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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 18 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Rendtorff-Smith (Vice-Chair) (Denmark)

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In the absence of Ms. Joyini (South Africa), Ms. Rendtorff-Smith (Denmark), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 58: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (continued) (A/78/23, A/78/65 and A/78/249)

Question of Gibraltar (A/C.4/78/L.3)

1. **The Chair** recalled that the Committee had postponed hearing the statement of the representative of Gibraltar at the request of Gibraltar, pending the elections in the Territory, which had taken place on 12 October 2023. On 13 October, the secretariat had been informed that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Fabian Raymond Picardo, had been re-elected, that he was prepared to address the Committee, and that his statement would be delivered by the Deputy Chief Minister, Joseph Garcia. She suggested that the Committee invite Mr. Garcia to make a statement.

2. *It was so decided.*

3. **The Chair** said that, in accordance with the Committee's usual practice, the representative of the Non-Self-Governing Territory would be invited to address the Committee and would withdraw after making his statement.

4. **Mr. Garcia** (Deputy Chief Minister of Gibraltar), speaking on behalf of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, said that exactly 60 years earlier, the elected representatives of Gibraltar had appeared before the United Nations for the first time and had argued for the recognition of the right of Gibraltarians to self-determination, called for the exercise of that right, and asserted their desire for a democratic decolonization. Gibraltarians were still saying the same thing, but nothing had happened. The United Nations had not meaningfully engaged, despite the administering Power having publicly stated that it supported Gibraltar in working towards decolonization.

5. Many of the countries represented in the room had been colonies once. Large former colonies such as Australia, Canada, India and South Africa were becoming increasingly important players on the global stage, and small nations such as Grenada, Nauru and Saint Lucia had also achieved decolonization. Gibraltar was part of the Commonwealth, as were many former colonies, and it looked to its peers for support and guidance as it pursued its own decolonization journey. The people of Gibraltar should not be treated differently

from any other people. For that reason, Gibraltar would welcome a visiting mission from the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and wished for the Fourth Committee to engage formally with its Government and people.

6. Gibraltar was a unique multicultural society that had been built over more than 300 years by immigrants from different parts of the world, including traders from Genoa, before the unification of Italy; Sephardic Jews from North Africa; workers from Malta in the nineteenth century; and Indians and Moroccans in the twentieth century. Gibraltarians were a distinct people from the administering Power, with the inalienable right to self-determination under international law.

7. Spain had long asserted a territorial claim to Gibraltar, seeking to redraw pre-1704 European borders. That was a frightening notion, whose implications extended far beyond Gibraltar. In the twenty-first century, the wishes of the people must come first. While Gibraltar rejected its neighbour's claim to its territory, it also extended the hand of friendship to Spain. The exit of Gibraltar from the European Union had led Gibraltar and Spain to work together to solve shared challenges. Gibraltar benefited the economy of the neighbouring area of Spain. Some 15,000 people lived in Spain and worked in Gibraltar, making Gibraltar the second-largest employer for southern Spain. Gibraltar purchased approximately \$1.5 billion worth of goods annually from Spanish companies, and Gibraltarians spent over \$100 million annually on goods and services from Spain. That economic interaction must be protected in the future. Accordingly, Gibraltar had been working with the United Kingdom to adopt a treaty that would safeguard its relationship with the European Union and with Spain.

8. The foregoing notwithstanding, Gibraltar belonged to its people and would never surrender any part of its sovereignty. Future generations might see Gibraltar differently, through the prism of democracy and human rights, rather than as a mere object of territorial ambition. Gibraltar could not simply be transferred from one colonial power to another. In the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the Committee should fulfil its mandate by mapping out a plan for the decolonization of Gibraltar. The people of Gibraltar must be allowed to determine their own future.

