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Chair: Mr. Kemayah, Sr. (Liberia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 58: Questions relating to information
(continued) (A/73/21 and A/73/288)

1. **Mr. Misra** (India) said that the Department of Public Information was to be commended for publicizing the work of the United Nations in overcoming some of the most important challenges of the day and for bringing that work closer to the public through its outreach activities. Particularly significant were the efforts of the Department, in conjunction with the United Nations information centres and other departments, to raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals and their interrelationship; the urgency of action on climate change and the preparations for the 2019 Climate Summit; United Nations peacekeeping operations worldwide; and collaborative counter-terrorism efforts.

2. While the peacekeeping website was maintained in all six official languages, adding the main languages of the major troop-contributing countries would boost the website's reach. As part of the extensive work done by the Department's News and Media Division and Outreach Division, the commendable Academic Impact initiative had attracted a welcome increase in membership from among South Asian institutions. The multilingual guided tours at United Nations Headquarters, recently expanded in response to their popularity, should certainly be given also in Hindi to accommodate the many Indian tourists.

3. Genuine multilingualism promoted unity in diversity and international understanding. Providing information in many languages, however, particularly in non-official languages, entailed a financial burden, and the Department had to identify innovative ways of raising extrabudgetary resources, including through voluntary contributions, especially for the most widely spoken non-official languages. Given the growing interconnectedness of the challenges faced, multilingual outreach was more essential than ever.

4. **Mr. Lynn** (Myanmar) said that his Government recognized the crucial role played by the Committee on Information in overseeing United Nations public information policies and activities, and the valuable work done by the Department of Public Information in promoting global awareness and understanding of United Nations activities. The Department had shown real dedication and professionalism in conducting the very necessary review and reform tasks requested by the Secretary-General, and Myanmar supported its renaming as the Department of Global Communications. It had also been effective in engaging young people in

support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by such means as the use of social media and innovative technology, the convening of a global student video conference on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in September 2018 and the expansion of the Academic Impact network. It deserved recognition for its collaborative work to promote peace and security, especially in the areas of counter-terrorism, humanitarian affairs and the combat of sexual exploitation and abuse. It had organized activities to celebrate the 2018 International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, and as a troop-contributing country, Myanmar urged the Department to strengthen its collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support, the Department of Political Affairs and the Peacebuilding Support Office.

5. Highlighting the dangers of "fake" news, which spread intolerance, hatred and extremism, his delegation urged the Department and the United Nations information centres, which played a pivotal role in disseminating information about United Nations activities, to remain objective and impartial and to promote factual, accurate and reliable information.

6. Supporting the Department's efforts to reach out especially to people in developing countries with limited access to information, Myanmar urged the United Nations to maintain its traditional methods of disseminating information and called on all countries with advanced communications technologies to work with developing countries in order to bridge the digital divide and strengthen the United Nations information and communications strategy. Since language remained a barrier to communication in developing countries, multilingualism was essential in promoting unity in diversity and international understanding.

7. The Department should stay abreast of rapid technological changes when planning its future activities. Myanmar had benefited from such developments: the price of mobile phones had decreased and network coverage and speed had increased dramatically, allowing greater access to both conventional and social media. In addition, media and press censorship had been abolished years earlier, and the Government was liberalizing the telecommunications sector to attract foreign investment, create employment and develop local information and communications industries. Conferences on media development had been held periodically, and they had led to media strategies to promote democracy, good governance, transparency and accountability. Myanmar regularly celebrated various United Nations international days, in particular United Nations Day, as

a way of demonstrating its commitment to the United Nations and disseminating information to the public.

8. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country attached great importance to the establishment of a new world information order that was more just and effective, that more closely upheld the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and that served the needs of peoples around the world and embodied their cultural and civilizational values. The Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information were responsible for ensuring that the United Nations message of peace reached all corners of the world, especially at a time when conflicts and cross-border challenges were on the rise. The media had a significant impact on public opinion and were capable of not only reporting events but also influencing or even creating them. His delegation was concerned about certain biased media outlets that failed to respect journalistic standards, misrepresented facts to serve narrow political agendas and instigated terrorism and violence instead of promoting a culture of peace. The United Nations must take care to use only trusted, impartial, non-politicized information sources.

9. Welcoming the publication by numerous international media outlets of reliable reports on the reality of the situation in his country, in particular with regard to the activities there by armed terrorist groups affiliated to Al-Qaida, the Syrian Arab Republic denounced the targeting of journalists by such groups, in particular the abominable actions of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). His delegation rejected the description of terrorist groups as “armed resistance”, “moderate armed resistance” or “non-State armed groups” by prominent United Nations representatives and the authors of certain reports. As those individuals were aware, such groups were, in fact, armed terrorist groups, the most notable of which was the Nusrah Front, classified by the Security Council as a terrorist group linked to Al-Qaida.

10. The Department of Public Information must continue to conduct its special information programme on the question of Palestine, given the enduring suffering of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the denial of the people’s legitimate rights, including the right to establish an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. Furthermore, the Department needed to achieve parity among the official languages of the United Nations and remedy the deficiencies of the Arabic-language website.

11. In the process, the Department could play an important role in encouraging dialogue and building

understanding among cultures and peoples. Freedom of expression was a universal right that should never be used to attack the beliefs, holy sites or heritage of others. All States should support the work of the Department to promote the message of the United Nations and tackle pressing global issues such as eliminating all forms of occupation, combating terrorism and promoting sustainable development.

12. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) said that, although the clear increase in worldwide interest in the work of the United Nations, as shown by the rise in the number of users of its social media accounts and websites across multiple languages, was positive, it should not be forgotten that large educational and cultural gaps persisted around the world and that many individuals did not have access to social media or even know of their existence. Cuba was concerned that many millions of adults still did not know how to read or write and that illiteracy among the poorest adolescents in developing countries was not expected to be eradicated for half a century. It called on the United Nations to remedy the situation and ensure that its message was able to reach all individuals.

13. Cuba supported the Secretary-General’s efforts to reform the management of information and communications with a view to ensuring the rapid, strategic and integrated communication of United Nations messages to all persons in their own languages via digital and traditional media. It was important that the United Nations continue to use traditional methods of communication to reach those who were unable to use the Internet and that it work to eliminate the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

14. His delegation was concerned that press releases continued to be issued in French and English only, despite the fact that Spanish was the second most commonly spoken language worldwide and the second most frequently used to access United Nations websites and other products. While reforming the Department, it was essential that the United Nations uphold the priorities set out by the Committee on Information, in particular multilingualism, but it should also consult with Member States and ensure that no communication tools that had been proven to be efficient were discarded.

15. Cuba supported the special information programme on the question of Palestine, which helped provide training to Palestinian journalists. It also called on the Department and the United Nations information centres to continue to promote information about the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, at no extra cost.

16. His Government was giving priority to digitizing Cuban society, and had included the promotion of connectivity and Internet access as a strategic part of its national development plan to the year 2030. Such efforts were hindered by the illegal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the Government of the United States of America, however. Cuba condemned the aggressive use by that Government of Cuban radio and television networks with the aim of undermining the constitutional order established by the Cuban people. Such actions violated the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of the International Telecommunication Union. Communications technologies should be used in a manner that complied with international law, the Charter, internationally recognized norms for peaceful coexistence and the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Cuba rejected in particular the decision of the United States Department of State to establish the “Cuba Internet Task Force”, supposedly to promote the free and unregulated flow of information in Cuba, because such action violated its national competence to regulate information flow and the use of mass media and represented an attempt to manipulate the Internet in order to conduct illegal programmes for subversive political purposes. Cuba remained committed to establishing a new, more just world information and communications order.

17. **Mr. Nikolenko** (Ukraine) said that it was necessary to transform the Department of Public Information into a leading global provider of information about the work of the United Nations. Efforts to reform the Department were therefore welcome, especially in the areas of leadership and strategy, resource management and operational efficiency, with a view to providing rapid, integrated communications and engaging people in languages they understood via media platforms, with a particular focus on modern digital media.

18. Because professional journalism and independent and pluralistic media played a decisive role in democratic transformation in any country, his Government remained committed to protecting freedom of expression and improving the safety of journalists. The biggest threat to media freedom and security in Ukraine was the ongoing Russian military aggression. The Russian Government had launched a massive propaganda and hate campaign against Ukraine and Ukrainians on prime-time television, which had fuelled the occupation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas. Those areas, in addition to the city of Sevastopol, were under illegal Russian occupation and had been converted into “exclusion zones” for Ukrainian media

outlets. In its reports, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had called on the Russian Federation to refrain from criminalizing free speech and to rescind all penalties imposed on Crimean residents for expressing dissenting views, including any regarding the status of Crimea.

19. The Russian Federation was also targeting activists and journalists who opposed its occupation. Citing the cases of two prominent journalists who had been incarcerated, one by Russian forces in Ukraine and the other as a foreign correspondent in the Russian Federation, his delegation urged all States to condemn such cynical violations of human rights and put pressure on the Russian Federation to ensure the release of all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

20. Such hostile practices by State-controlled media posed a direct threat to United Nations values. The Committee and other United Nations bodies should react swiftly to all attempts to falsify information in order to fuel regional conflicts and should hold accountable all parties who engaged in propaganda wars. The international community should redouble its efforts to identify best practices to overcome that global threat, as information security was essential to national security anywhere.

21. **Ms. Mills** (Jamaica) said that it was essential that the United Nations use the tools at its disposal in an effective manner in order to bring it closer to ordinary citizens, and that candid information be provided about the challenges faced and the opportunities available. Commending the work of the Department of Public Information, she welcomed the reform in progress, including the change of name, which would prompt it to adapt to global trends in the field and demonstrate the continued relevance of multilateralism as a central tenet of the work of the United Nations. Her delegation looked forward to receiving periodic updates on the progress made and encouraged the Department to take into account the views of Member States and of staff members on the reforms.

22. Technological developments presented both challenges and opportunities in terms of the Department’s presentation and dissemination of information. Jamaica was pleased that the Secretary-General acknowledged in his report ([A/73/288](#)) the need for balance between the use of traditional and modern communication tools in order to ensure that the reach of United Nations activities was not compromised. The Organization’s internal communication tools also needed improvement if it was to take advantage of the wealth of information available within it, and there

should thus be greater parity in the dissemination of information in all official languages.

23. The Secretary-General had provided welcome information on the events and activities in which the Department had been engaged in the preceding seven months, in particular the activities to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As an active member of the Committee on Information, Jamaica continued to play its part in support of key messages of the United Nations. It had developed a comprehensive national communications package to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals were made relatable both to national development priorities and to citizens, in the belief that targeted communication and advocacy were essential, particularly for vulnerable groups. In addition, the Jamaican Ministry of Education, Youth and Information had launched a records and information management programme under which all government activities and decisions would be fully and accurately documented, managed and monitored in order to facilitate the delivery of accessible, efficient and effective services for all citizens. Jamaica remained committed to supporting the efforts of the United Nations to enhance capacities, build synergies and carry out diverse and wide-reaching outreach programmes.

