

French Language Day at the United Nations
20 March 2017, 1.15-2.45PM
ECOSOC Chamber

**Transcript of the remarks by Ms. Catherine Pollard
Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management
Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism**

Question from the moderator (Ms. Melissa Kent, CBC/Radio Canada):

Multilingualism was recently recognized as a core value of the United Nations. Could you tell us more about your role as Secretariat-wide Coordinator for Multilingualism?

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs, Chers collègues,

First of all let me begin by warmly thanking the OIF, which requested my collaboration for this event, and all our panel members and interviewees for their interest and openness to other language groups, and our shared commitment to realizing the full potential of the UN through multilingualism.

My role of Secretariat-wide Coordinator is closely intertwined with the francophone group. Interestingly enough, this group was very instrumental in adding the the UN General Assembly agenda in 1995. And a few years later, the UNGA requested the Secretary-General, through this very resolution on multilingualism, to designate a senior official to serve as Coordinator. So,

I would say that over the past few months – it has been less than a year – we have managed to achieve a lot:

we certainly have reactivated the network of focal points,

we are just completing the Secretary-General's report on multilingualism, which was a lot of consultations with all of the entities in the Secretariat,

we've added a webpage on DGACM website, dedicated to multilingualism and it's in all six official languages

we've upgraded our social media presence

and we've seized every opportunity to raise awareness both of internal and external audiences. This is why I am here today. Also internally,

And a lot of it relate to the area of human resources, and also which have not come up here in the area of procurement. So our colleagues in human resources have been asked to come up with a series of measures and initiatives that they will pursue, together with the Department of Field Support, so that we can address this issue, including doing a mapping of the language skills of all of our 44 000 staff across the Organization. So, to get some idea of the baseline and the inventory of where we actually are, so we can see how we are going to be able to respond to this very practical issue that we have.

On a larger issue, in a larger sense, of course I would say that the common expectation would be to talk about a lack of resources. Yes, of course, everything has a cost. But we have to bring best practices and innovative measures to bear on how we actually tackle this. So, I am not going to sit here and make a pitch for resources because I know very well in terms of how the Organization works. Nevertheless, we will get on with what we have to do, because this is not a new mandate. It has always been a mandate of the Organization. We just have to get on with being very conscious of it and to do it. And the cost of not doing it, I would say, is greater than actually whatever investment we might make now. And I think that my colleagues on the podium have given some clear examples of some of that impact.

We can also see some of the positive benefits of it. Just two years ago, in 2015, we had a number of intergovernmental successes, with financing for development, the adoption of the SDGs, we had the climate change agreement. And