Draft decision A/C.4/78/L.3: Question of Gibraltar

9. *Draft decision A/C.4/78/L.3 was adopted.*

Agenda item 53: Questions relating to information
(continued) (A/78/21 and A/78/294)

10. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lanka commended the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. Information and communications technology (ICT) supported economic growth and social development, but also held the potential to exacerbate inequalities within and among countries. Sri Lanka therefore commended the Department of Global Communications for its efforts to bolster social media, which enabled the United Nations to demonstrate its impact and relevance to diverse global audiences. Member States should renew their commitment to multilateralism within the Department, including the appropriate use of all the official languages across all departmental activities.

11. The popularity of content related to the Sustainable Development Goals showed that there was the potential to engage and inspire global citizens to actively pursue the Goals. However, rapid advances in technology meant that many, especially in developing countries, were left without Internet infrastructure. The Department must explore resource mobilization strategies to bridge digital divides. Resident coordinators could play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of United Nations information centres. Those centres, including the one in Colombo, had a profound impact in promoting globally accepted values.

12. Sri Lanka applauded the collaboration between the Department and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Violent extremism and hate speech undermined the freedom of information and of the press, and it was imperative to address their influence on young people. Sri Lanka supported media independence and pluralism, and was confident that the Department's efforts would further define the role of the United Nations in fostering tolerance and helping developing countries nations to address their challenges. Sri Lanka remained committed to accountability, redress for victims and recognition of victims' rights and was working to improve in those areas.

13. As a troop-contributing country, Sri Lanka attached great importance to the effective dissemination of information about United Nations peacekeeping operations. It appreciated the ongoing cooperation between the Department of Global Communications and the Department of Peace Operations in that endeavour.

14. **Ms. Chan Valverde** (Costa Rica) said that it was important for the Department of Global Communications to disseminate information in all the official languages and draw inspiration from the International Decade of Indigenous Languages with a

view to promoting and revitalizing indigenous languages throughout the world. The infodemic had become a major challenge, and it had been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. There was a need for strategies to counter misinformation and disinformation, support digital literacy and provide access to high-quality information. For those reasons, Costa Rica was determined to establish a comprehensive communication and information framework that was based on evidence, science, the search for the truth and the protection of human rights. The Secretary-General's proposed code of information integrity on digital platforms and initiatives such as the International Observatory on Information and Democracy were steps in the right direction.

15. In view of the differential impact of technology on women and girls, and persistent gender biases in the digital industry, it was crucial to include a gender perspective in efforts to improve access to and use of digital technologies. Online violence added to the serious obstacles that women and girls faced in accessing the Internet. In March 2023, Costa Rica, along with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, had contributed to the launch of a guide for policymakers on combating hate speech. The guide would support educational authorities to build societies that were resilient in the face of discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech. Costa Rica was working with the United Nations to develop a national strategy to combat hate speech and discrimination, which was expected to be in place by the end of 2023. There was also a plan for a longer-term national policy on hate speech and discrimination.

16. Protecting the freedom of the press was essential for democracy and the full exercise of civil rights, including the free exchange of ideas and information. Hate speech and dehumanization of the other often preceded heinous crimes, including crimes against humanity. It was necessary to counter misinformation and disinformation with stronger democracy, respect for human rights and education, including the promotion of digital literacy.

17. **Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) said that rapid technological developments in the area of the media were giving rise to unprecedented challenges. Collective action was needed, in a spirit of pluralism and mutual respect, to tackle such shared challenges as climate change, nuclear disarmament and the need to maintain international peace and security. Technologies, including artificial intelligence, were being misused to foster hatred, extremism and intolerance. Misinformation and disinformation could be used to

spread rumours, undermine social cohesion, incite people to violence or to commit crimes, or to promote ideas that ran counter to the prevailing cultural norms and the laws in force.

18. Journalists had a duty to be rigorous, objective and transparent. The mission of the media was to support cultural exchange, and the United Nations was ideally placed to be a source of information for that purpose. His delegation welcomed the role of the United Nations and, in particular, the Department of Global Communications, in providing accurate information in all the official languages. It hoped that the Department would play an even greater role in disseminating information about international humanitarian law and human rights violations, including those perpetrated by rebel militias and armed groups.