24. **Ms. Samarasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that her country continued to support the Department of Public Information in its important efforts to disseminate information and to project a positive and inspiring image of the United Nations around the world, particularly at a time when multilateralism was at serious risk. With rapid technological advances came grave threats, as extremist voices manipulated social media and hijacked democratic spaces. Sri Lanka valued the Department's efforts to increase its social media presence in order to demonstrate the relevance and impact of the United Nations to a wide range of audiences and in multiple languages. It was heartening that content relating to the Sustainable Development Goals had been especially popular among users of the website and social media.

25. As the changing face of terrorism and violent extremism posed new challenges, driven by rapid technological advancement, porous borders and large-scale migration as a result of violence, the Department had provided valuable support to the Office of Counter-Terrorism in planning communications activities, which had included the observance of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism. As a troop-contributing country, Sri Lanka recognized the importance of disseminating information on United Nations peacekeeping operations and

commended the cooperation between the Department and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in that regard.

26. As a main sponsor of World Youth Skills Day, Sri Lanka thanked the Department for its support in organizing an event on youth skills for sustainability and innovation, in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Sri Lanka also welcomed the planned reform of the Department, in particular the commitment made by the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications to improve the communication of priorities established by Member States.

27. The United Nations could not turn a blind eye to the incarceration, disappearance and murder of bloggers and journalists around the world or to the muzzling of the media by regimes, and it had a duty to hold them responsible for such actions. As a former colonial Territory, during which time a culture of impunity had prevailed, Sri Lanka was conscious of the value of a nation built on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Freedom of information was the cornerstone of democracy, without which peace, development and human rights could not be attained. Sri Lanka therefore welcomed the resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/73/21), which urged all countries to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them. Sri Lanka was confident that the Department's work would help the United Nations promote tolerance and assist developing countries in confronting the challenges posed by development.

28. **Ms. El Zaghloul** (Costa Rica) said that the Secretary-General highlighted in his report the proactive manner in which the Department of Public Information approached its mandate. The Department should continue to work with other departments and agencies of the United Nations, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Political Affairs, in order to publicize and support activities in the areas of disarmament, counter-terrorism, sustainable development, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the promotion of justice, international law and human rights.

29. Costa Rica welcomed the Department's new integrated multimedia website, which allowed news to

be disseminated more quickly and efficiently, and commended the development of programmes adapted to the changing needs of their audiences, including the collaboration with United Nations information centres to present local interest reports for the public in Latin American countries. Given the fact that, between March and May 2018, Spanish had been the second most frequently used language to access United Nations News, it was disappointing that daily press releases for the General Assembly and the Security Council were not yet published in Spanish, and the Department should continue to do better in that regard.

30. Costa Rica firmly supported all initiatives to promote a greater balance in the use of the official languages of the United Nations, where much remained to be done. Webcasts of the most important United Nations meetings should continue to be transmitted and archived in all official languages. Multilingualism was an essential part of the United Nations, and the principle must be implemented in all United Nations communications.

31. Open, transparent, participative and multidirectional information flows were indispensable to promoting development, generating opportunities, boosting creativity and innovation, supporting democratic coexistence, increasing transparency and fighting corruption. It was therefore essential that the Department provide equal coverage for all summits, international conferences and high-level meetings organized by the General Assembly.

32. Despite the educational and socioeconomic disadvantages that they often faced, young persons were crucial to the dynamic that led to tangible change. Capacity-building for young persons was therefore fundamental if new possibilities for social, economic, environmental, political and cultural participation were to be created. Costa Rica had been developing initiatives to engage young persons, such as the creation of a single network connecting the country's public educational institutions and the offices of the Ministry of Public Education with a view to generating opportunities for students, promoting inclusion and equality and teaching the younger generation about new technologies. All Governments ought to emphasize and guarantee the right to education, since it facilitated social mobility, guaranteed full access to other rights and helped build a culture of peace.

33. Costa Rica hoped that the Department — even during the transitional phase in which changes were being introduced — would continue to work closely with Member States, especially since the Committee on Information was the main subsidiary body responsible

for reviewing and implementing recommendations regarding the Department's work.

34. **Ms. Al-Otaibi** (Saudi Arabia) said that both modern and traditional media played an essential role in promoting coexistence and influencing public opinion. Saudi Arabia used modern media to promote its economic, cultural and social message and to show the international community that its people were international, welcoming of others and open to cultural exchange.

35. Given the increasingly important counter-terrorism role played by the media, they should be given support to enable them to prevent the spread of violent beliefs and the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and to identify their sources of financing. Her Government used its media to further the principles of moderation, justice, transparency, dialogue and peace and to denounce extremism. It had also established the Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology (Etidal) in order to advance tolerance, justice and dialogue between cultures with a view to achieving stability, security and prosperity worldwide. Saudi Arabia hoped that the United Nations as well would make greater efforts to ensure that the media were used to pursue only honourable aims.

