrase was included in a number of General Assembly resolutions and was regularly used by Member States and, occasionally, in documents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. In this context, the Secretary-General advocated in his 2017 report for a paradigm shift, providing an overview of the implementation measures taken by the Coordinator for Multilingualism, such as the reactivation and expansion of the network of multilingualism focal points, and various initiatives aimed at mainstreaming multilingualism as a core value of the Organization. Among those initiatives were the anticipated development of a strategic policy framework on multilingualism, a proposed inventory of the staff's language skills and a review of the way in which language skills were assessed in the selection of new staff. In annex II to the report, in response to the request made by the General Assembly in paragraph 60 of its resolution 70/9, the Secretary-General detailed the proposed terms of reference for the Coordinator for Multilingualism. The General Assembly endorsed the terms of reference as proposed, in its resolution 71/328.

The 2019 report (A/73/761) provided an update on the measures taken to mainstream multilingualism as a core value – and a shared responsibility – of the Organization. In it, the Secretary-General detailed cross-cutting measures meant to strengthen multilingualism, ranging from human resources policies, including recruitment and training, to conference management and information and communication. He underlined the measures taken to reinforce accountability mechanisms through senior managers' compacts and the inclusion of language skills in senior leaders' appointment notices. The report also provided an unprecedented review of language requirements in job openings published by the Secretariat in 2017 as an indicator of performance in nurturing and achieving a multilingual workforce. The report was supplemented with detailed information on compliance of United Nations websites and social media accounts with the multilingualism requirements, covering a wide spectrum of entities not limited to the Department of Global Communications.

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[5] Starting with the seventy-first session, the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States, discontinued the practice of issuing his reports on multilingualism in the late summer, before the opening of the main session of the General Assembly. Instead, they were issued in the first part of the calendar year following the opening of the session.

In his 2021 report (A/75/798), the Secretary-General provided an update of progress made in 2019 and 2020. Building on his previous two reports, he placed special emphasis on mainstreaming multilingualism throughout the United Nations, making deliberate language-related decisions, and strategically using human resources policies to instil an organizational culture supportive of multilingualism in an effort to improve the Organization's efficiency, performance and transparency. The report provided an update on language requirements in job openings published by Secretariat entities in 2019 and was accompanied by supplementary information on the compliance of United Nations websites and social media accounts with multilingualism requirements. The report reaffirmed Secretary-General's vision for a multilingual, field-oriented, agile and transparent United Nations. The report also mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had presented challenges for the timely issuance of documentation in all official languages and the preservation of multilingualism in what were tumultuous times, challenges that had been met, inter alia, by developing remote simultaneous interpretation capacity, by transitioning overnight to virtual language training formats and by overcoming obstacles to observing language celebrations.

At the request of the co-facilitators of the resolution on multilingualism, the General Assembly adopted decision 75/584 (see A/75/49 (Vol. III), sect. IV.B), in which it deferred its consideration of the item, which was to be held at its seventy-fifth session, until the seventy-sixth session so as to give the item the proper focus. With that decision, the Assembly followed the requesters' line of argumentation, set out in their letter to the President of the General Assembly (A/75/1009): "Multilingualism is at the heart of our commitment because it is the guarantor of a fair and renewed multilateralism. The General Assembly's consideration of this item is all the more important at a time when multilingualism has all too often been a collateral victim of the dual health and budgetary crisis that our Organization has had to face".
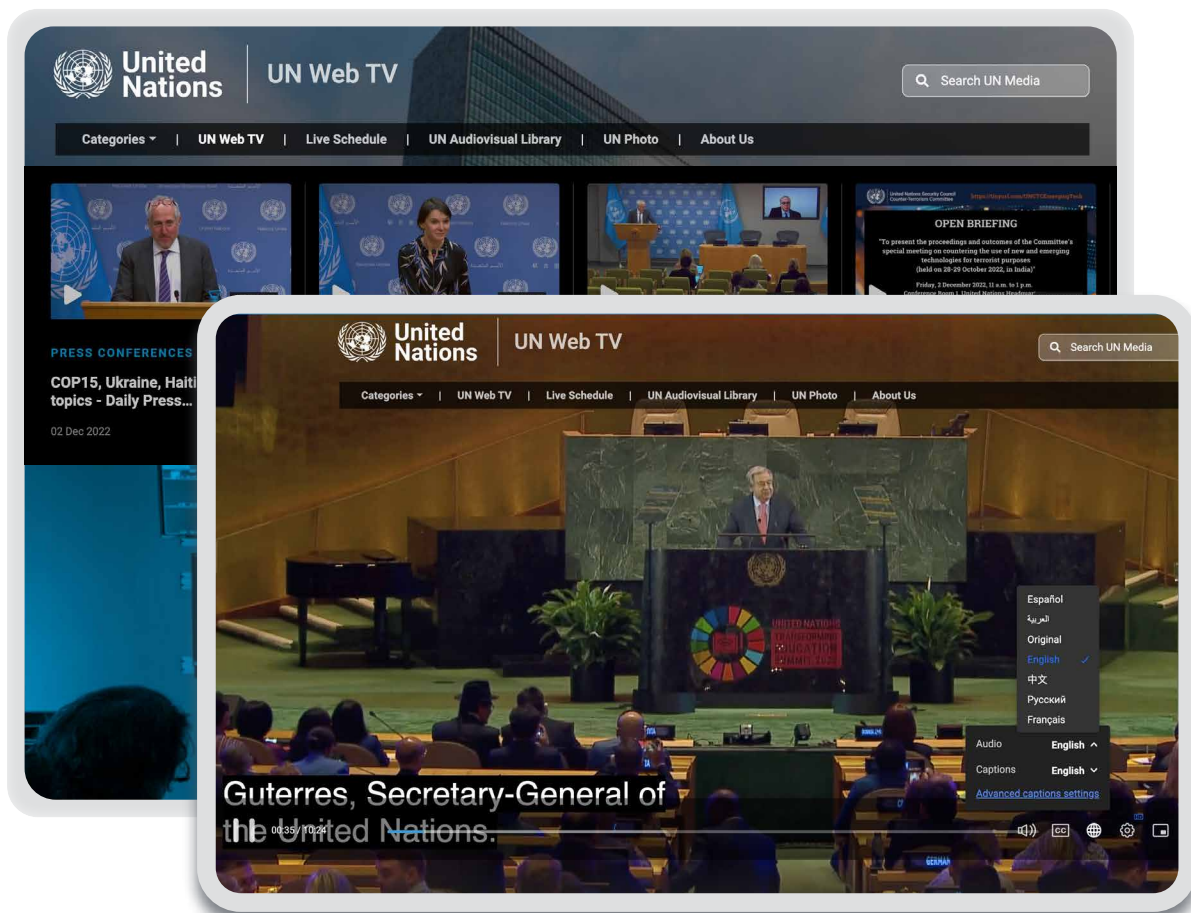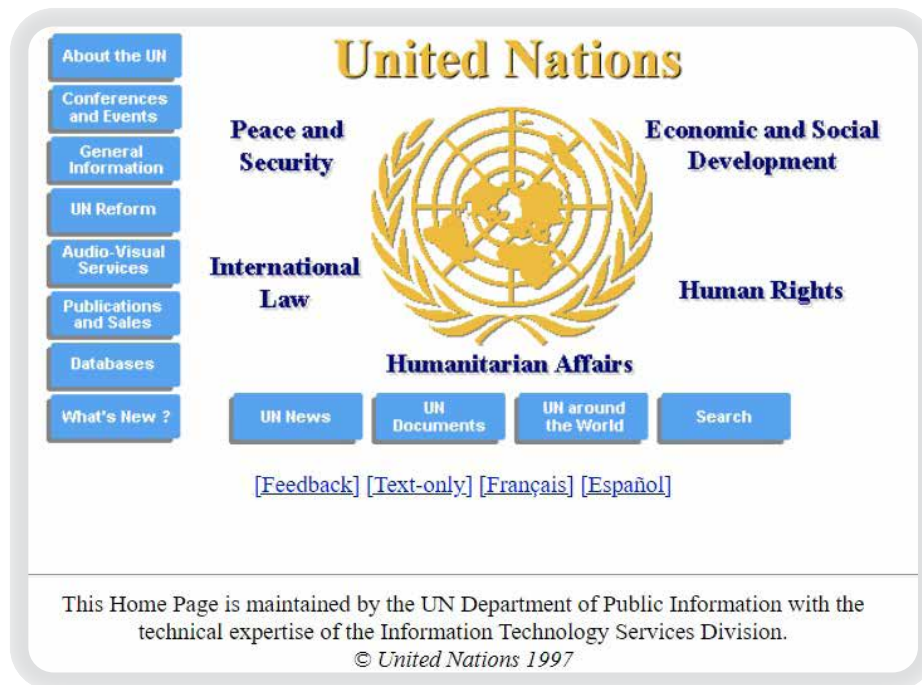
PARITY AMONG OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ON UNITED NATIONS WEBSITES

The United Nations website (www.un.org) was inaugurated on 26 June 1995 as a pilot project. It contained basic information on the work of the Organization and was available in English only. The site was formally launched in September 1995, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. French and Spanish were added to the site in September 1996, Russian in April 1998, and Arabic and Chinese in November 1998 (see A/AC.198/1999/6).

