

General Secretariat statement on Arabic Language Day 2024

General Secretariat

Social Affairs Sector

Department of Culture and Dialogue of Civilisations

The statement of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States

Delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Dr. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh

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On Arabic Language Day

General Secretariat, Grand Hall

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Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome you all to today's celebration of the Arabic Language Day, observed annually on 18 December, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3190, adopted on this date in 1973. This resolution recognised Arabic as one of the official and working languages of the United Nations.

Allow me to extend the warm greetings of His Excellency the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who conveys his heartfelt wishes for the success of this auspicious occasion.

The Arabic language holds a distinguished position among the world's languages. It is not only one of the oldest in the Semitic family but also the largest in terms of speakers, with over 422 million individuals across the Arab world, in addition to significant numbers in other regions. Globally, Arabic ranks among the top four languages used on the Internet, surpassing languages like French and Russian in growth and reach.

Arabic's profound significance extends beyond its role as a mode of communication. It is the sacred language of the Holy Quran, endowing it with unparalleled importance to Muslims worldwide. Furthermore, it serves as a liturgical language in numerous Christian houses of worship within the Arab world, reflecting its role as a unifying medium across diverse communities.

Deeply embedded in Arab culture, heritage, and literature, Arabic forms the cornerstone of Arab civilisation. It is celebrated for its unparalleled linguistic richness, encompassing a vast array of creative expressions, terminologies, scripts, and meanings. The Arabic lexicon is uniquely expansive, offering linguistic nuances rarely found in other languages.

This depth and versatility have enabled Arabic to make significant contributions to global literature, arts, and sciences. Its influence has transcended linguistic boundaries, enriching other languages with its vocabulary while also embracing terms from other cultures, creating a dynamic exchange of knowledge and ideas.

Today, we reaffirm our pride in the Arabic language as a symbol of our identity and a vital tool for fostering dialogue, understanding, and innovation on a global scale.

Distinguished guests,

Our beloved Arabic language is confronting numerous challenges, both external and internal. Externally, there are deliberate attempts to strip the rising generations of their identity and diminish the presence of the Arabic language. These efforts are compounded by the regional and international transformations we are experiencing, which have emboldened adversaries of Arabism and the Arab identity to question our history, civilisation, and cultural essence.

Internally, the challenges are no less significant. Within the Arab world itself, we are witnessing a shift among the younger generations, who increasingly use foreign languages in their daily lives instead of their mother tongue. This shift is driven by societal misconceptions that prioritise other languages over Arabic. The phenomenon of bilingualism has further complicated the teaching and learning of Arabic, resulting in an alarming reality: a growing segment of Arab children no longer speak Arabic fluently, with some even considering English as their primary language.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted and innovative approach. Empowering the Arabic language calls for intensified research, creative ideas, and forward-looking visions to develop its teaching and learning. We must proactively anticipate and address the obstacles facing Arabic, exchange expertise in advancing its education, and leverage modern tools and technologies to enhance its teaching methodologies. This includes encouraging researchers to propose actionable solutions, grounded in both scientific and applied fields, to revitalise the Arabic language and its role in our lives.

Undoubtedly, Arabic, as our national language, is a profound treasure and the primary vessel for preserving our esteemed heritage. In this era of rapid progress, it is imperative that we transmit this rich legacy to future generations. Let us take inspiration from the example of Japan, which rose to prominence by steadfastly adhering to its mother tongue, achieving global leadership in science, technology, and culture. Indeed, the mother tongue is the cornerstone of identity.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the necessity of aligning with the demands of the modern era. It is neither practical nor wise to confront contemporary challenges with outdated tools. Instead, we must integrate authenticity with modernity, particularly in light of the swift technological advancements and the widespread accessibility of information.

Therefore, it is essential to harness the power of information and media technologies within the educational system to create a seamless integration that advances the Arabic language and enhances its use across all domains. By doing so, we ensure that Arabic continues to flourish as both a symbol of our identity and a dynamic medium for engaging with the modern world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its inception, the League of Arab States has placed immense emphasis on the promotion of the Arabic language, recognising it as a cornerstone of Arab cultural identity. This commitment has been reaffirmed through numerous Arab summits, underscoring its vital role in preserving our heritage and fostering unity across the region. Over the years, the League has initiated a series of significant projects aimed at advancing the

Arabic language, including the establishment of the Higher Institute for Translation, the Arabic Repository Project—a comprehensive data bank for Arabic texts across diverse knowledge domains—the Arabization Coordination Office, and the Khartoum International Institute for the Arabic Language, among other institutes and centres.

The League has also played a pivotal role in implementing the Arabic Language Promotion Project, which was endorsed by the Arab Summit in Damascus in 2008. The outcomes of this initiative have been realised through the collaborative efforts of various bodies affiliated with the League, such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organisation. Additional projects include teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and facilitating the exchange of translations with countries and regional as well as international blocs.

Currently, the General Secretariat is working on updating the Arab Strategy for the Advancement of the Arabic Language under the theme, "Empowering the Arabic Language: A Symbol of Our Identity and a Tool for Its Development." This endeavour is being carried out in accordance with Economic and Social Council Resolution 2446, issued during its 114th ordinary session on 5 September 2024. The strategy is designed to address the evolving global landscape and the persistent challenges confronting the Arabic language and identity. The strategy is structured around four key axes: Arabic and Education; Arabic and Media; Arabic and Communication; the Arabic Script.

The General Secretariat is committed to updating the accompanying executive plan, convening meetings with relevant organisations, and

coordinating with member states to ensure its effective implementation and approval.

The Economic and Social Council also adopted Resolution 2445 of 2024, welcoming the Arab Reading Challenge initiative launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives Foundation. This creative cultural and educational project has been embraced as a vital initiative, with the Council urging Arab ministries of education to adopt and integrate it into their curricula, disseminate it widely, and provide the necessary support wherever feasible.

To cultivate a generation deeply rooted in its identity and heritage, the esteemed International Council for the Arabic Language proposed the Arabic Language Month initiative. This initiative, approved by the League's Council at the ministerial level in September 2022, designates the period from 21 February to 22 March each year as a time for active engagement, including training programs, the presentation of initiatives, honours, competitions, and celebrations dedicated to the Arabic language.

This year's celebration of Arabic Language Day carries special significance. In recognition of the League's enduring contributions to the advancement of the Arabic language, and as part of the memorandum of understanding between the General Secretariat and the International Council for the Arabic Language, the League has been directly associated with this global occasion. This linkage stands as a testament to the League's leadership and pivotal role in championing Arab and international efforts to elevate the status of the Arabic language.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all the participants and everyone who contributed to the success of this significant day. Special thanks are due to the International Council for the Arabic Language for its pioneering efforts in serving the Arabic language, as well as to everyone involved in organising and facilitating the celebration activities to achieve their intended goals.

Let us reflect on the fact that this year's Arabic Language Day takes place amidst challenging regional and international circumstances that surround our Arab world. The continued Israeli violations in the region, the suffering endured by Palestine and Lebanon, and Israel's illegal ambitions—exploiting the internal situation in Syria—pose serious threats to the security and stability of these countries and the region as a whole.

History has repeatedly shown us that colonialism does not merely usurp land but also attempts to erase heritage and cultural legacies that have been deeply rooted in history. Thus, it is our collective responsibility to safeguard our heritage, culture, and language from any obliteration attempts, and to ensure the preservation of Arab cultural security in its entirety.

May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you