36. The Department of Public Information must be commended for its important work in communicating the activities of the United Nations, promoting its principles and values and providing coverage of international conferences and other related activities. It should in addition draw attention to the suffering of peoples that were struggling against occupation, in particular the Palestinian people, who continued to experience violence, intimidation and dispossession of property as a result of Israeli activities. The Department should also ensure that all publications, reports, press releases and news services were made available in Arabic in order to bring its message to all Arab societies. Saudi Arabia remained ready to work with the United Nations to achieve its objectives, including the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

37. **Mr. Mero** (United Republic of Tanzania), expressing support for the work done by the Department of Public Information, said that there was, however, no reason why Kiswahili should not be adopted as an official language of the United Nations. Global media, and in particular radio, had played a significant role in expanding the use of Kiswahili, which was on the way to becoming the pan-territorial language of Africa and a future global language, with currently 500 million speakers worldwide. Microsoft software was being

developed in Kiswahili to meet the rising demand, academic programmes were offered in Kiswahili in Africa and beyond, and it had been adopted as an official language by the African Union and many African countries.

38. Communication provided hope and a sense of belonging to marginalized communities. Information about what the United Nations was doing to address the plight of the poor should reach them via the cheapest and most easily accessible medium, radio. United Nations radio programming should therefore not be reduced until marginalized communities — in particular those in situations of conflict and instability — could be guaranteed access to newer forms of communication.

39. The use of Kiswahili by United Nations News was contributing to the success of the Secretary-General's reform agenda, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and peacekeeping operations, among other things. He expressed concern that two posts had been removed from each language team in United Nations News, including the Kiswahili and Portuguese teams, in order to create a social media team. The workload placed on the two non-official language units was substantial, especially because they were unable to make use of other United Nations translation services available to the teams for the six official languages. He recommended that the two abolished posts be reinstated and upgraded in the Kiswahili and Portuguese teams. He also called for the recognition not only of Kiswahili but also Portuguese as official languages of the United Nations.

40. **Mr. Al-Ghadban** (Libya) said that the Department of Public Information played an important role in raising awareness of the purposes of the United Nations, especially with regard to international peace and security and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. His delegation welcomed the Department's collaboration with other departments, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and its reliance on the latest technological developments in its work.

41. Cooperation was required to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing nations. Training courses should be provided, technological monopolies eliminated and traditional forms of media strengthened, as they were the most commonly used in developing countries. The United Nations information centres should be provided with all necessary means to enable them to perform their duties properly, given the central part they played in publicizing the achievements of the United Nations. The centres themselves needed to rely especially on local languages during awareness-

raising campaigns. Within the Department of Public Information, there had to be parity in the use of the official languages of the United Nations, and it should publish a greater number of documents in Arabic.

42. Welcoming the reforms the Under-Secretary-General had proposed for her Department, it would be also advisable for the United Nations archive to be translated into all six official languages and fully digitized. Given the time and resources required for such a large project, partnerships should be established with leading academic institutions to provide translation support.

43. While the special information programme on the question of Palestine was effective, the Department should do more to highlight the suffering of the Palestinian people under the occupation, including the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Judaization of Jerusalem, the attacks on peaceful civilian demonstrators and the suffering of the residents of Khan al-Ahmar, which hindered the political process and jeopardized the two-State solution. The Department should promote that solution, which had received unanimous international support within the United Nations, and alert the public to any unilateral modifications to the situation on the ground.

44. The Department needed to act decisively to counter terrorism, the spread of which was clearly facilitated by information technology. Yet it had no clear policies to combat the fact that many popular, well-funded television channels promoted a culture of hate and terrorism and glorified suicide fighters and that highly trained terrorist groups were able to easily exploit media outlets and social media to justify terrorism and recruit young persons. Setting a moral precedent for the use of information in modern media, the Department should periodically publish a list of satellite television channels that supported terrorism.

45. As the United Nations media services were designed to serve countries, not governments, the Department should devise a way of making the public more sensitive to the kind of discourse needed to foster dialogue and denounce violence and hate, and should tailor its policies to the societies that it was addressing on subjects such as fighting climate change, resolving disputes in accordance with international law, combating terrorism and promoting a culture of human rights, peace and the rule of law.

46. **Mr. Bar-El** (Israel) said that, with one of the highest levels of expenditure on research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product in the world, Israel had become a shining example of a nation that placed technological innovation and the

sharing of information at the forefront of its national vision, in the belief that science and technology could improve the quality of life of peoples around the world.

47. Although information was a powerful tool for promoting transparency, dialogue and education, misinformation presented many dangers, antisemitism being a vivid example. Israel welcomed the efforts of the United Nations to tackle antisemitism, in particular through the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, and the strong stance taken by the Secretary-General. The global community had a responsibility to recognize and combat antisemitism, especially on social media, which had become the preferred platform for its proliferation. Israel encouraged cooperation between Governments, civil society and the private sector to establish mechanisms to monitor and combat online terrorism and incitement to violence.

48. As the United Nations had a duty to uphold the principles of its Charter and oppose the dissemination of biased and misleading information, in particular that which promoted hatred, Israel was concerned that the special information programme on the question of Palestine established a misleading and biased narrative against Israel. The Jewish people had a deep historical and religious connection to the land of Israel, and particularly Jerusalem; to claim otherwise was untrue. The 2018 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East organized by the Department was a flagrant example of the biased attitude of the United Nations towards the conflict and cast doubt on the mandate of the Department, particularly as such lies could lead to violence against Israel and the Jewish people. Israel urged the Department to establish a single central body to oversee all political media platforms and ensure that all communications originating from the United Nations upheld its values.

49. Information was essential to acquiring knowledge and developing consciousness. The United Nations had a duty to uphold the truth and to ensure that information was used solely for moral reasons, such as defeating racism, breaking down barriers, promoting tolerance and fostering hope.

50. **Mr. Khiari** (Tunisia) said that the United Nations remained the most suitable forum for coordinating collective efforts to promote peace, security and development. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Department of Public Information was making the public aware of issues such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, disarmament, decolonization, human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and climate change. Tunisia encouraged the Department

to pursue that work, with a particular focus on achieving development priorities in Africa, overcoming the socioeconomic challenges faced by countries transitioning to democracy, dealing with the dilemmas posed by migration, combating illicit sources of financing and corruption, and restoring stolen assets to their countries of origin.

51. In order to apply the principle of leaving no one behind to access to information, the Department needed to do more to apprise the international community of the benefits of information and communications technologies to humankind, in particular through the implementation of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society adopted at the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, which sought to ensure fair, universal access to information. Tunisia commended the Department's growing cooperation with civil society and educational institutions in order to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, make young persons aware of contemporary challenges and combat extremism.

52. With regard to multilingualism, Tunisia welcomed the expertise that the International Organization of la Francophonie had made available to the United Nations to help it develop an integrated policy. The promotion of multilingualism in all areas of United Nations work was essential to achieving its mandates. It would certainly serve to broaden access to information, particularly for persons with special needs, and ensure non-discriminatory engagement in United Nations activities. The Department had made a real attempt to provide media coverage of the United Nations in its six official languages, but greater efforts were needed to achieve parity among all of them. The United Nations information centres, and the United Nations Centre in Tunis in particular, were also to be commended for the important role that they played in supporting multilingualism and promoting the United Nations at the local level. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library as well had notably improved access to information and developed electronic services for Member States and the public.

53. Since the occupying Power of the Palestinian Territories continued to attack the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, Tunisia called on the Department to expand its support for the special information programme on the question of Palestine, given the legitimacy of the demand of the Palestinian people that it be permitted to establish an independent State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital. Tunisia also urged the Department's Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section to become directly involved in the training programme for young Palestinian journalists and media professionals.

54. Tunisia underscored the need for cooperation in order to achieve a global information and communications order that was more just and balanced and that supported international peace and security, strengthened human rights organizations and facilitated comprehensive development.

55. **Mr. Mahfouz** (Egypt) said that the Department of Public Information played a central role in raising awareness and fostering discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals and in fighting the ideological battle against extremism and terrorism. Egypt also appreciated its special information programme on the question of Palestine.

56. Although welcome progress had been made in promoting multilingualism within the work of the Department, much remained to be done. The Department had to ensure parity in its use of the official languages of the United Nations when covering meetings and publishing documentation.

57. The misuse of mass media and information and communications technology, particularly when they disseminated inaccurate or misleading information, was a cause for concern to the international community, for such acts could incite violence or provide a platform for extremists. The Department must stand firm against all such misuse. Extending its continued support to the Committee on Information and the Department, Egypt hoped that the change in name to the Department of Global Communications would usher in a new beginning in the Secretary-General's planned reforms.

58. **Ms. Al-Hammadi** (United Arab Emirates) said that because information and communications were crucial in promoting social and cultural development, his Government had invested in its communications infrastructure and in the provision of the latest electronic services. According to the United Nations E-Government Survey 2018, the United Arab Emirates ranked first among the Arab countries, and sixth worldwide, for smart electronic services and second worldwide in the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index.

59. The United Arab Emirates had hosted numerous conferences, most notably the first International Conference on Media and Communication in March 2018, which had provided an opportunity for academics and professionals from around the world to exchange best practices and increase mutual cooperation. Furthermore, information institutions in the United Arab Emirates stayed abreast of developments by establishing digital platforms in various languages to enhance communication with peoples around the world.

60. Information played an increasingly important role now that terrorist and extremist groups were using modern technologies to spread their ideologies. That danger was exacerbated by the fact that some States used media platforms that incited hatred and provided a forum for such groups. It was therefore important for organizations such as the Sawab Centre in Abu Dhabi to be established to promote tolerance and confront the discourse of extremism and for action to be taken to address such hate speech.

61. The United Arab Emirates hailed the special information programme on the question of Palestine and all other efforts by the Department to publish information on that issue and on others such as female and youth empowerment, counter-terrorism and counter-extremism and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Department must continue to publicize significant activities carried out by the United Nations and its Member States, such as the United Nations World Data Forum, which the United Arab Emirates was due to host later in October 2018, with the aim of using improved data to guarantee a better future for the world's people.

62. While endorsing the ongoing reform of the Department, her delegation emphasized that all news published by the Department should be comprehensive, objective and free from politicization. It encouraged the Department to check the accuracy of all information against official sources before issuing official statements. The Department should also work more closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, which should always uphold the principle of objectivity in its own activities, including its dealings with delegations during Committee meetings. The Department of Public Information should, furthermore, continue to provide full coverage of news and events in all official languages of the United Nations, including Arabic. The United Arab Emirates remained ready to share its expertise and best practices in the field of information with the United Nations, Member States and information institutions.

63. **Mr. Kishimori** (Japan) said that the Department of Public Information was fulfilling its mandate well. At the same time, the Under-Secretary-General's proposed reform was warranted, given its indispensable role in communicating the work and achievements of the United Nations to peoples around the world. Japan welcomed the efforts made to ensure that the reform was conducted in a cost-neutral manner and based on dialogue between Member States.

