**DG’s draft remarks for Arabic language Day, 19 January 2016.**

[Representative of the Government of Kenya],

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

UN Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to UNON, and to offer greetings to all those taking part in this observance of the International Day of the Arabic Language.

Let me express my appreciation to the Group of Arab Ambassadors in Nairobi, particularly the Mission of the League of Arab States, for organizing this event, and for choosing the United Nations Office at Nairobi as the venue.

This is an appropriate place to hold this event, here at the only UN Headquarters in Africa and the entire global South. Multilingualism is very important for the United Nations and is an essential factor for advancing the ideals and work of the Organisation – from peace and security, to sustainable development to human rights.

Multilingualism is a formidable force for the rapprochement of peoples and cultures. It promotes tolerance, harmonious relations and mutual understanding.

Languages reflect perspectives, traditions, collective memories and unique modes of expression, which are all precious resources for building a better world.

That is why the UN Department of Public Information, in 2010, decided to designate different days in the year to celebrate each of the six official languages of the UN, including, of course, Arabic.

The dates for the Language Days were selected for their symbolic or historical significance in connection with each language. Arabic language Day was set on 8 December, the date on which the UN General Assembly designated Arabic as the sixth official language in 1973.

Today’s event is taking place a few weeks after the official date, but that does not diminish the significance of this celebration in any way.

The Language Days, whenever they are celebrated, provide a good opportunity to raise awareness about the history, culture and achievements associated with each of the languages. By celebrating the Arabic language, we are acknowledging, for example, the great contributions of its writers, scientists and artists to universal culture.

According to UNESCO, Arabic is spoken by more than 422 million people in the Arab world and used by more than 1.5 billion Muslims around the world. Arabic-speaking Member States are a crucial component of the United Nations, and the UN system is very present in the Arab World, including on the African continent.

The power of linguistic and cultural diversity to forge close ties and to bring peoples together is at the heart of the UN’s mission and greatly facilitates the work of this Organization.

In that spirit, I wish you all a pleasant and informative celebration of this Arabic Language Day.

Shoukran jazelan!