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Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Rouven **Klein** (Germany)

Addendum

Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2024

(Item 3 (a))

Programme 24 Global communications

1. At its 9th meeting, on 2 June 2023, the Committee considered programme 24, Global communications, of the proposed programme plan for 2024 and programme performance in 2022 ([A/78/6 \(Sect. 28\)](#)).
2. The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications introduced the programme and, together with other representatives of the Secretary-General, responded to questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. Delegations expressed appreciation for the essential work done by the Department of Global Communications in building global support for the work of the United Nations, including its fight against misinformation and disinformation and hate speech, and for its efforts in publicizing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some delegations also expressed appreciation for the commitment of the Department to delivering accurate, impartial, balanced and objective news and information in a timely manner.
4. Several delegations acknowledged the efforts undertaken by the Department to release factual, engaging and accessible information through its various media, including the United Nations website and social media accounts. Some delegations expressed their appreciation for the support provided by the Department to Member



States on issues pertaining to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the promotion of the verified campaign in combating misinformation related to the pandemic. Clarification was sought on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the challenges related to fighting misinformation through the provision of verified and factual information. Some delegations also requested more information on crisis communication and on ways the Department addressed and implemented such communication requirements.

5. Some delegations called on the Department to continue its work on addressing hate speech, misinformation and disinformation by promoting tolerance, dialogue and peaceful coexistence, and establishing fair, peaceful and inclusive societies. A delegation encouraged the Department to double its efforts on fighting racism, hate speech and discriminatory speech, especially against Asians, people of African descent and Africans. The delegation acknowledged the growing importance of spreading the voice and work of the United Nations in a turbulent world. The same delegation emphasized that the work of the Department was closely linked to people's perception of the United Nations, and in that regard called on the Department to ensure that news disseminated by the United Nations was objective, neutral, accurate, fair, comprehensive, balanced, coherent and timely. The same delegation further expressed its desire to hear more voices from developing countries and countries impacted by hate speech, racism and discriminatory speech, which it opined would help the United Nations in conducting its work with such Member States

6. With regard to multilingualism, delegations emphasized its importance and acknowledged the work undertaken by the Department to reach global audiences in many languages and across multiple platforms to tell the story of the United Nations, and to persuade those audiences to support the United Nations agenda. Some delegations stressed the need for an agile approach and called for the adoption of multilingualism in disseminating information to the public in a strategic and creative manner. A delegation recalled the importance of multilingualism and respect for the parity of the six official languages of the United Nations for the dissemination of information to ensure the veracity of reliable information and the dissemination of the Organization's documents and news.

7. A group of delegations highlighted how multilingual content facilitated the dissemination of up-to-date information on a broad range of issues to millions of people worldwide and helped various nationalities and ethnic groups better understand the activities of the United Nations, which improved the image of the United Nations and the standing of the multilateral system. Some delegations expressed their strong views that the Department should use all six official United Nations languages equally, reduce the gap between the use of English and the other five languages and ensure the full and fair treatment of all official United Nations languages in all its activities. A delegation noted that Chinese had the largest number of speakers in the world, as 1.5 billion people, or one fifth of the world's population, used it, and in that regard sought clarification about the initiatives that would be taken by the Department to spread the voice of the United Nations to those 1.5 billion people.

8. A delegation expressed appreciation for the work of the Department to foster multilingualism that was not confined to the six official languages, but rather went further, as it was noted that digital media content was produced daily in Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese.

9. A delegation opined that multilingualism promoted inclusion and tolerance and cautioned that multilingual parity should be a reality and not just an aspiration. The same delegation called for the publication of all documents, decisions, reports and statements by the Secretary-General in all official languages to allow the Organization to carry out its mandate.

10. A delegation expressed its strong view that multilingualism was a core principle of the United Nations and should be a priority of the Department. The delegation opined that equitable access to information in all official United Nations languages should be a priority of all United Nations information services. The delegation made reference to paragraphs 28.45 to 28.47 of the proposed programme plan for 2024 and programme performance in 2022 (A/78/6 (Sect. 28)), which referred to lessons learned in the implementation of the programme, and highlighted the phrase “by making live and on-demand webcasting available on multiple platforms and languages, it could reach larger and broader audiences around the world”. The same delegation noted that the Department had finally concluded that the distribution of materials on various platforms in all languages made it possible to reach a wider global audience. The delegation reiterated its view that it had systematically raised the issue of introducing metadata in all languages for years at all possible levels, and opined that the recognition by the Department that multilingualism made it possible to reach a wider global audience was similar to an example in which a person created the wheel and later came to the conclusion that the wheel expedited transport, and then decided to include that conclusion as part of its lessons learned and planned changes.