64. The vast global network of United Nations information centres was essential to ensuring that the

United Nations messages reached the widest possible audience. The United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo was crucial in promoting support for the United Nations in Japan in a compelling and creative manner, including by strengthening partnerships with businesses and the financial sector, assisting the Tokyo organizing committee for the 2020 Olympics and promoting the Sustainable Development Goals through comedy performances and entries at international film festivals.

65. Japan commended the outstanding work of the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, especially its latest Youth 2030 strategy. It also welcomed the recent video productions by the Department of Public Information, such as those showing the experiences of peacekeepers, which had succeeded in making global audiences understand the realities in the field.

66. Between April 2017 and August 2018, Japan had worked with the Department, other Member States and youth representatives of non-governmental organizations to hold a series of events as part of Japan's *Peace Is...* initiative, based on the premise that the public could better connect with the work of the United Nations through the medium of art and culture, and inviting participants to depict their idea of peace in writing, in their own languages. With a view to implementing the suggestions thus collected, Japan and other former co-hosts of the initiative had launched an informal, open-ended discussion on the topic of United Nations public diplomacy. Two meetings had been held thus far, the second of which had focused on social media best practices. With regard to multilingualism, he noted that the annual haiku contest held by the Tokyo Information Centre had been expanded to include French and Spanish language categories. Japan would continue to support multilingualism in imaginative and inclusive ways.

67. It would also continue to support the Department of Public Information, as its work to promote the efforts of the United Nations in overcoming unprecedented global challenges was more important than ever.

68. **Mr. Duarte Lopes** (Portugal) said that his country endorsed the ongoing reform of the Department of Public Information and the updating of its working methods in the light of new communications technologies. Its work should be guided by the three founding pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, human rights and development — and should focus on engaging with the various stakeholders in the general public. In addition to traditional forms of media, new technologies and social networking platforms should be used in order to appeal to younger audiences.

69. Given its well-established universality and global outreach, the Portuguese language was an important asset in promoting multilingualism, a core value of the United Nations communications strategy. As the number of Portuguese speakers was expected to continue to increase, especially in Africa and Brazil, Portugal encouraged the Department to further expand its use of Portuguese. Among the United Nations information centres, the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe and the United Nations Information Centre in Rio de Janeiro were building invaluable bridges between the Portuguese-speaking world and the United Nations. A case in point was their fruitful interaction with the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau to develop material in Portuguese. Portugal supported the establishment of a United Nations information centre in Luanda, Angola, as it would increase access to United Nations information in Lusophone countries in Africa.

70. The Secretary-General had drawn attention in his report to the expanding audience and rate of engagement with United Nations information sources among Portuguese speakers, in particular via the United Nations News flagship multimedia Portuguese-language news programme. Altogether, the Portuguese Unit of United Nations News was doing highly valuable, diversified work.

71. Member States had a shared responsibility to work with the Department to engage the wider public, in particular young persons. In that connection, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, in collaboration with the Portuguese and Sri Lankan delegations, UNESCO and the ILO, had hosted an event on youth skills for sustainability and innovation in July 2018.

72. **Mr. Suárez Moreno** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his Government welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to promote the aims of the United Nations and followed with interest the campaigns under way to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Agenda 2063 of the African Union and other initiatives to promote tolerance and inclusion in relation to human rights, peacekeeping and Palestine.

73. His Government attached particular importance to efforts to include young persons in the activities of the United Nations, notably with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, as the younger generations would be responsible for ensuring that those goals were achieved. It welcomed the participation of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in the International Conference on the Role of Youth in Preventing and

Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism recently held in Uzbekistan. It was important that the public be made aware of the commitment of the United Nations and its Member States to preventing terrorism.

74. Information and communications technologies and social networks should be used to promote peace, sustainable development, cooperation and human rights. Their misuse, instead, could have harmful effects on societies and undermine the principles of the United Nations. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela denounced the publication of biased or selective information about Member States on United Nations social networks, which should instead promote objectivity, impartiality, dialogue, non-selectivity and non-politicization in the handling of information. Any action to the contrary distorted reality and undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the United Nations. His Government also rejected the use by certain States of information and communications technologies to intervene in the internal affairs of other States in order to encourage regime change. It called on the United Nations to refrain from responding to such campaigns and urged the Department to take steps to ensure that the United Nations was not inadvertently used as a platform for aggression against Member States, including his own.

75. His Government advocated the establishment of an information and communications order that was just and effective, supported international peace and understanding and was based on the free, full and fair dissemination of information. It called for efforts to overcome the digital divide between developed and developing States in the use of information and communications technologies. Training should be provided, taking into account the specific needs of each country.

76. With regard to multilingualism, his delegation underscored the importance of ensuring that all six official languages of the United Nations were used in a balanced way in presentations, publications and activities. The work of the United Nations was bolstered by the timely and accurate communication of information in all its official languages.

77. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Nepal) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through global and local media and community outreach. Commending its promotion of multilingualism, he encouraged the Department to provide information in additional languages, including Nepalese, considering especially Nepal's contribution

to United Nations peacekeeping, in order to encourage greater support for the United Nations among the Nepalese population. The Department was successfully publicizing the contribution made by United Nations peacekeepers to maintaining international peace and security, most recently through the multilingual multimedia campaign "Service and Sacrifice", which would foster greater public recognition of the work of peacekeepers.

