

Background Information on the Celebration of International Mother Language Day on 27 February 2009 by the Society of Foreign Consuls in New York in collaboration with, and support of, the Turkish Cultural Center in Manhattan.

A. What is International Mother Language Day?

Languages are at the very heart of UNESCO's objectives. They are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. 21 February was proclaimed as the International Mother Language Day by the Paris based UNESCO on 17 November 1999. Its observance was also formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution establishing 2008 as the International Year of Languages. The International Mother Language Day is being observed every year in UNESCO's Member States and at its Headquarters to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to development fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue. Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue. More information available at: UNESCO <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/language/index.html> and UNESCO Resolution http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=19644&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

B. History of the Day:

On that day of 21 February 1952, corresponding to 8 Falgun 1359 in the Bangla calendar, a number of students campaigning for the recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan were killed when police fired upon them. Mohammed Ali Jinnah (the Governor General of Pakistan) declared that the Urdu will be the only language for both west and East Pakistan at a public meeting on 1948, 21 March. The people of the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh, whose main language is Bengali) started to protest against this. A student meeting on 21 February 1952 called for a province-wide strike. But the government invoked Section 144 on 20 February. The student community at a meeting on the morning of 21 February agreed to continue with their protest but not to break the law of Section 144. Even then the police opened fire and killed the students.

Eventually, the Government of erstwhile Pakistan had to give in and Bangla was also accepted as the State Language of Pakistan alongside Urdu. Since then the people of East Pakistan celebrated the day as Language Martyr's Day. After the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 through the war of independence, the Day had been celebrated by the people of Bangladesh as the National Language Day or the National Martyr's Day. After UNESCO adopted 21 February as International Mother Language Day, in line with its mission of promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism, the Day has been celebrated in Bangladesh as National Martyr's Day and International Mother Language Day with the support of Diplomatic Corps in Dhaka while the UNESCO celebrates this day as International Mother Language Day.

C. Celebration of International Mother Language Day in New York.

Civil Society Organizations of Bangladeshi Expatriate Community in the USA celebrates this day as International Mother Language Day on 21 February with the support of other mainstream organizations. Last year, the New York based Society of Foreign Consuls decided to celebrate the day as the International

Mother Language Day. Bangladesh Consul-General, as the Regional Vice President of the Society has been entrusted with the task of coordinating with partnering organizations. Since the day is celebrated by all Bangladeshi organization in New York on 21 February and as a first ever initiative, still we have to rely on more participants from Bangladesh to gather a critical mass of attendees, we chose the following week of 27 February to celebrate the day. We deeply appreciate Turkish Cultural Center's support and agreeing to sponsor the event on 27 February.

D. The Framework of the Program is given below;

International Mother Language Day 2009

27 February 2009

Jointly organized by the Society of Foreign Consuls in New York
and sponsored by the Turkish Cultural Center in New York

6:00-9:00 PM

Program Outline:

- Address of Welcome by the President/Executive Director of the Turkish Cultural Center
- Inaugural Remarks by the President of the Society of Foreign Consuls, Consul General of Indonesia
- Brief History of the International Mother Language Day by the Consul-General of Bangladesh
- Laying floral wreaths at the makeshift/symbolic Monument of International Mother Language
- (2 Minutes each) Greetings by the US Dignitaries
- (2 Minutes each) Greetings by the Consul-Generals of participating countries
- (2 Minutes each) Greetings by Civil Society Organization Leaders
- Multicultural performance by artists from different countries (One from each country, Turkey may take more as host)
- Decorative artworks or cultural items and A and B equivalent of alphabets of each official language participating countries may be displayed on the walls or sides of the hall.
- Dignitaries like the Federal and State Senators and Congressmen/Assemblymen, City Council Members, State and City Education Department Officials, Some Academicians, Civil Society Organizations engaged in promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism, members of print and electronic media from different countries may be invited to the function.
- Invitation fliers with joint logo of the Society of Foreign Consuls and the Turkish Cultural Center may be printed or circulated.