In his 1995 report on questions relating to information (A/50/462), the Secretary-General recognized the progress made by the Department of Public Information in taking "a bold new step on the information superhighway by launching the UN Home Page on the World Wide Web", and he commended the Department for moving "aggressively to exploit the enormous outreach and exchange of information that electronic communication now offers".

In his 1997 report on questions relating to information (A/52/455), the Secretary-General noted that the United Nations website had contributed to raising global awareness of the work of the Organization. Moreover, some United Nations information centres around the world had launched their own websites in local languages. The report commended the Department of Public Information for its efforts to bring the information available on its website in French as close to the English version as possible, with additional French documents being made available on an ongoing basis. At that time, the Spanish-language page was still in a pilot project phase, but continuing to grow.

This Home Page is maintained by the UN Department of Public Information with the technical expertise of the Information Technology Services Division.
© United Nations 1997

In its resolution 53/208 on the pattern of conferences, adopted in 1998, the General Assembly expressed its appreciation for the launch of the United Nations website in Russian, Arabic and Chinese and stressed the need for the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations websites, with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those websites. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals in that connection to the General Assembly at its following session.

The Secretary-General submitted a comprehensive review of the state of language parity on the United Nations websites in a report to the Committee on Information on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations websites (A/AC.198/1999/6), in which he emphasized the importance of equitable treatment of all official languages and proposed three options:

- To ensure full parity among all websites in official languages by the end of 2001 by granting equal treatment on the United Nations website regardless of the current availability of materials in other languages or the level of technology in those languages

- To achieve the same objective over a longer period by establishing the necessary infrastructure to service and provide equitable coverage of all official languages beginning on 1 January 2001; the level of differences at that time would be addressed incrementally over a period of several bienniums, as staff and technological resources were made available

- To seek to make available only elements in each of the languages in accordance with the level of funding made available for that purpose; this proposal entailed a modular approach so that certain modules of the website would be made available in some languages, while addressing the issue of equality on an incremental basis over a period of several bienniums in accordance with the availability of appropriate resources

At the recommendation of the Committee on Information, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to further develop his proposals pertaining to the third of the above-mentioned options. A report (A/AC.198/1999/9) was submitted in response to that request. It addressed the proposals made in a preceding report of the Secretary-General to the Committee (A/AC.198/1999/6) to ensure continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations websites with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those websites, but it also underlined the importance of formalizing the ad-hoc arrangements in place so that the current status of the maintenance of the website in the six languages could be maintained.

In a further report to the Committee, issued in 2000 (A/AC.198/2000/7 – A/AC.172/2000/4), the Secretary-General noted that further development, coordination, production and management of information content on United Nations websites would require a substantial increase in the level of investment, as would the upgrading of the related technical infrastructure. He recalled the proposals made in the previous two reports, underscoring the need for more funding and translation capacity for the rendition of the contents of the present United Nations websites into all official languages. He also highlighted the need to conduct a feasibility study on the complete redesign and restructuring of the sites in order to render them more user-friendly and flexible, and outlined the resource requirements for the ongoing development and maintenance of the United Nations websites in all official languages.

In his following report to the Committee issued in 2001 under the title "Continued multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site" (A/AC.198/2001/8), the Secretary-General further provided an update on the progress made, underlining that the United Nations website had continued to grow during the previous year at a phenomenal pace, with over 3 million hits per day and reaching more than 159 countries. He attributed the increase partly to the fact that, on 1 September 2000, a completely redesigned website had been launched simultaneously in all six languages of the Organization, a major step toward parity among the official languages. There was also a significant increase in the number of documents available from the website in official languages other than English and French, and, for the first time, in addition to the webcast, all statements made to the General Assembly during the Millennium Summit and the subsequent general debate at the fifty-fifth session had been uploaded to the site. In addition, all provisional verbatim records of the General Assembly had been made available online. He noted that uploading webcast recordings and written statements to the website would become a regular practice.

In his 2002 report on the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations website in the six official languages (A/AC.198/2002/6), the Secretary-General addressed the issue of parity of the six official languages within each United Nations website. He observed a rapid growth in demand for information from the website, which made it a challenge to keep the content up-to-date in all official languages and underscored the relevance of the proposals made in the past concerning the appropriate allocation of resources for further development of the new medium. He outlined and analysed two possible courses of action to achieve language parity on the website:

- Replicate all materials available on the English website in the other language sites

- Allow the websites to develop independently in each language on the basis of the resource capacities of the author entity

The Secretary-General recommended that Member States approve the second course of action. It was considered more cost-effective, since it entailed incremental additions of available materials instead of replicating all materials on the English website in the other languages.

Also in 2002, the Secretary-General issued a report entitled "Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization" (A/57/355). In it, he set out proposals and resource requirements to be considered for the programme budget for the biennium 2002–2003.
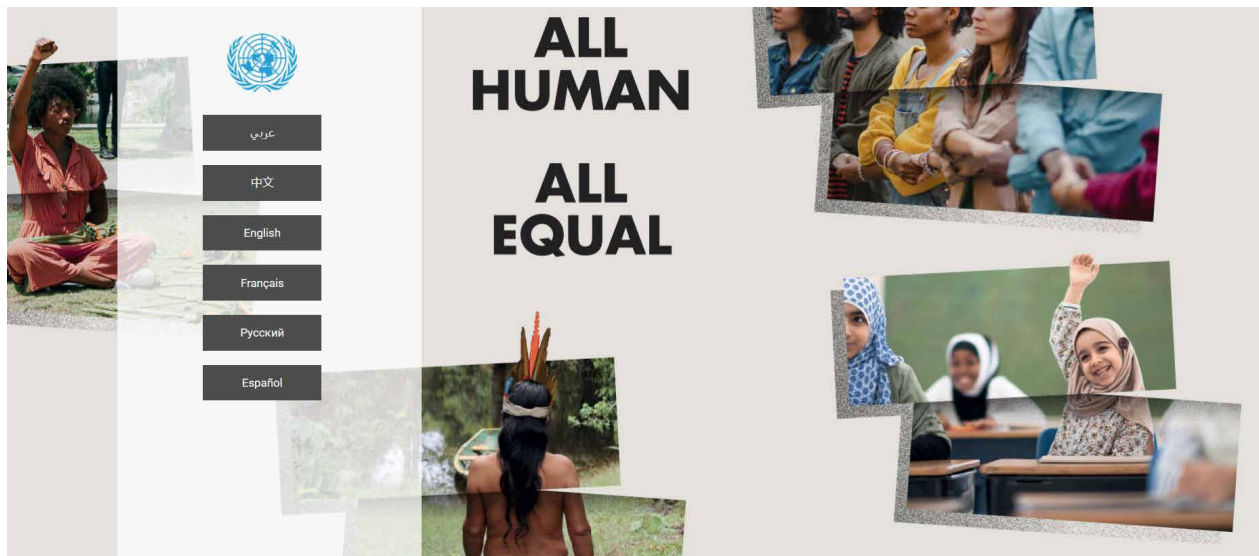
In 2003, the Secretary-General issued a follow-up report (A/58/217), in which he noted: "The Department of Public Information is realigning its priorities with regard to the web site … by strengthening the language capacity in the Website Section". The realignment had been proposed in a preceding report to the Committee on Information entitled "Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications" (A/AC.198/2003/2) in which he had detailed the progress made in repositioning the Department of Public Information. The Secretary-General noted that a major component of the Department's plan was "to strengthen language parity on the United Nations home page".