78. The technical and infrastructure capabilities of the United Nations information centres needed to be strengthened, as they were a key instrument for communicating with populations around the world in their own languages. Stronger synergies should be created among the centres to ensure their effectiveness. In addition, designated repositories of United Nations publications, such as that at Tribhuvan University Central Library in Nepal, should be modernized and expanded in order to boost the impact of their outreach activities.

79. Since access to the new media in the least developed countries was hindered by poor technical capacity and financial constraints, traditional media remained the primary sources of information in remote areas. The United Nations should therefore continue to use a combination of traditional and modern means of communication. Nepal commended the Department's efforts to forge meaningful partnerships with young persons, educational institutions, NGOs and civil society, as they helped promote the United Nations at the local level.

80. **Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez** (Uruguay) said that the work of the Department of Public Information was more important than ever, given the pressing need to defend multilateralism and the role of the United Nations in resolving global issues, enforcing international law and preserving peace. The voice of the United Nations should be heard clearly around the world, by means of accurate, timely, complete and balanced information furnished by the Department in areas such as human rights, violence against women, disarmament, climate change, peacekeeping and sustainable development. Uruguay also supported the reform of the Department, including the change of name.

81. Despite the Department's considerable efforts to promote multilingualism, so essential to cultural diversity, the continued lack of parity in the use of the official languages of the United Nations was a cause for concern. The Department, armed with sufficient resources, should continue striving for the goal of mainstreaming multilingualism in all information and communications activities, and should certainly see to it

that all press releases and archived documents were made available in all six official languages. The entire United Nations system also had a collective responsibility to ensure multilingualism in its day-to-day work and in communications with the public.

82. Uruguay favoured the use of innovative information and communication strategies. Social networks enabled direct contact with audiences, and new information and communications technologies allowed messages to be spread as rapidly and widely as possible around the globe. The Department and the Secretariat did well to focus on young persons. Given the finding in the UNESCO report *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World* that children and adolescents under the age of 18 were the age group with the highest level of Internet usage worldwide, the best way to reach them was through the new technologies they were accustomed to using.

83. In Uruguay, children and adults alike had been offered permanent, free access to digital technologies, through a government programme providing laptops and Internet access to all primary and secondary school students and to 500,000 adults. However, in Uruguay a large proportion of the adult population still preferred to use traditional media, and it was important that the United Nations should continue to use them as well, to reach all populations without access to new technologies.

84. More support should be given to the United Nations information centres, which helped give a national or regional dimension to global messages and bring the United Nations closer to local populations by addressing them in their own languages. At a time when freedom of information, the press and expression were under threat in various parts of the world, the United Nations had a responsibility to set an example to inspire respect for those rights.

85. **Mr. Prada** (Spain) said that his country endorsed the Under-Secretary-General's proposed reforms of the Department of Public Information, including the change of name to the Department of Global Communications, which would better suit its mandate and goals. If the goal was to be to institute a new information and communications world order that was more just and effective, that promoted peace and understanding and that was based on the free, full and balanced dissemination of information, the Department's communications needed to be faster, more strategic and more integrated, delivered in multiple languages and across multiple platforms. His delegation appreciated the efforts made to inform Member States about what the priorities of the reform were and how they would be

achieved, and encouraged the continuation of such dialogue.

86. The Department had successfully run its communications campaigns within existing resources, notable among them the one launched at the opening of the current General Assembly session, and its sector-specific campaigns to promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the Sustainable Development Goals, which had been of particular relevance during the high-level political forum on sustainable development held in July 2018. Also very useful were the information campaigns on human rights, those intended to combat violence against women and children, and those to strengthen the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons around the world in keeping with standards of conduct for businesses developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which had been publicized in Spain.

87. The Secretary-General's report had furnished interesting information regarding audiences on social networks, showing that the number of followers of official United Nations accounts had surged among Spanish-language speakers, thereby cementing Spanish as the second most-used language. That highlighted the importance of ensuring parity in the use of the official languages, and of promoting multilingualism in the interests of public outreach, effectiveness and transparency.

88. Spain was aggrieved by the lack of freedom of the press in many areas of the world, which, in the worst situations, took the form of attacks on journalists. According to Reporters Without Borders, 65 journalists had been killed in 2017 because of their profession, and by the end of 2017, the Committee to Protect Journalists had recorded the highest-ever number of incarcerations of journalists. The United Nations must make every effort to protect freedom of the press and pluralism, as they were fundamental pillars of democracy and essential to the protection of human rights. All journalists and communications professionals should be able to work in an environment free from fear, intimidation, assault, unjust detention and persecution.

89. **Mr. Simon-Michel** (France) said that his delegation supported the Under-Secretary-General's proposed reforms of the Department of Public Information. At a time when multilateralism and United Nations system were under threat, the United Nations needed to communicate effectively to as wide an audience as possible regarding the global threats to peace and security, the implementation of sustainable development, including environmental protection and

the fight against climate change, and the protection of human rights. The Department needed to choose its programmatic themes, media platforms and languages of communication strategically in order to ensure the greatest support for United Nations mandates.

90. France welcomed the increased interest in United Nations activities, as demonstrated by the rise in the number of users on its social network accounts and multimedia sites. The potential of the new information and communications technologies needed to be harnessed to reduce costs and simplify communication. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that a significant part of the world population, in particular in developing countries, still depended on traditional media.

