International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) Secretary-General Louise Mushikiwabo has called for greater connections between people across the French-speaking world, saying the organisation should extend beyond diplomatic meetings to create opportunities for cultural exchange and shared experiences.

She made the remarks on Friday, November 13, at the opening of the Village de la Francophonie in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, an event bringing together countries from across the Francophone community ahead of the organisation’s 20th summit.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Mushikiwabo inaugurated the village at Wat Botum Park, where national pavilions, exhibitions, food stalls and cultural performances are showcasing the diversity of participating countries.

Mushikiwabo said the village demonstrated the importance of creating spaces where people could meet and learn about one another, rather than limiting Francophonie to official discussions between governments.

“This is also the magic of the Francophonie: bringing together peoples, histories and sensibilities that might otherwise never have had the chance to cross paths,” she said.

She described Cambodia’s hosting of the event as evidence of its strong relationship with the Francophone community and its desire to make the summit a celebration open to the public.

The Cambodian prime minister said the village was an opportunity to celebrate the country’s ties with Francophonie while bringing people from different backgrounds together.

“For our country, this is a moment of pride, a moment of unity, and a moment of celebration,” Hun Manet said.

He also described French as a language of memory, study, knowledge and friendship in Cambodia.

The event features 73 pavilions representing Francophone countries and partners, as well as 130 exhibition booths displaying products, initiatives and expertise from institutions, businesses and artisans. A gastronomy section has 30 food booths,

while conferences, roundtable discussions and cultural performances are scheduled throughout the programme.

The village is free and open to the public until November 17. Organisers expect about 100,000 visitors from Cambodia and abroad.

The opening ceremony included performances by Cambodian artists and Rwanda’s National Ballet.

The village is part of the programme leading up to the 20th Francophonie Summit, scheduled for November 15 and 16 in Phnom Penh. Leaders and representatives of OIF member states and governments are expected to discuss cooperation on peace, security, economic development, education and culture.

The summit’s theme is “Reinvest in Peace for Shared Prosperity and Lasting Stability”.