In its resolution 58/270, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to "continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through further redeployment to the required language posts". In 2004, in response to that request, the Secretary-General reported on the status of the resolution's implementation

(see A/59/336), noting that, despite challenges related to the budget and human resources, the Department had succeeded in making progress. However, "while progress would continue to be made, present current resources are were not adequate to sustain a rapid expansion of pages and to meet the full maintenance requirements of the United Nations web site".

In 2005, 2006 and 2007, the Secretary-General issued reports to the Committee on Information related to progress towards parity among official languages on the United Nations website.

In the 2005 report (A/AC.198/2005/6), he addressed the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations website. Notable in the report was the request of the General Assembly to the Department of Public Information to take further measures to ensure accessibility to the website by persons with disabilities, including those with visual and hearing disabilities. He encouraged the Department to improve actions to achieve full parity among the six official languages on the United Nations website and reaffirmed the need for parity. He also underlined budget constraints in the allocation of resources towards parity among languages and recommended that the issue be submitted for discussion of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006–2007.

While the 2006 report (A/AC.198/2006/3) gave an account of some progress made, such as the expansion of website outreach to 199 countries and territories, it also highlighted some of the challenges. Among them was the incoherence resulting from what was termed a decentralized governance structure, budget constraints and insufficient technical support. Decentralization, with single departments creating their own content, added to the complexity. The Secretary-General recommended a system of governance that would introduce coherence for further development of the website and progress towards language parity, and emphasized the need for enhanced collaboration with the Information Technology Services Division to improve the technological infrastructure of the website with a view to enhancing the multilingual nature of the United Nations website.

The 2007 report (A/AC.198/2007/3) outlined the progress being made towards parity among the official languages, accessibility and content management, as well as the development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations website. The Secretary-General noted an increased usage of the website

content in all official languages, which he attributed to the additional human capacity received in the 2006–2007 biennium. The Secretary-General also recognized the efforts made by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to enhance content in all official languages: "Other efforts to increase parity are centred on the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre (DHLink) which ensures that official documents are fully indexed and made accessible through the Official Document System (ODS) as well as in the Library's United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBISnet). Documents are searchable on ODS by subject in all six official languages of the Organization through the application of the UNBIS Thesaurus."

From 2008, the issue of language parity on the United Nations website continued to be discussed in "reports of the Secretary-General" on the activities of the Department of Public Information.

The 2008 report was issued in two parts (A/AC.198/2008/2 and A/AC.198/2008/3). Section I, contained in the second part, addressed multilingualism at the United Nations information centres and included additional content made available in local languages on the centres' websites. Section II was concerned with the main United Nations website. The report underlined the noticeable progress the Department of Public Information had made in what was referred to as the complex challenge of addressing the issue of parity among official languages on the United Nations website. Particular mention was made of the enhancement of content in languages attributed to pro bono services offered by universities, which had resulted in 2,552 new pages added to the website in Chinese, Russian and Spanish. The report also contained recognition for the continued cooperation with Member States to seek pro bono translation into Arabic and expressions of gratitude to the Government of France for providing an associate expert to work on the French site. The report acknowledged the contribution made by interns and skilled volunteers in translating documents into official languages for uploading to the website and emphasized the need to enhance human resources capacity.

Between 2009 and 2018, the Secretary-General issued annual reports on news services. These reports continued to address multilingualism and parity among languages, as well as the United Nations website, offering analyses of the progress made by the Department to improve online language parity. The reports provided specific details, such as the number of pages created in the official languages, information on the website and the website's governance and design. They also provided information on accessibility of United Nations websites from mobile devices and on compatibility in all languages.

The reports also highlighted milestones that had been achieved. For example, the 2009 report (A/AC.198/2009/3) discussed changes in the governance of the United Nations website. Based on the experience gained during the 13 years that the United Nations website had been in operation, the Department, in consultation with the Chief Information Technology Officer, had proposed the establishment of a two-tier governance mechanism for the website, which had been approved by the Office of the Secretary-General.
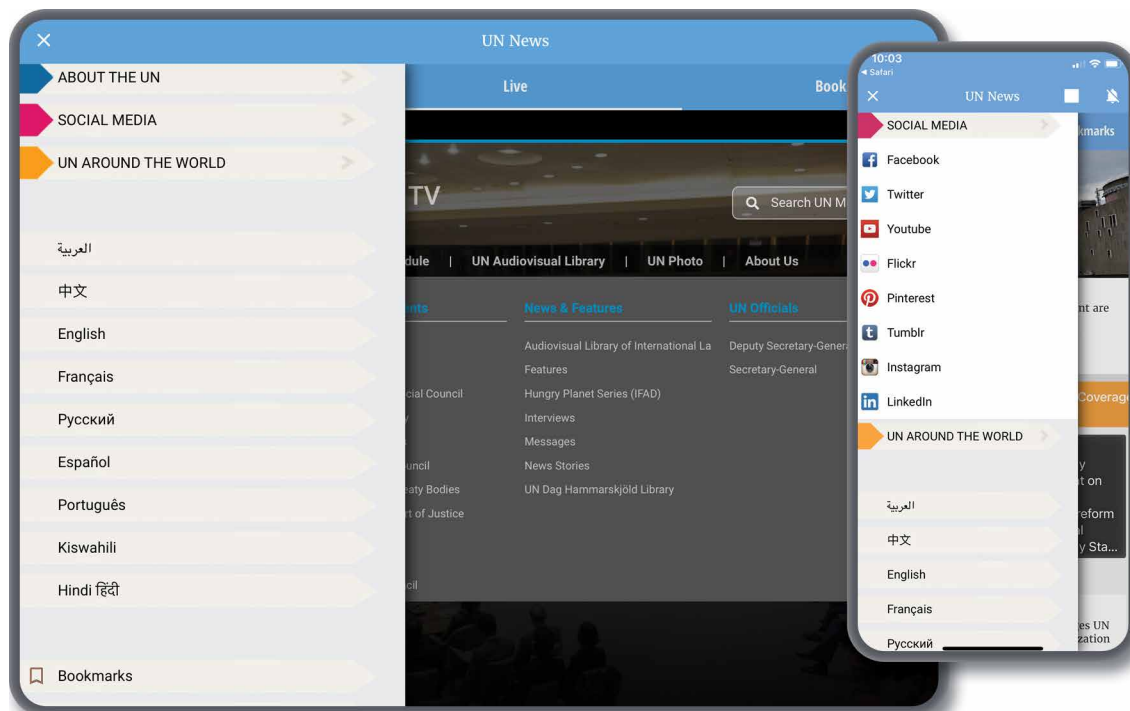
The 2012 report (A/AC.198/2012/3) provided insight into how social media expanded access to the United Nations website in various languages. Given the proliferation of social networks in various parts of the world, including in the developing countries, the Department had paid special attention to expanding its outreach in this sphere in all official languages. On Twitter, the Spanish account, ONUWeb, had gained some 13,800 followers, which represented an increase of over 550 per cent over 2010 figures.

In the 2016 report (A/AC.198/2016/3) the Secretary-General noted that the website had been significantly rebranded and expanded, and emphasized that the continued increase of website content in all official languages had advanced language parity.

The 2018 report (A/AC.198/2018/3) indicated an ongoing commitment to harmonizing visual branding across the United Nations websites and underlined the efforts made by the Department of Public Information, among them the enforcement of strict multilingualism criteria when receiving requests from author departments for new pages, and the partnering with universities to increase the availability of substantive content across the wider website, with a view to achieving language parity.