19. Freedom of expression could not justify spreading hate or denigrating others' beliefs and religious or historic symbols. There was a need to strike a balance between upholding the right to freedom of expression and protecting the rights and freedoms of others.

20. **Mr. Ghelich** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that although ICT was an effective tool for connecting people from different societies, the gap between developed and developing countries had significantly widened as a result of deliberately perpetuated disparities in access to ICT and broadband connectivity. The Islamic Republic of Iran was deeply concerned by certain countries using their monopoly on modern communication technology to distort and fabricate lies about the reality in other countries. Such technology should be used in a way that was in full compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and internationally recognized rules of civil coexistence and friendly relations among States, specifically the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in States' internal affairs. Media platforms with an extraterritorial impact should be held accountable for conduct that undermined the security, identity, territorial integrity, culture or public order and moral values of other societies.

21. The United Nations had an important role to play in raising international awareness about the negative consequences of the occupation of Palestine and the violence perpetrated against Palestinians. Fake news and disinformation were increasingly being used to exacerbate racism and incite violence against innocent Palestinians, and to cover up the brutality and barbarity of the Israeli occupying regime. The Department had a responsibility to raise awareness of the global response to one of the greatest tragedies in human history. The plight of the Palestinian people was beyond words: in addition to the deliberate cut-off of water, food, fuel,

medical supplies and electricity in Gaza, thousands of Palestinians had been killed, including hundreds, many of whom were children, at the Ahli Arab Hospital on 17 October 2023. Those crimes constituted flagrant violations of international law and of the Charter of the United Nations. The Israeli regime had developed a disturbing pattern of invoking self-defence to justify the killing of civilians, particularly children. It would not be successful in doing so.

22. The current climate of intolerance and hatred towards Islam and Muslims across the globe, fuelled by anti-Muslim media outlets and the bigoted rhetoric of certain political figures, was of grave concern. The Department should continue its efforts in that regard, including by observing the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March, and should include in its annual reports information on its activities aimed at combating Islamophobia.

23. The Department was well positioned to help bridge the digital divide and use ICT to promote development. It should be mandated to raise public awareness of the detrimental effects on sustainable development of unilateral coercive measures, illegal occupation, violence, extremism, poverty, climate change and terrorism. In pursuit of narrow political objectives, certain powers continued to use unilateral coercive measures to block technology transfer, denying developing societies access to communication infrastructure and capacity-building. The Department should support efforts to ensure that developing nations were given equal access to social media platforms in a timely and impartial manner.

24. The Secretariat should continue to explore solutions for issuing media products in non-official languages, including Persian, in response to the growing demand for content in those languages. Persian was spoken by more than 120 million people worldwide and was the wellspring of great cultures and civilizations.

25. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) said that there had been a flood of misinformation and disinformation during recent conflicts, especially since the escalation of the Israel Palestine conflict on 7 October 2023. Misinformation and disinformation were fuelling violence and instability, and hate speech was leading to a rise in xenophobia and intolerance. The Department should strengthen its efforts to coordinate crisis communications in conflict situations, especially in Gaza, where millions of people were in dire humanitarian need. It should also raise awareness of the atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

26. His delegation commended the Department's work in support of United Nations climate action, and encouraged it to seek out a wider audience and tailor its approach to the most climate-vulnerable countries.

27. Rising anti-United Nations sentiment in some countries which hosted peacekeeping operations was of concern. The Department should continue to highlight the role of such operations and combat propaganda directed against them. In that regard, the continuation of the Service and Sacrifice campaign was welcome. His delegation encouraged the Department to work with the Department of Operational Support on the issues related to environmental management in peace operations.

28. The Department of Global Communications should increase its engagement with the Peacebuilding Support Office, including to raise awareness of the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. His delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to promote multilingualism and save small languages from extinction, including by partnering with Bangladesh to observe International Mother Language Day on 21 February.

