



21 March 2014- Today the United Nations observes not one, but five days around the world.

The 21st of March marks The International Day of Forests. Forests cover one third of the Earth's landmass, performing vital functions around the world. Around 1.6 billion people - including more than 2,000 indigenous cultures - depend on forests for their livelihood. Forests are the most biologically diverse ecosystems on land, home to more than half of the terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects. Forests also provide shelter, jobs and security for forest-dependent populations. Yet despite all of these priceless ecological, economic, social and health benefits, we are destroying the very forests we need to survive. Global deforestation continues at an alarming rate - 13 million hectares of forest are destroyed annually. Deforestation accounts for 12 to 20 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on this day [reminds us](#) of the importance of forests, not only to our ecosystems and our economy, but also for the medicines they provide and the many non-monetary benefits they bring to our lives everyday. Beyond awareness he calls on the international community to take action, "awareness must be coupled with concrete action. As we deliberate on the post-2015 development agenda, let us acknowledge the vital role of forests and pledge to work together to protect and sustainably manage these vital ecosystems."

The [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) is also marked on the 21st of March. On this day, in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid laws in Sharpeville, South Africa. This year the world commemorates this day for the first time after the death of former South African President Nelson Mandela. He chose Sharpeville for the historic signing of South Africa's new Constitution in 1996. On that occasion, President Mandela said, "Out of the many Sharpevilles which haunt our history was born the unshakeable determination that respect for human life, liberty and well-being must be enshrined as rights beyond the power of any force to diminish." Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calls on all people of the world to, "acknowledge that racial discrimination remains a dangerous threat and resolve to tackle it through dialogue inspired by the proven ability of individuals to respect, protect and defend our rich diversity as one human family."

The 21st of March also sees the celebration of [World Poetry Day](#) . As a deep expression of the human mind and as a universal art, poetry is a tool for dialogue and rapprochement. The dissemination of poetry helps to promote dialogue among cultures and understanding between peoples because it gives access to the authentic expression of a language. Poetry contributes to creative diversity, by questioning anew our use of words and things, our modes of perception and understanding of the world. Through its associations, its metaphors and its own grammar, poetic language is thus conceivably another facet of the dialogue among cultures. World Poetry Day is an invitation to reflect on the power of language and the full development of each person's creative abilities. UNESCO Director-General

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said of poetry, "Through its words and its rhythm, poetry gives shape to our dreams of peace, justice and dignity, and gives us the strength and desire to mobilize to make them real."

The word Nowruz means new day; its spelling and pronunciation may vary by country. So on the 21st of March we celebrate The [International Day of Nowruz](#) , which marks the first day of spring and is celebrated on the day of the astronomical vernal equinox, which usually occurs on 21 March. It is celebrated as the beginning of the new year by more than 300 million people all around the world and has been celebrated for over 3000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions. Nowruz plays a significant role in strengthening the ties among peoples based on mutual respect and the ideals of peace and good neighbourliness. Its traditions and rituals reflect the cultural and ancient customs of the civilizations of the East and West, which influenced those civilizations through the interchange of human values. The Day of Nowruz promotes values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and different communities. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calls for increased global solidarity on this day, "At this time of global change, when all societies face new pressures, the need for solidarity between all people and harmony with our planet has never been more essential."

Today we also observe [World Down Syndrome Day](#) . Down Syndrome is a naturally occurring

chromosomal arrangement that has always been a part of the human condition, exists in all regions across the globe and commonly results in variable effects on learning styles, physical characteristics or health. Adequate access to health care, to early intervention programmes and to inclusive education, as well as appropriate research are vital to the growth and development of the individual. Individuals with Down Syndrome can achieve optimal quality of life through parental care and support, medical guidance and community based support systems like inclusive education at all levels. This facilitates their participation in mainstream society and the fulfillment of their personal potential. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon underlined that this year the day should focus on, "Health and Wellbeing – Access and Equality for All" which is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He furthermore calls upon the international community to "take concrete action now towards the inclusion of all persons with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome."