

International Mother Language Day 2018: Linguistic diversity and multilingualism: keystones of sustainability and peace

On International Mother Language Day 2018, celebrated every year on 21 February, UNESCO reiterates its commitment to linguistic diversity and invites its Member States to celebrate the day in as many languages as possible as a reminder that linguistic diversity and multilingualism are essential for sustainable development.

UNESCO has been celebrating International Mother Language Day for nearly 20 years with the aim of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened as more and more languages disappear. One language disappears on average every two weeks, taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage.

Nevertheless, progress is being made in mother tongue-based multilingual education with growing understanding of its importance, particularly in early schooling, and more commitment to its development in public life.

This year, UNESCO commemorates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its bold statement that ‘no

discrimination can be made on the basis of language’, and celebrates its translation into more than 500 languages.

UNESCO also uses the day to focus on linguistic diversity and multilingualism as an integral part of sustainable development, and in particular to realize targets 4.6 and 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on education.

The SDGs depend on linguistic diversity and multilingualism as a vital contribution to global citizenship education as they promote intercultural connections and better ways of living together.