29. The United Nations information centre in Bangladesh was complementing the efforts of his Government to foster multilingualism by promoting the languages of ethnic minorities, disseminating information on the work of the United Nations in Bangla and supporting the organization of model United Nations conferences. The activities of the centres should be strengthened and supported with adequate resources.

30. The Department should do more to raise awareness of genocide and atrocity crimes. Presenting lessons of past genocides, including the genocide which had taken place in Bangladesh in 1971, would support collective efforts to prevent further genocides.

31. Lastly, the proposed code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms would serve as a good basis for further discussions on A Pact for the Future, to be adopted in 2024.

32. **Mr. Alsammak** (Iraq) said that the media played a major role in fostering peaceful coexistence, dialogue, culture, freedom, justice and mutual respect, as well as strengthening ties between countries and promoting human rights. His Government had established an independent media and telecommunications agency, which covered television, the radio, digital media and the press, and whose role it was to counter discrimination, hate speech, stereotypes, intolerance exclusion and everything that undermined the values of society. It was important to counter extremism and make sure that terrorist groups were not able to use social

media to spread their ideology. His delegation welcomed the work of the Department to shed light on different cultures and to raise public awareness about international issues. It urged the competent United Nations entities and, in particular, the Department, to use credible information and rely on official sources.

33. The United Nations should step up its efforts to counter the use of media to incite hatred, violence and discord and to raise public awareness of such manipulation, in order to bolster peace and security worldwide. The media had a positive role to play in upholding human rights, including freedom of religion, in the fight against terrorism and extremism and in promoting justice and peace. Rapid technological changes had created a global village, which brought inherent challenges; but his delegation was confident that the peoples and Governments of the world be able to adapt to those changes so as to ensure sustainable development and maintain international peace and security.

34. **Ms. Cedano** (Dominican Republic) said that her delegation welcomed the innovative approach taken by the Department to enhance its capacity to reach people all around the world with detailed, reliable information on the work of the United Nations. It was pleased with the Department's responses to other pressing challenges, such as climate change, the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and the cholera outbreak and drastic deterioration of the security situation in Haiti, which had led the Department to activate a crisis communication cell on the response of the United Nations.

35. Multilingualism and diversity were cardinal values of multilateralism, and the Dominican Republic welcomed the efforts of the Department to share information in local and ethnic minority languages and in forms accessible to persons with disabilities. The Department should continue to disseminate information on the work of the United Nations in as many languages as possible, taking into consideration linguistic and cultural diversity and countries' different levels of digital development. It should also continue to facilitate international cooperation and capacity-building in the field of ICT and the media, in particular for developing countries.

36. The Dominican Republic welcomed the groundwork being done towards the development of a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. The work of the Department and of the Fourth Committee was increasingly relevant in view of the complex and fraught international environment, the

plethora of communication media and the need to combat misinformation and disinformation.

37. **Mr. Ipo** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation supported the efforts of the Department and encouraged it to enhance its strategic communication by increasing its dissemination of factual, timely, targeted, clear, accessible, multilingual and science-based information through all platforms.

38. Multilingualism was important for both the work of the United Nations and the dissemination of information about its work to a larger global audience. Côte d'Ivoire therefore echoed the call for the equitable treatment and use of all the official languages in all United Nations activities, and urged the Department to increase its efforts to make working documents available to Member States in all six languages in real time. There was also a need to strengthen the network of United Nations information centres, which played an essential part in promoting an understanding of the work of the Organization and in promoting its goals. The relevant United Nations services must be adequately funded to enable them to support multilingualism, which remained the driver of multilateral diplomacy.

39. The rapid development of ICT, which had transformed societies and given rise to genuine expectations of an improvement in living conditions, had become a source of concern because of its frequent malicious use. In the light of the spread of fake news and the manipulation of information on the Internet and social media, his delegation welcomed the Organization's focus on fostering safety and trust in digital environments. It particularly welcomed the Secretary General's commitment to preserving and promoting human rights in the fields of ICT and artificial intelligence, and continued to support initiatives aimed at fostering an open, free and safe online environment in which there was full respect for data protection, privacy and other relevant human rights norms.

40. International cooperation, technology transfer and capacity-building were needed to close the digital divide and ensure universal, safe, inclusive and affordable Internet access by 2030, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 9. In 2021, Côte d'Ivoire had adopted a national ICT development strategy for the period up to 2025. The strategy should enable his country to consolidate its economic growth, including by mainstreaming the use of ICT, improving the productivity of public and private-sector entities, creating jobs, empowering women and girls, and strengthening cybersecurity.

41. **Ms. Ouattara Cisse** (Burkina Faso) said that new information and communications technologies made it possible to reach a broader audience, but also entailed the risk of fake news and cybercriminality. Her delegation welcomed the United Nations negotiations under way for the adoption of a binding instrument on preventing the use of ICTs for criminal purposes. In Burkina Faso, such technologies had fostered radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism, serving as platforms for the enrolment of young people. Poor governance and use of such technologies had contributed in part to the current situation of terrorism in the Sahel. Her Government had taken action to raise awareness among citizens and media professionals, in order to better regulate information, enhance the use of technologies, and foster social resilience and cohesion and lasting peace.

42. Despite challenging operating conditions, the United Nations information centre in Burkina Faso had continued to facilitate access to information with regard to the Organization and her country, and to provide communications support. It also played a watchdog role in relation to poverty, food security and natural disasters and organized awareness-raising sessions to combat hate speech, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The work of the information centre to disseminate the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in three national languages was commendable, and the dissemination of its programmes in the main local languages should be resumed.

43. Traditional media continued to be the main source of information for many people, especially in developing countries, and should be supported accordingly. Moreover, increased multilingualism within the United Nations was necessary to guarantee respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, in line with General Assembly resolution [69/324](#). Lastly, her delegation condemned the use of international or national media outlets for selfish and non-constructive purposes and reiterated its support for media freedom.

44. **Mr. Manzeri Ngondo** (Congo) said that the Congo had adopted several regulations on information and related challenges, including hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. Its Constitution and national laws enshrined values such as freedom of belief, information and communication, while rejecting propaganda for violent or hateful purposes. The dissemination of accurate, impartial and multilingual information to the public was crucial, given the linguistic diversity of Member States and their varying levels of development.

45. The Charter of the United Nations enshrined the principles of equality between the official languages and non-discrimination between languages, which were essential to strengthening the sovereignty and equal participation of Member States. Multilingualism was essential to the effectiveness of multilateral action and to ensuring that Member States could contribute to international discussions. The Department of Global Communications should ensure equal use of the six official languages across all websites of the Secretariat and use traditional means of communication to reach audiences with limited Internet access, particularly in developing countries.

46. **Ms. Al Rashdi** (Oman) said that information related to the United Nations and its activities was failing to reach certain areas of the world, including the Middle East. In Oman, traditional, digital and social media all played an important role in fostering respect, pluralism and moderation. Her Government had focused on spreading a culture of peace and tolerance through its local media. The Omani media had also provided reliable information to shape the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

47. Her Government attached great importance to freedom of opinion and expression. Accordingly, it had hosted the 2022 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists, attended by 350 journalists from around the world. The Department should continue to convey the message of the United Nations in order to combat hate speech, fanaticism, discrimination and Islamophobia, which had all increased recently. The Department should be given adequate resources to fulfil those tasks and to compile comprehensive reports of the Secretary-General on those issues and the actions taken to address them.

48. **Ms. Mocanu** (Romania) said that citizens needed access to diverse, transparent and trustworthy information. Accordingly, Romania had channelled its official development assistance into championing quality journalism and promoting media and information literacy and resilience to disinformation, in line with its belief in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It had also conducted a training programme for journalists that covered combating disinformation and ensuring freedom of expression.