In 2019, the Department of Public information became the Department of Global Communications. Subsequent reports of the Secretary-General on the United Nations website were issued under the title "Activities of the Department of Global Communications: news services". The first report under this title (A/AC.198/2019/3) provided various examples of increased parity of the official languages on the United Nations website. The report also observed that the Department had worked closely with different United Nations system entities to ensure that their online presence met multilingualism requirements.

The 2020 report (A/AC.198/2020/3) mentioned the redesign of the United Nations website to "a more advanced technological platform (known as the UN-2 platform)" and highlighted a significant increase in access to information about the United Nations in all languages. It also underlined the Department's efforts to strengthen multilingualism across all platforms in the six official languages of the United Nations.

The 2021 report (A/AC.198/2021/3) noted that 2020 had marked the largest increase in audiences visiting the United Nations website since the Department started tracking user behaviour. For the sole period of 1 July through 15 November 2020, the website had already been accessed by more than 39.2 million users in the six official languages combined. One of the most popular areas on the website was the COVID-19 portal, a dedicated multilingual website launched in March 2020. From 1 July to 15 November 2020, it had attracted over 2 million unique users and more than 3 million page views. The document also recorded that the United Nations websites in all six official languages had measured significant gains in reach in comparison with 2019: the Arabic, Chinese and Russian sites had more than doubled in reach, with the Arabic site growing by 112 per cent, the Chinese site by 283 per cent and the Russian site by 103 per cent. However, the most notable changes had been seen with regard to the English and Spanish sites, which had both added more than 6 million unique users (13.5 million combined) between 1 July and 15 November 2020.
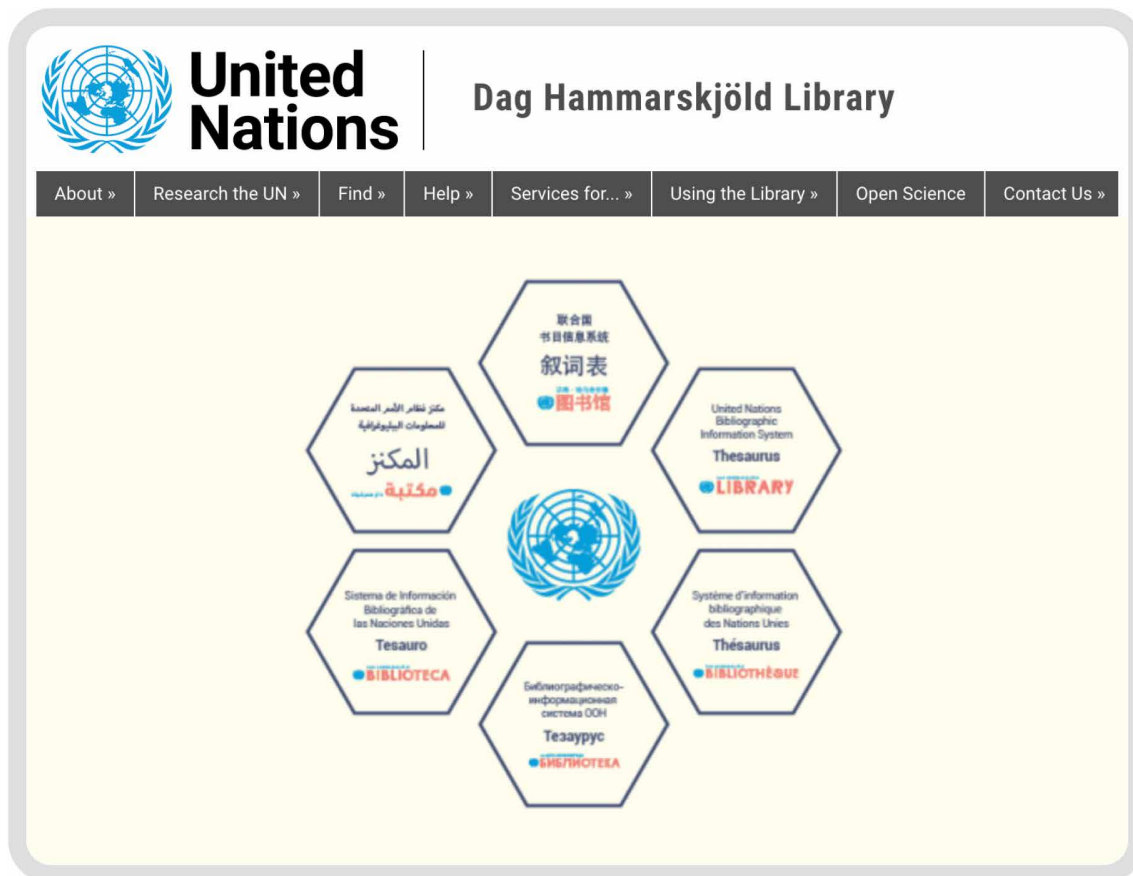
In 2017, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library launched the United Nations Digital Library, replacing the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBISnet), to provide access to born-digital and turned-digital United Nations documents and publications to citizens worldwide. The Digital Library has an interface for each official language and provides full-text searching options in all six official languages. In its resolution 76/268, the General Assembly welcomed this new initiative and its provision of multilingual content.

In 2019, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library launched the new linked data services platform: http://metadata. un.org. The site currently hosts the Library's UNBIS Thesaurus and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs taxonomy of identifiers for the Sustainable Development Goals. The UNBIS Thesaurus is a multilingual database of terms used to describe United Nations documents and other materials in the United Nations Digital Library. The first online version of this resource was launched in 2001, and the new platform provides a revamped interface with increased functionality in the six official languages.

OTHER UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM BODIES ADDRESSING MULTILINGUALISM

The use of languages at the United Nations is discussed in a wide range of principal and subsidiary bodies of the Organization. For instance, the biennial resolutions on multilingualism, as well as those on the cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie or between the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, are adopted by the General Assembly without reference to a Main Committee. Others are adopted on a report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) or of the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee), sometimes upon recommendation of a subsidiary body, as is the case for the annual resolution on questions relating to information (adopted by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Committee on Information) and the annual resolution on the pattern of conferences (adopted on the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences).

The Committee on Conferences serves as an oversight body of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The Committee regularly considers new developments and innovations as well as challenges relating to conference management that the Department may have brought to the Committee's attention through the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences. Of particular relevance to multilingualism are its periodic consideration of documentation- and publication-related matters and translation- and interpretation-related matters.

Actions and mandates of the Committee on Conferences relating to multilingualism are described in the reports of the Committee on its sessions, in the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences and in the resolutions adopted on the same topic by the General Assembly.


The Committee on Information deals with questions relating to public information and oversees the work of the Department of Global Communications. The agenda item entitled "Questions relating to information" is then taken up for discussion in the Fourth Committee. The multilingual content relating to the United Nations websites, press releases, radio programmes, library, social media accounts and other public information-related products or services are discussed extensively in the Committee.

Actions and mandates of the Committee on Information relating to multilingualism are described in the reports of the Committee on its sessions, the relevant reports of the Secretary-General and in the resolutions on questions relating to information adopted by the General.

REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT ON MULTILINGUALISM

The Joint Inspection Unit has issued several reports relating to multilingualism over the years in which it covered the United Nations system as a whole as well as specific organizations.
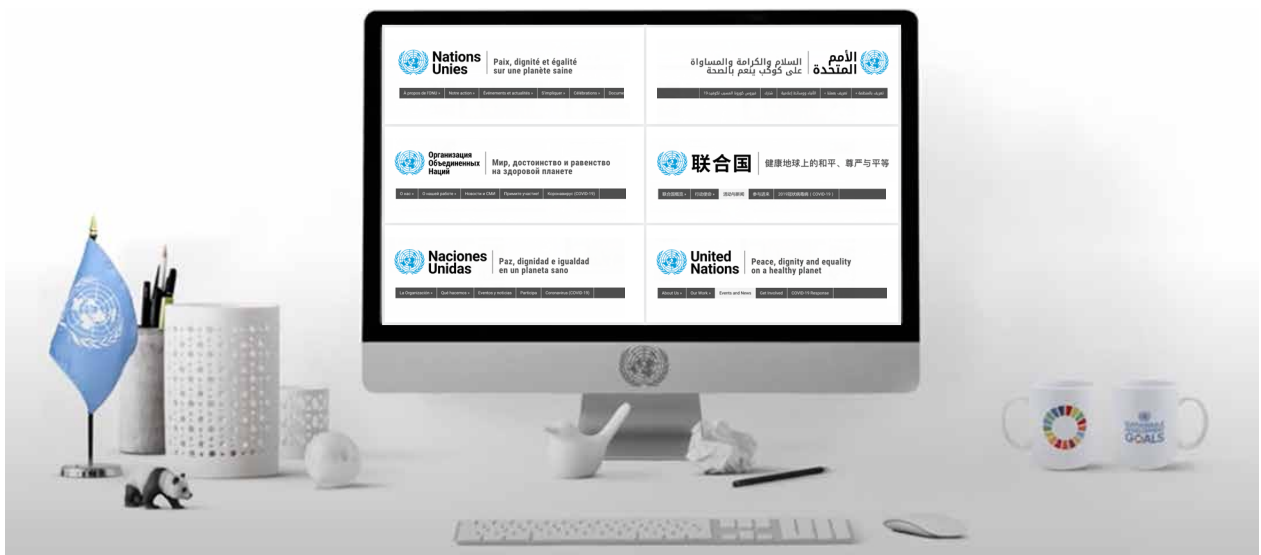
Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the implications of additional languages in the United Nations system issued in 1977 (JIU/REP/77/5, contained in A/32/237): The report started with a brief historical and analytical overview of the existing language services in the United Nations system, before providing a study of the financial and administrative implications of adding a new language service. In the last section, the Joint Inspection Unit introduced a survey of possible measures to reduce the cost of providing language services in the United Nations system. In the absence of a generally recognized world language, language services facilitated international discussion and understanding and contributed to economic and social development. Limits, therefore, were practical and financial, which meant that, beyond a certain point, the cost and difficulty of the operation would outweigh its benefits. The Unit grappled with the question where exactly that point lay and suggested that, by a greater degree of resource-sharing in the fields of interpretation, translation, printing and distribution of documents and publications, the benefits of language services could be reaped while minimizing costs.
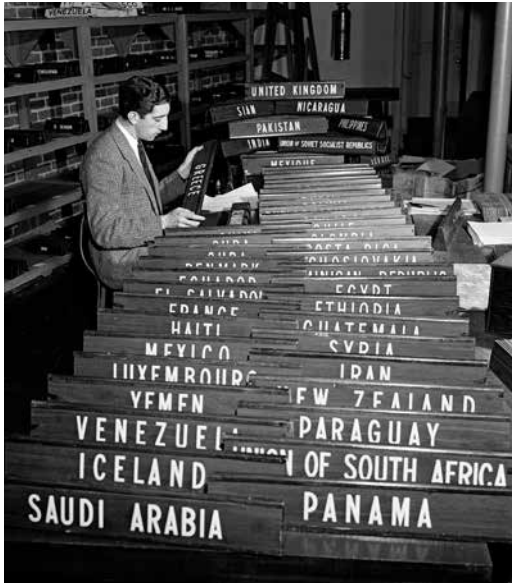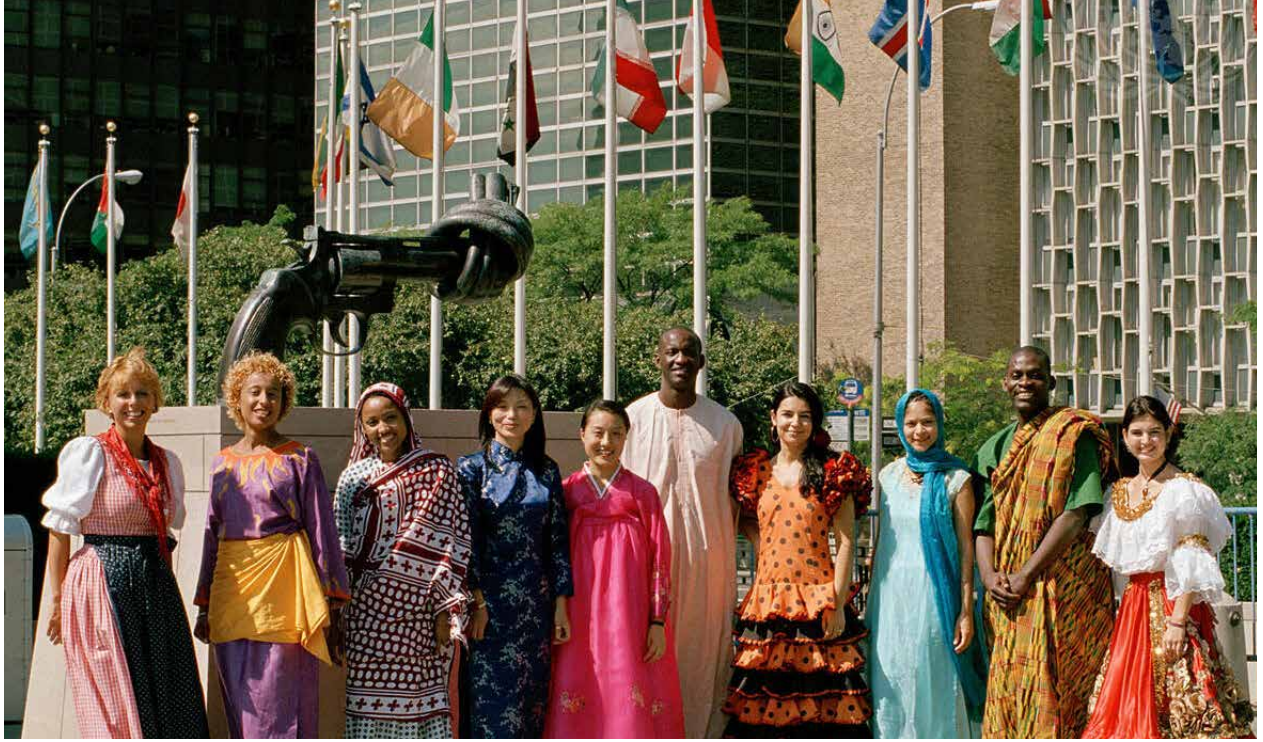
Report on the implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations system, issued in 2002 (JIU/REP/2002/11): To assist legislative bodies and secretariats in their efforts to maintain and improve the multilingual content of services required by the universal character of United Nations system organizations, the Joint Inspection Unit presented nine recommendations in this report to ensure the enhanced use of multilingualism. Faltering multilingualism could result in the marginalization of linguistic groups, particularly those from developing countries, to the extent that it did not allow them to contribute on an equal basis to the outcomes of key meetings.

Report on the review of management of Internet websites in the United Nations system organizations, issued in 2008 (JIU/REP/2008/6): In this report, the Joint Inspection Unit addressed the use of websites as a communication tool for information dissemination at a time when the United Nations was just beginning to establish systems for effective website governance, strategy and guidelines. It stressed the importance of related issues, such as a content management system, accessibility and multilingualism, and discussed the main challenges faced by United Nations system organizations in managing their websites, including the possibility of publishing outdated or duplicated information, the existence of scam emails or websites in which the content falsely implied association with a United Nations system organization, and a lack of website coordination across United Nations system organizations.

Report on multilingualism in the United Nations system organizations, issued in (JIU/REP/2011/4). In this report, the Joint Inspection Unit stated that the effective implementation of multilingualism was a collective and shared responsibility, but the "hegemonic" use of one language, English, over the other five official languages of the United Nations for the sake of pragmatism had created a trend towards "monolingualism" in the United Nations system. Further efforts needed to be made by all stakeholders, including Member States and their representatives, executive heads of the organizations, secretariats, conference- and language-related services, human resources, training, as well as public information and outreach departments, in a coordinated approach across the system via the "One UN policy on Multilingualism", under the institutional umbrella of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

Report on multilingualism in the United Nations System, issued in 2020 (JIU/REP/2020/6): As an inherent part of the genetic code of the United Nations, multilingualism was both an asset and a shared commitment for all organizations in the United Nations system. However, the overarching lack of a holistic perspective, strategic framework or action plan, combined with a failure of the United Nations system to implement multilingualism rules during recruitment and the slow progress in system-wide initiatives had contributed to the absence of a coherent approach to multilingualism. The report contained seven formal recommendations for action; among other things, the Secretary-General encouraged resident coordinators to plan awareness initiatives to promote multilingualism as an expression of diversity and a vehicle for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals during the last decade of the 2030 Agenda.

