



7TH MoU CONFERENCE



Opening of the seventh conference of the network of universities
that signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations
on cooperation in preparing candidates for
the United Nations competitive examinations for language
positions (MoU universities)

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Remarks by Movses Abelian

Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference
Management and United Nations Coordinator for Multilingualism

Distinguished Executive Secretary Rola Dashti,
Distinguished deans and participants,
Dear colleagues,

It is my privilege and honour to give some introductory remarks to open this seventh edition of the conference bringing together the United Nations and partner universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in preparing candidates for the United Nations competitive examinations for language positions.

On behalf of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, I wish to thank our host, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and its Executive Secretary, Under-Secretary-General Ms. Rola Dashti, for her hospitality and the initiative and determination shown in turning what is traditionally an in-person meeting into a fully virtual conference.

This biennial meeting with partner universities is critically important to the UN, to succession planning in our language services and, beyond that, to the upholding of multilingualism – a core value of our Organization. In the current context, where language professions and training institutions have had to reinvent themselves almost overnight to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that the communication channel between the supply and demand sides of the profession remain open. There are many uncertainties and differing opinions as to what the “new normal” will look like in the future. Therefore, in these exceptional times, we should continue to discuss our needs and possible capacity gaps, but also, importantly, the potential that new working methods may unlock.



7TH MoU CONFERENCE



I wish to thank our partner universities for working with us over the years. Your students have been, and will continue to be, the future workforce of the United Nations. Our joint investment is paying off: the future of the language workforce at the UN looks bright and we have made real progress in creating a vibrant and skilled pool of language professionals. It is a pleasure to be part of this conference, where we will not only review where we are now and where we are going, but also celebrate the fruitful alliance between your universities and the UN.

I am particularly inspired by the number of participants and the fact that, for the first time since the inception of the UN's outreach programme in 2007, all the member universities of the MoU network are represented. The conference's virtual format has certainly contributed to the high attendance rate as it is now easily accessible from all over the world. Paradoxically, remote meetings are, in a sense, bringing the world closer together. The same is true of our cooperation. When universities shifted to virtual environments last year, so did our outreach activities. Our colleagues in the language services took the opportunity:

- To further cooperation with academia,
- To provide continued support to the next generation of language professionals when it was needed the most,
- To rethink the way we conduct competitive examinations for staff positions and revamp tests for temporary positions,
- To develop new training tools for language professionals and rethink the way we hold internships,
- To continue to leverage new technologies, and
- To expand the horizon of our outreach programme to raise awareness and achieve greater diversity in UN language careers.

These aspects will be developed during the presentations, but speaking of diversity, as you probably know, one area that our department takes great pride in is the fact that it has achieved gender parity at all levels, including senior positions. Last month, the Secretary-General appointed Ms. Cherith Norman – Chalet as my deputy. She will be delivering closing remarks on Wednesday and will attend the conference as her schedule allows.



7TH MoU CONFERENCE



Although this platform does not allow me to see you all, I am pleased to note that the member organizations of the MoU network have designated a high number of female representatives to the conference. Nearly 140 female university and UN participants – more than 70 per cent – have registered. This is undoubtedly a fair reflection of the outstanding and indispensable contribution made by women to our outreach programme and the language professions at large.

I know that you are all eager to get to work, so in closing, I should like to again thank our host, ESCWA, and in particular Ms. Nidale Noun, the Chief of its Conference Management Section, and her team, as well as all our partner universities for enabling a direct and open dialogue on what has worked in these unprecedented times and where further concerted action is needed to take our cooperation to the next level.

I should also like to express my warmest thanks to all the student interpreters from partner universities who have taken on the challenge of interpreting at a conference attended by language professionals and academics. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your skills. Achieving a balanced representation of all UN official languages is of particular importance to me, in my capacity as UN Coordinator for Multilingualism, and I thank all of you for making this a reality.

I wish you a successful conference, full of lively interaction and engagement and sharing of knowledge and experience, from both the UN angle and the university perspective. I have no doubt that it will be a rewarding experience for everyone.

Thank you.