49. Her delegation commended the work of the Department on a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. With regard to the current developments in the Middle East, Member States, the Secretariat and Special Rapporteurs should speak out against antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and hate speech of all kinds. Lastly, multilingualism was a core

pillar of the United Nations and should be realized in the daily work of the Organization.

50. **Mr. Alvarez** (Argentina) said that his delegation recognized the intensive work undertaken by the secretariat of the Committee on Information Secretariat and the Department of Global Communications, particularly the efforts to produce and disseminate multilingual content. The United Nations should continue to act as a source of information in the public interest and a tool to combat disinformation, particularly given the rise in conflicts and emerging threats to peace and stability. The Organization must adapt its messages to new tools and formats, ensuring that no one was left behind, particularly those without access to new information and communications technologies.

51. The development model for information and communications technologies in Argentina placed special emphasis on human rights, which were central to its regulatory and legal frameworks, while promoting universal access to telecommunications networks. His delegation encouraged the Secretariat to continue consulting closely with Member States on that issue.

52. Concerning multilingualism, the Department must move away from a translation-based culture, where English was seen as the primary language, to a truly multilingual approach where the specificities of all languages were taken into account at all stages of communication. The Secretariat should address the lack of resources by reallocating existing resources, to uphold the principle of ensuring equal use of all official languages.

53. His delegation highlighted the work of the Spanish News Centre as the only website collecting multimedia content in Spanish. The Centre provided Spanish-language materials on the work of the United Nations as well as other content geared towards the interests of Spanish-speaking audiences. The United Nations information centres in Latin America did commendable work to produce content on the global agenda of the Organization, with focus on the regional implications and challenges. His delegation also welcomed the increase in Spanish content on the United Nations website and social media. The Secretariat should take into account the demand for such content by reallocating existing resources, particularly for staff, in response to the growing demand for up-to-date Spanish content.

54. **Mr. Ferreira Silva Aranda** (Portugal) said that, while many people favoured digital platforms as information sources, the digital gap remained a reality. Moreover, an increasing number of people received information from social media feeds, which were part of a toxic information ecosystem in which misinformation

and disinformation thrived. Action should be taken to improve awareness of, and access to, reliable and trustworthy information from credible and independent media sources. Such action must, however, be consistent with international law, and must not be misused to stifle freedom of expression. His delegation therefore supported the idea of a global code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms.

55. His delegation commended the Department's efforts to counter disinformation, such as its updates on the United Nations response to the war in Ukraine, including in Portuguese, on social media; the promotion of peacekeeping operations; and improvements to strategic communications within the United Nations system. The Department should play a fundamental role in the context of peacekeeping operations during both deployment and transitions, through comprehensive communications strategies. It should continue to use Portuguese in United Nations documents and communications. Portugal would continue providing support to the information centre in Brussels and to the Department, through the Portuguese Language Unit of United Nations News.

56. **Mr. Alaklabi** (Saudi Arabia) said that, as part of its Vision 2030 plan, Saudi Arabia had taken action to promote cultural and artistic diversity, boost the film industry, establish museums, train gifted young artists, boost human capacities, improve the country's digital infrastructure and digitize public services.

57. The Department must ensure that its information was accurate, credible and taken from official sources. Information centres should strengthen their media presence in all official languages of the United Nations, including Arabic, to promote multilateral diplomacy and the values of the Organization. His delegation celebrated the Arabic language every year on 18 December at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

58. Greater efforts should be made to highlight the progress made in several Arab States and to raise awareness of Arab issues, including the current situation of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip. The media must give an accurate and impartial account of the genocide and forced displacement that were currently being perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces. The United Nations should fulfil its responsibility in respect of media outlets that propagated hatred, extremism and violence in an attempt to destabilize the region. Efforts must also be intensified to combat hate speech, particularly Islamophobia and acts of violence against Muslims.