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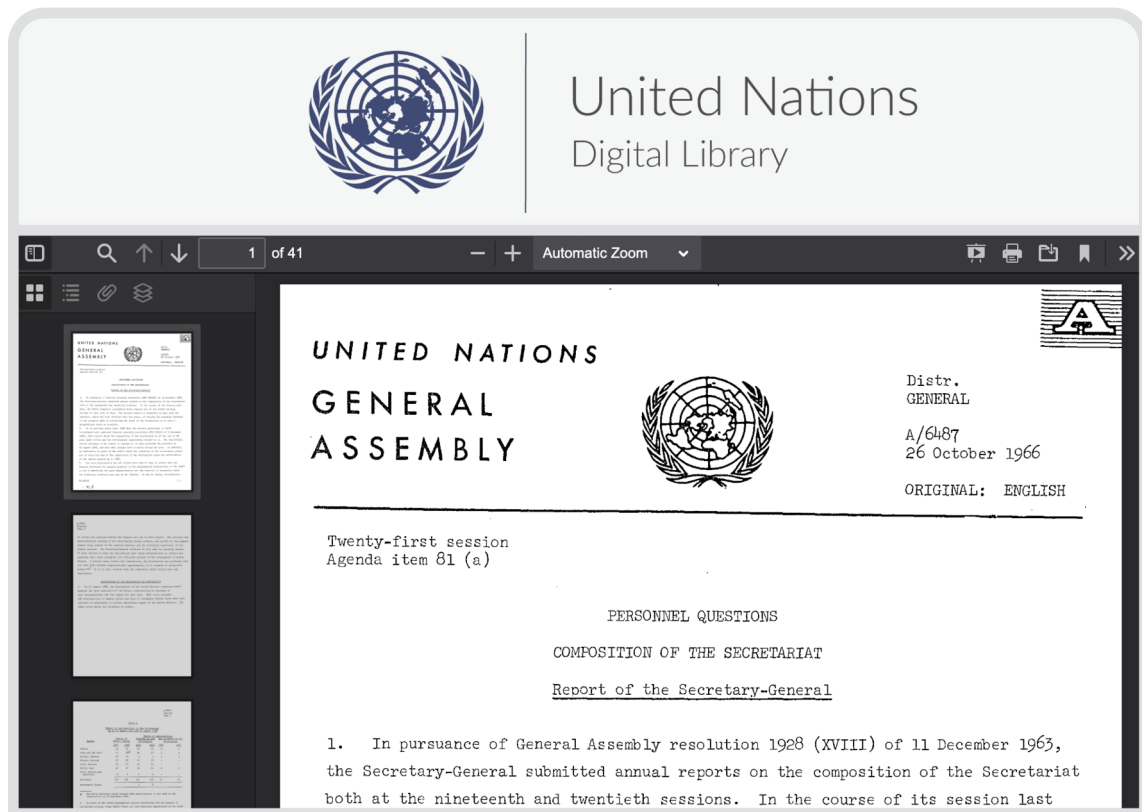# Multilingualism

Multilinguisme

Многоязычие

Multilingüismo

MULTILINGUALISM – AN ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUMENT

"The policies and administrative methods of the Secretariat should reflect, and profit to the highest degree from, assets of the various cultures and the technical competence of all Member nations. The Secretary-General referred to this when he recently stated: 'I have striven to make the Secretariat more truly international in outlook and approach and a more energetic and efficient servant of the Governments of Member States. I believe that, within its limitations, the Secretariat has performed well and that with further organizational improvements, it is capable of doing even better'" (report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat of 1966, A/6487).

In line with staffing responsibilities, the Secretary-General has continuously used multilingualism as an administrative instrument by advocating language learning. This is reflected in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization as well as in administrative issuances (i.e., Secretary-General's bulletins, administrative instructions and information circulars).

In his first annual report on the work of the Organization in 1946 (A/65) the Secretary-General called on the Languages Division to organize courses in the then five official languages as soon as its own resources would allow. The following report (A/315), issued in 1947, documented the establishment of a language learning programme that, from its inception, operated in all official languages, and also underlined the importance of hiring personnel with language proficiency through a competitive exam. Progress had been made with the introduction of the competitive examination system for recruitment of languages personnel, and the first such examination would be held in Europe and Latin America in July 1947.

@UN HR Portal

Under the Provisional Staff Regulations of 1948, contained in SGB/3/Add.5, the Secretary-General was to provide facilities to train members of the staff in subjects relating directly or indirectly to their duties. The training was to apply particularly to members on probation whose earlier educational opportunities had been inadequate or whose language qualifications were deficient.

The Secretary-General has released several administrative issuances to guide staff and reward their efforts for learning official languages other than their mother tongue. The administrative instruction of 1956 (ST/AI/113) provided for the linguistic standards for staff of the United Nations Secretariat. It underlined the importance of staff learning another official language even when their mother tongue was one of the six official languages: "… those who naturally speak one of the working languages should not seem to take for granted that there is no need to speak any other." The document reiterated the career benefits for multilingual staff, including assignment to mission service, promotion and transfer.

The instruction on the language proficiency of staff of 1971 (ST/AI/207) addressed the language benefits for staff in the professional and higher categories. It translated General Assembly resolution 2480 (XXIII) B into an internal policy by making proficiency in a second official language a condition for promotions: "All promotions … from P-1 to D-2 … will be conditional upon adequate and confirmed knowledge of a second language." Command of a second language was also incentivized by accelerating the award of salary increments within the same grade by setting the interval between steps at 10 months instead of 12.

In his bulletin on the use of working languages of the Secretariat of 1983 (ST/SGB/201), the Secretary-General reiterated the requirement that every staff member have the capacity to work in one of the two working languages: "By virtue of his or her appointment, every staff member is required to work in either English or French, which are the working languages of the Secretariat." In addition, since the

regional commissions for Europe, Latin America and Western Asia also had Russian, Spanish and Arabic, respectively, as a working language, he mandated staff of those commissions to work in that language. The Secretary-General encouraged staff to be proficient in more than one language and emphasized the respect for equal status of the working languages.

In his bulletin on the use of working languages of the Secretariat of 1985 (ST/SGB/212), the Secretary-General emphasized the continued relevance of the previous bulletin and the need to enhance language capacities in the Secretariat: "The purpose of this bulletin is to emphasize once more the importance I attach to ensuring a linguistic balance among staff members of the Secretariat ..." The Secretary-General included, in an annex, the previously issued bulletin (ST/SGB/201) and reaffirmed the policy contained in it. These bulletins, which were published nearly 40 years ago, are still in effect at the time of publication.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management upholds the Secretary-General's commitment to the use of official language by regularly issuing information circulars on the language and training programme at United Nations Headquarters (similar documents are issued by the Division of Administration in Geneva). The circulars provide, inter alia, updated information on the language and communication programmes including policies, the types of language offered and schedules for the language proficiency examination. In an information circular on language and communication skills training at Headquarters issued in 1997 (ST/IC/1997/78) the language proficiency examination is referred to as the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language and underlines the need for staff to develop their communications skills for work-related purposes.

In an administrative instruction on language proficiency and language incentives issued in 1999 (ST/AI/1999/2), multilingualism was commended as a means to achieve and maintain linguistic balance in the Organization. The instruction reaffirmed the language incentives and set out the conditions that a staff member must meet to demonstrate adequate knowledge in another official language by passing the language proficiency examination in any of the official languages, except that in which they were required to be proficient under the terms of their appointment. As the preceding instruction, it provided for incentives in the form of accelerated salary increments for Professional staff and a language allowance for General Service staff and related categories who had established proficiency in at least two official languages of the United Nations.