91. Deploing the continued preferential use of English over the five other official languages of the United Nations, France recalled that the principle of parity between those languages was set down in General Assembly resolutions and should be better respected. The United Nations also needed to adapt to expanding language usage in line with demographic changes; the number of French speakers, for instance, was set to double within 30 years, and the majority would be found in Africa. In addition, the United Nations had a responsibility to address younger generations in their own languages and via appropriate media; the enforcement of multilingualism within the United Nations was essential if that was to be achieved.

92. Although resources were tight, the cost of allowing populations to distance themselves from the United Nations would be even greater. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's reform of the United Nations and hoped that it would ensure that public communications reached the widest possible audience.

93. **Mr. Strzhizhovskiy** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to explore new media while preserving traditional media and to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of its work. While still more information would be welcome, his delegation was pleased by the resumption of informal briefings to Member States, as they were vital to the work of the Committee.

94. The reforms undertaken by the Department should improve the effectiveness of all media resources, remain within the budget and be implemented in full compliance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Expert assessments and planning for future reforms should be carried out by the Department itself, with the consent of Member States. The involvement of external experts was costly and did not

guarantee transparency, and thus must have prior approval.

95. His delegation welcomed the activities and outreach initiatives to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of peacekeeping operations, the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. It also supported the Department's focus on promoting youth participation in international efforts to strengthen peace and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In September 2018, the Russian Federation had hosted a media seminar on peace in the Middle East, during which the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow had worked in close collaboration with a Russian team to ensure the event's success.

96. Given that sports were an ideal tool to promote the Sustainable Development Goals, it was surprising that the Secretary-General's report did not cover the Department's efforts to promote the 2018 World Cup hosted by his country. The Department had actively assisted the Russian Federation in all related activities at the United Nations, which had been covered broadly in all languages. Eight teams from various New York high schools had competed in a special youth World Cup, and several joint initiatives by Member States had focused on strengthening mutual understanding, promoting sports and fostering a spirit of peace among young people. Information about those activities should be made available to the public, and future reports should give an account of large-scale sporting and youth events.

97. The statistics showed that the traffic on United Nations media sites had increased overall. However, the majority of users had visited English-language media resources; the number of visitors to French and Russian websites was still low — even though there were over 300 million potential Russian-speaking users around the world — and the number of visitors to the Chinese website had fallen since the previous year. Perhaps it was time to change the strategy and consider the possibility of partnering with large regional media actors. Additionally, the Department ought to ensure the fair allocation of financial and human resources among all official languages. His Government stood ready to work with Member States and the Secretariat in order to achieve language parity.

98. Once again, it was clear that the Ukrainian delegation would use any United Nations platform to spread misinformation about his Government's policies. It claimed to be attached to democratic values and yet there was a state of lawlessness in Ukraine, as had been

noted by a number of international organizations. Journalists had been attacked and murdered, and media outlets had been shut down. Furthermore, in May 2018, during the fortieth session of the Committee on Information, the Ukrainian delegation had organized an unsanctioned side event. There had also been threats of reprisals made against representatives of other delegations. He hoped that steps would be taken to address that issue.

99. **Mr. Niang** (Senegal) said that the United Nations used reliable and effective communication tools to provide a clearer picture of its activities relating to international peace and security, sustainable development and the control of diseases. Given that most people in developing countries were still unable to take advantage of rapidly evolving information and communications technologies, an effective strategy must be devised to address the digital divide between the North and the South. Furthermore, African countries required assistance in developing information policies adapted to their specific challenges.

100. United Nations information centres rapidly disseminated up-to-date information in close collaboration with government officials in 63 countries, and their success was due in large part to the quality and diversity of the products and services provided. His Government would continue to support the United Nations Information Centre in Dakar.

101. In order to reach the greatest number of people, the message of the United Nations must be transmitted in the greatest possible number of languages. The Organization must give equitable weight to the six official languages, and multilingualism must remain a focus. In addition, official United Nations documents must be distributed in the six official languages in a timely manner, and multilingual communication should play an important role in United Nations information centres and within peacekeeping operations. He commended the larger community of information and communications professionals who strove every day to raise awareness of United Nations activities, often at the cost of their lives.

102. **Mr. Ghorbarpour** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that information and communications technologies, including social media, had the potential to connect diverse segments of humanity, but they could also be misused, and inaccurate reporting and distorted information could have a negative impact on countries and their citizens. Those technologies should be used in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, in particular the principles of

sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

103. It was crucial to provide people worldwide with accurate and factual information. The Department of Public Information should continue to inform the public about important decisions and agreements reached by the international community and should focus on issues that affected international peace and security. Disseminating the decisions of international courts and tribunals could play a pivotal role in strengthening the rule of law at the international level; and publicizing a country's activities regarding international agreements, including accessions or withdrawals, could improve respect for international law. The Department should take appropriate measures to advocate multilateralism and continue to promote initiatives to maintain and promote international peace and security, especially those focused on combating violent extremism and encouraging dialogue.

104. The United Nations had a responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine and it was important to raise international awareness of the negative consequences of occupation and embargo on the Palestinian people. His delegation appreciated the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine and the training programme for Palestinian journalists.

105. United Nations information centres played a significant role in disseminating United Nations messages and promoting the public image of the Organization, especially in developing countries, and should therefore be strengthened. The Department's Academic Impact initiative had established direct relationships with over 1,000 universities worldwide, including 25 universities in his country. Multilingualism would contribute to the achievement of United Nations objectives. In addition to the six official languages of the Organization, information should be disseminated also in other languages, including Persian, which was used by tens of millions of people across several nations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.