11. A delegation expressed strong support for the Department’s three subprogrammes and its corresponding plans, and for its efforts to fight the increasing spread of misinformation and disinformation. The delegation further opined that although the three subprogrammes contributed to the same overall objective, the delegation encouraged the Department to specify and distinguish the objectives for the individual subprogrammes so that objectives and performance measures could be better linked.

12. With regard to the strategy and external factors for 2024, and specifically paragraph 28.10, some delegations expressed support for the integration of a gender-responsive approach in the Department’s operational activities, deliverables and results. The view was expressed that the representation of women in communications and media products was crucial in empowering women and promoting gender equality, and in meeting the goals of the Organization.

13. A delegation stressed its view on the importance of reducing the gender digital divide to empower women and girls and sought clarification about the Department’s activities in that area. Another delegation raised the need to address the same issue of digital divide, but referred to the growing inequalities that had a negative effect on the information landscape and led to the unequal access to reliable, timely, trustworthy and multilingual information, including the spread of misinformation, disinformation, fake news and hate speech.

14. With regard to subprogramme 1, Campaigns and country operations services, some delegations reaffirmed the effectiveness of specialized information campaigns in raising global awareness on the most significant issues in the world and in mobilizing global support and action towards sustainable development, climate change, peace and security, and human rights. The creative and innovative approaches undertaken by the Department in implementing information policies, including guidance on strategies and crisis communications to resident coordinators, officers and United Nations country teams, were welcomed.

15. With regard to paragraph 28.21 (d), a delegation welcomed the Department’s stated intention to strive to serve as a source of reliable, fact-based information that advanced the work, principles and purposes of the United Nations. The delegation further expressed appreciation for the Department’s focus on providing guidance with regard to countering misinformation and disinformation and developing and promoting content to counter false narratives and build confidence among global audiences.

16. A delegation expressed its satisfaction with how the Department continued to expand its audience reach through the use of a strategic and data-driven approach to reaching a diverse range of audiences, including young people. The delegation sought further clarification on how the Department used data to prioritize its programme of work.

17. A delegation emphasized the crucial and important role of the Department in ensuring neutrality in the dissemination of information. The same delegation opined that simply emphasizing the issues would be counterproductive for the Department, and expressed its view that it was equally important for the Department to abide by its code of conduct in the implementation of its mandates. The same delegation expressed its belief that, in some instances, information could have been disseminated with more accuracy, and reiterated its view that the Department was responsible for ensuring that the decisions of Member States reflected in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council and other bodies were accurately and impartially disseminated.

18. With regard to paragraph 28.28 and figure 28.III, which included a performance measure regarding the number of social media followers across platforms, a delegation enquired about the reasons why the planned results for 2023 dropped by 1.5 million after surpassing the 64.5 million subscribers reported in 2022.

19. With regard to result 3 of subprogramme 1, on increased public engagement with the global peace and security agenda, some delegations commended the Department's activity with regard to the peace and security agenda, and welcomed the cooperation undertaken between the Departments of Global Communications, Peace Operations and Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. A number of delegations commended the assistance provided to peacekeeping missions in addressing disinformation. Some delegations also commended the efforts undertaken by the Department of Global Communications to combat misinformation targeting United Nations peacekeepers.

20. A delegation welcomed the Service and Sacrifice campaign that was aimed at protecting and acknowledging peacekeepers serving in missions. The same delegation noted that the presence of the Department at the interactive art installation at Times Square in New York, which celebrated peacekeepers and all those who worked together to build and maintain peace across the world, honoured the service of peacekeepers and was a manifestation of the Department's commitment to the protection of peacekeepers. Another delegation sought clarification on whether the presidential statement of the Security Council on the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers had been released and how the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative pertained to the work of the Department. Another delegation expressed its view that the issue of misinformation and disinformation was broad and expressed its intent to present language to include information manipulation in the programme where applicable.

21. A delegation noted that the United Nations website (www.un.org) had reached some 250 million views per year on the basis of figures from May 2023, and the United Nations peacekeeping website (peacekeeping.un.org) had reached 565,000 views that same month. In that regard, the delegation sought clarification on the basis used for the target of 80,000 views for 2024 presented in paragraph 28.32 and figure 28.IV, given the good results reported on the aforementioned sites.

22. With regard to subprogramme 2, News services, a delegation welcomed the Department's plan to use the United Nations Web TV platform in the six official languages, as reflected in result 3. The same delegation also welcomed the Department's efforts to provide communications support and accessibility for persons

with disabilities, and in that regard enquired whether subtitles would be used on the platform.

23. With regard to paragraph 28.35 (c) and the emphasis made on multilingualism, a delegation expressed support, reiterated that multilingualism was stressed by the Committee on Information and enquired about the criteria that would be used in implementing the components linked to multilingualism.