Language incentives have also been reflected in the Staff Regulations and Rules. Rule 3.8, contained in ST/SGB/2018/1, includes the following provision: "A staff member in the General Service, Security Service or Trades and Crafts category, or in the Field Service category up to and including level FS-5, holding a fixed-term or a continuing appointment may be entitled to a pensionable language allowance, under rates and conditions determined by the Secretary-General, provided that he or she has demonstrated proficiency in two United Nations official languages ..." Moreover, a staff member who attains a third working language will be compensated further with "a pensionable allowance, equal to half of the amount of the first, provided that he or she has demonstrated proficiency by passing the prescribed test in a third official language".

UN SECRETARIAT

LEARNING STRATEGY

2021-2025
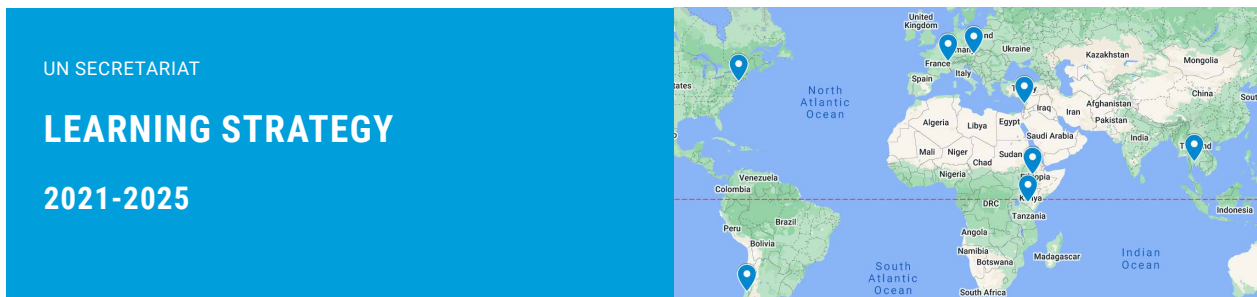
The progress and scope of the language programme continue to be addressed in the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, as well as in reports submitted under the agenda items entitled "Questions relating to information" and "Multilingualism".

The 2021 report on multilingualism (A/75/798) refers to the report of the Secretary-General on a global human resources strategy (A/73/372), in which the Secretary-General stated: "A strong United Nations, staffed by an agile, multidisciplinary, multilingual and independent international civil service, is needed more than ever". In the same report, he cited the further challenges posed by the discontinuation of language incentives for the Professional staff categories in line with General Assembly resolution 70/244, issued in 2016[6]. He also noted the continued lack of language-disaggregated data in certain areas of the work of the Secretariat, and the possible applications of an inventory of the staff's language skills. In the absence of reliable data on the staff's language skills, he noted in the report that language requirements in job openings served as a useful indicator for assessing the status of multilingualism in the Secretariat and the progress made towards building a multilingual workforce. He also cited the challenges posed to training by the COVID-19 pandemic and commended the efforts made as part of the language training programmes in configuring the training to suit an online environment that enabled more Secretariat staff members, from more diverse locations, including remote field missions, to benefit from language learning opportunities than ever before.

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[6]   In its resolution 70/244, the General Assembly approved changes on the common system compensation package proposed by the International Civil Service Commission in its report for the year 2015 (A/70/30). The Commission had decided to discontinue the accelerated step increments serving as an incentive for language proficiency.
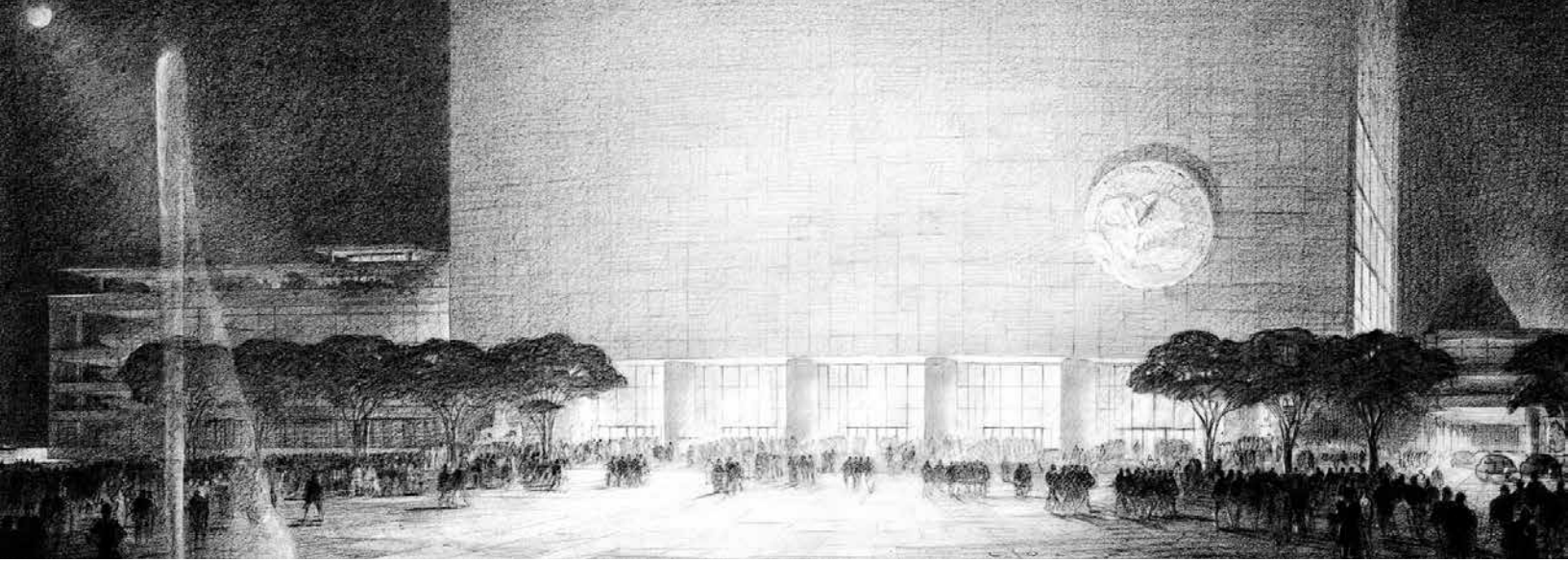
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# Multilingualism

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Multilinguisme

Многоязычие

Multilingüismo

MULTILINGUALISM – A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

In its resolution 54/64, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to appoint a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat.

In 2000, the first Coordinator for Multilingualism was appointed and tasked to coordinate action and propose strategies to address the weaknesses in the pattern of language use in the Organization identified in resolution 50/11, and serve as the focal point for questions and proposals pertaining to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat (see A/56/656, para. 5) The Coordinator met with Member States, including at meetings of the Committee on Conferences, in informal consultations of the Fifth Committee and at meetings of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions where multilingual issues were addressed. Three sets of issues related to multilingualism were identified during these consultations, namely: (a) issues relating to the working languages of the Secretariat; (b) issues relating to the use of official languages in documents and meetings; and (c) issues relating to public information.
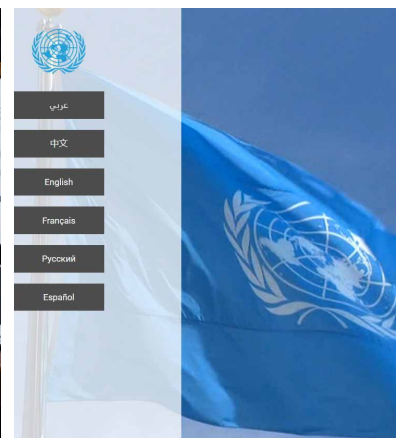
In line with the request of the General Assembly made in its resolution 70/9, the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its seventy-first session detailed proposed terms of reference for the Coordinator containing key responsibilities, working modalities, tasks, priorities, a programme of work, reporting lines and anticipated support, in compliance with the relevant provisions of previous Assembly resolutions (A/71/757, annex II). The Assembly endorsed the terms of reference in resolution 71/328 (see para. 9). Under the terms of reference, the main responsibilities of the Coordinator for Multilingualism's are to:

a. Act as an entry point for concerns and queries from Member States and Secretariat entities;

b. Serve as a facilitator to attain a coordinated, consistent and coherent approach in the Secretariat to multilingualism and, at the request of the Secretary-General, at the United Nations system level through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination;

c. Inspire all departments and offices by initiating and suggesting innovative solutions to foster an organizational culture conducive to multilingualism.