24. With regard to subprogramme 3, Outreach and knowledge services, reference was made by a delegation to paragraph 28.50 (c). The delegation noted the Department's intent to organize outreach and education programmes on the Holocaust, and welcomed this positive step. However, the delegation opined that General Assembly resolution 76/250 went a bit further in its guidance, as the Assembly requested the United Nations outreach programme on the Holocaust, as well as all relevant United Nations specialized agencies, to continue to develop and implement programmes aimed at countering Holocaust denial and distortion. The same delegation sought clarification on how the Department planned to continue the integration of resolution 76/250 in its work in the future.

25. Another delegation underlined the importance of General Assembly resolution 76/250, and opined that it served as a signal to condemn and confront the disturbing trends of diminishing, distorting or denying the Holocaust. The same delegation expressed appreciation and strong support for the Department's activities to implement the mandate contained in the resolution, which it noted was part of the 2024 programme of work.

26. With regard to paragraph 28.54 and the increase in the actual unique downloads of United Nations content on its platforms, a delegation expressed the view that the growing figures over the past few years were a clear testament to the importance of both the subprogramme's work and that of the Department. In that regard, the same delegation acknowledged the work of the Department and expressed its full support.

27. With regard to result 2 of subprogramme 3, on increased engagement and action for the Sustainable Development Goals through the global football community, a delegation expressed its support to the "Football for the Goals" initiative and noted its success in getting the football community involved in promoting the Goals to a wide audience. The same delegation sought clarification on how the performance measure target for 2024 shown in figure 28.X was derived and whether it was a realistic target.

28. While matters relating to parts of the programme dealing with resources were not within the mandate of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, a delegation called on the Department to pay close attention to the conduct of staffing reforms, which it noted were tending towards increasing the number of personnel and therefore imposed a greater financial burden on the budget. The delegation was of the view that the main criterion for such increases should be effectiveness, especially in the context of limited financial resources. Another delegation noted that the Department planned to establish one post for each language, and expressed its belief that this would not be adequate with regard to providing full accessibility to information on events posted on the United Nations media website (media.un.org). The same delegation reiterated its view that this applied to all official languages other than English and requested that representatives of other Member States raise the issue in other contexts. The same delegation noted that the Department was large and had an extensive structure designed to address the most complicated challenges that could be faced by the United Nations, and that the Department's resources would allow it to introduce new practices and methods at a scale that would only be available to the United Nations. Another delegation expressed concern over the unbalanced staff composition of the Department, and requested that the Department take measures to

improve its geographical representation by recruiting more staff from underrepresented developing countries.

Conclusions and recommendations

29. The Committee expressed appreciation for the important work carried out by the Department of Global Communications, as well as for the further implementation of the global communication strategy for the United Nations, including by ensuring its communications were strategic, coordinated, audience-based, impact-focused and included an emphasis on multilingualism from the planning stage, as well as the timely delivery of accurate, impartial, inclusive, comprehensive, balanced, coherent and objective news and information.

30. The Committee reaffirmed multilingualism as a core and fundamental value of the Organization and emphasized the paramount importance of the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations. The Committee also emphasized the importance of making use of all the official languages of the United Nations, ensuring their full and equitable treatment in all the activities of the Department of Global Communications, with the aim of eliminating the disparity between the use of English and the use of the five other official languages.

31. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly urge the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to achieve full parity among the six official languages on all United Nations websites and social media platforms and urge him to strengthen his efforts to develop, maintain and update multilingual United Nations websites, including United Nations Web TV, its video content and metadata, and the web page of the Secretary-General in all the official languages of the United Nations, on an equitable basis.

32. The Committee highlighted the crucial role of the Department of Global Communications in addressing the spread of misinformation, disinformation and information manipulation.

33. The Committee recognized the efforts of the Department to also disseminate accurate, relevant information in non-official United Nations languages, in accordance with respective mandates.

34. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General, in particular the Department of Global Communications, to continue contributing to the observance of international days and celebrations established by the Assembly and to play a role in raising awareness and promoting those events in accordance with respective Assembly resolutions, and in cooperation with the specialized agencies in charge of their implementation, where appropriate.

35. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of programme 24, Global communications, of the proposed programme budget for 2024, subject to the following modifications:

Overall orientation

Paragraph 28.5

After “In an age when misinformation”, insert “, disinformation and information manipulation”.

**Subprogramme 1
Campaigns and country operations services**

Paragraph 28.21 (d)

Replace “and disinformation” with “, disinformation and information manipulation”.

**Subprogramme 3
Outreach and knowledge services**

Result 3

Title

Replace “engagement by macro influencers” with “communication and advocacy”.

Paragraph 28.58

Replace “and disinformation” with “, disinformation and information manipulation”.

Paragraph 28.59

Before “will provide support to such influencers”, insert “the Department of Global Communications, within its mandated activities,”.