Since 2000, the position of the Coordinator for Multilingualism has been held by senior officials of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services until 2002) and the Department of Global Communications (Department of Public Information until 2019).

LIST OF COORDINATORS FOR MULTILINGUALISM

2019: Movses Abelian

Under-Secretary-General
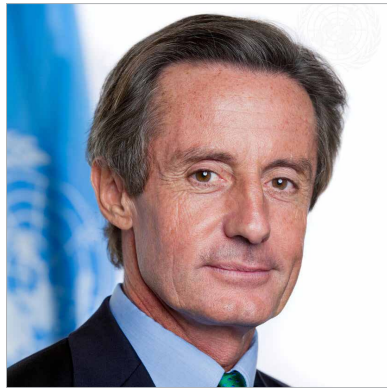Department for General Assembly and
Conference Management

2015: Catherine Pollard

Under-Secretary-General
Department for General Assembly and
Conference Management

2015: Tegegnework Gettu

Under-Secretary-General
Department for General Assembly and
Conference Management

2012: Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal

Under-Secretary-General
Department of Public Information

2008: Kiyo Akasaka

Under-Secretary-General
Department of Public Information

2003: Shashi Tharoor

Under-Secretary-General
Department of Public Information

2001: Miles Stoby

Assistant Secretary-General
Department of General Affairs and
Conference Services

2000: Federico Riesco

Assistant Secretary-General
Department of General Affairs and
Conference Services

FOCAL POINTS ON MULTILINGUALISM

Pursuant to relevant General Assembly resolutions, the Coordinator periodically invites the heads of entities to designate a staff member to serve as a focal point. Most Secretariat entities have one or more designated focal points in place. The Secretary-General shared, in the supplementary information to his 2021 report on multilingualism (A/75/798), an update to the responsibilities of the focal points as follows:

- Providing support to their head of entity in implementing relevant mandates and ensuring that multilingualism is mainstreamed in their entity's work plans and their daily activities

- Promoting greater awareness of all stakeholders in their entity about relevant mandates and the benefits generated by multilingualism at the organizational and work unit levels

- Monitoring and reporting periodically on progress made in implementing mandates relating to multilingualism as well as on obstacles, challenges or opportunities identified in the promotion of multilingualism

- Contributing to the development and realization of short- and long-term multilingualism targets as set out in their head of entity's compacts with the Secretary-General, and other action plans and accountability documents, as applicable

- Seeking creative solutions and measures for implementation of the General Assembly's mandates, including by establishing partnerships with external stakeholders, such as other international organizations, Member States and academic institutions

- Engaging within other Secretariat entities through the network of focal points under the stewardship of the Coordinator, to help assess progress achieved, share best practices, identify obstacles and discuss, where appropriate, policies and approaches

- Disseminating communications from the Coordinator for Multilingualism within their respective entities and coordinating their entity's response as needed, including in relation with language celebrations and the preparation of the biennial report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism
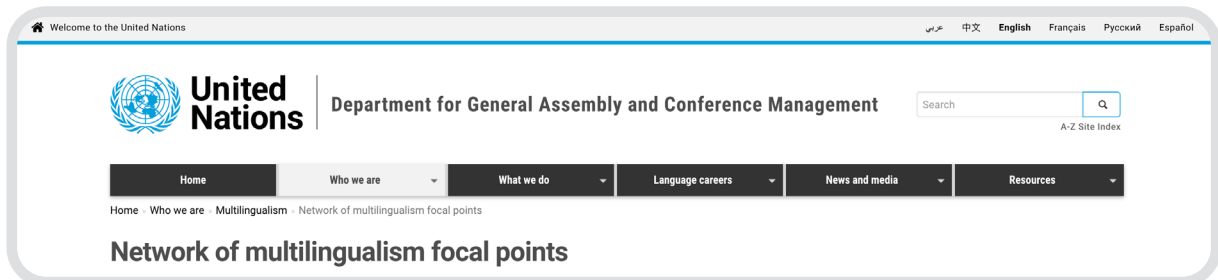
In its resolution 71/328 of 11 September 2017, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to include in senior managers' compacts a managerial indicator related to multilingualism. In his 2019 report on multilingualism (A/73/761) the Secretary-General indicated that since 2018, all compacts with senior managers required that their entities' workplans or, where applicable, mission plans or budgets integrate multilingualism and/or language considerations. In his multilingualism report of 2021 (A/75/798), the Secretary-General noted that since 1 January 2019, as a result of the delegation of authority to heads of entity, the network of focal points had expanded significantly. The geographical and quantitative expansion of the network had led to a higher level of involvement and commitment on the part of all Secretariat entities in support of multilingualism. This resulted in a record-high number of entities contributing to the report in question.

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism is increasingly being labelled by the Member States, United Nations system bodies and United Nations management as a core value of the Organization that contributes to the achievement of the Organization's goals as set out in its Charter. The role of multilingualism in decision-making is recognized; the General Assembly regularly reaffirms that multilingualism is a key enabler of multilateralism. Its impact on mandate delivery is constantly recalled; the General Assembly recognizes that multilingualism contributes to improving the Organization's efficiency, performance and transparency. It is in this context, further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the dire need to access reliable information in relevant languages, as well as to ensure business continuity within the United Nations, that the Secretary-General, António Guterres, has elevated multilingualism to one of the priorities for his tenure.

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PRIORITIES

MULTILINGUALISM AT THE UNITED NATIONS
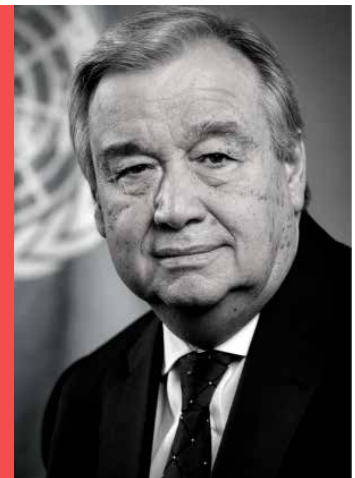
In doing so, he continued the work of his predecessors, who had been aware of the challenges associated with this matter. In 2001, the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, addressed the issue frankly (A/56/176):

"… though I believe that full parity is unachievable within existing budgetary constraints, I attach great importance to improving the linguistic balance among the official languages of the United Nations, and to doing so in a cost-effective manner. I am confident that through creative collaboration between United Nations offices and the Governments of Member States, we will progress together towards realization of this important goal."

While many have focused on enhancing multilingualism going forward, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is also concerned with preserving the multilingual historical record of the Organization. In successive resolutions (71/262, 72/19, 73/270 and 74/252), the General Assembly has requested, and the Board of Auditors has recommended (see A/74/5, (Vol. 1), issued in 2019), that the Library, as part of the Department of Global Communications, undertake the necessary task of digitizing valuable older official documents produced by the major United Nations organs in all official languages. Building on Kofi Annan's advice, the Library is looking for creative and collaborative ways to raise the funds necessary to bring to the public the unique United Nations records, documents, reports and publications that are available in print only. Once these documents evidence of the Organization's multilingual history become accessible online, people from every corner of the world will be able to explore in a comprehensive manner the fascinating aspects of the Organization's work since its beginnings. They will gain direct insights into the contributions of individual Member States and the United Nations to the many challenges the world is facing today.

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

determined

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

and for these ends

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

UNITED NATIONS

PREAMBLE TO THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

ميثاق الأمم المتحدة

والنظام الأساسي لمحكمة العدل الدولية

联合国宪章

及国际法院规约

CHARTER of THE UNITED NATIONS

AND STATUTE of THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

CHARTE DES NATIONS UNIES

ET STATUT de LA COUR INTERNATIONALE DE JUSTICE

УСТАВ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ

И СТАТУТ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО СУДА

CARTA de LAS NACIONES UNIDAS

Y ESTATUTO de LA CORTE INTERNACIONAL DE JUSTICIA

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