59. **Mr. Merabet** (Algeria) said that the Department played a commendable role in combating

misinformation and disinformation, in addition to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, climate-related work, human rights and peace and security. Through the *Africa Renewal* magazine, it also raised awareness of the work of the African Union, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Economic Commission for Africa.

60. The Department was the principal and official source of information concerning multilateral action, and media outlets around the world saw it as the most reliable source of information in that area. It must therefore consistently endeavour to be accurate and objective. In particular, press releases and coverage of meetings must faithfully reflect the positions and interactions of Member States. On many occasions, his delegation had drawn attention to mistakes on the United Nations website. It had called for inquiries to find out who was responsible for those mistakes, which had occurred repeatedly and could no longer be assumed to have been made in good faith; but it had yet to hear of any outcome. His delegation urged the Department to exercise greater caution in order to avoid such mistakes, and to show neutrality, accuracy and objectivity, particularly when reporting on the positions of Member States.

61. His delegation welcomed the efforts made by the Department to ensure equality among all six United Nations languages and ensure that human and financial resources were distributed fairly among all languages, including Arabic, which continued to be used insufficiently on United Nations media platforms.

62. **Mr. Peñalver Portal** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that there was an increasing interest among the global population in knowing more about the work of the United Nations and how it addressed challenges. Nonetheless, there were significant educational and cultural inequalities worldwide, with millions unable to access the platforms that provided information on the Organization. It was therefore crucial to continue using traditional means of communications, while also ensuring that new information and communications technologies were accessible to all countries without discrimination.

63. Illegal unilateral coercive measures, such as the blockade imposed by the Government of the United States against Cuba, made it virtually impossible to advance the development of information and communications technology. Between March 2022 and February 2023, the economic damage done by the blockade to that sector had been significant. Nonetheless, as part of its national plan for

socioeconomic development, his Government had continued to focus on the digitization of society and the development of telecommunications services.

64. The United States used cyberspace to attempt to subvert the Cuban political and legal system, particularly through digital platforms. It also financed the development of platforms that generated ideological content designed to overthrow the constitutional order; promoted the holding of public protests; and incited acts of terrorism including the assassination of Government representatives. In the context of a genuine economic war, the United States Government had unleashed a pernicious media campaign to destabilize the country. By doing so, it had created a misleading narrative and false image of a repressive and unstable Government in crisis, something that was in clear violation of international law.

65. Cuba fully rejected and condemned the ongoing aggression pursued by the United States against Cuba through radio and television broadcasts, which violated the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and various rules of the International Telecommunications Union. The United States was flagrantly violating the sovereign right of Cuba to regulate information flows, and using the Internet for political and subversive purposes.

66. The use of communications technologies must be completely consistent with the purposes and principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, particularly sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and peaceful coexistence.

67. **Mr. Pierre** (Haiti) said that in the current digital age, the United Nations must promote a new international order for more fair and effective information and communications, with a view to fostering international peace and understanding. Information should be disseminated in a broader and more balanced manner, while taking into account the importance of multilingualism. The use of local or official languages of the host countries in United Nations missions was a crucial factor for the successful implementation of their mandates.

68. The Committee on Information and the Department of Global Communications should promote dialogue with major international partners, including universities, civil society and young people. The Department should also strive to ensure the equal treatment of official United Nations languages in all its activities. The future of the United Nations depended on young people, who must therefore be kept informed and be enabled to participate in the activities of the Organization.

69. In July 2022, his delegation had asked to join the Committee of Information; it was still waiting for a response.

70. **Ms. Yoshida** (Japan) said that the Department had worked commendably to address online harm, uphold human rights, call for transparency in the area of artificial intelligence, and establish a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. The United Nations information centres were doing vital work to combat misinformation and disinformation. The information centre in Japan had worked to promote awareness of the 2030 Agenda, including through collaboration with the Sustainable Development Goals Media Compact.

71. The upcoming Expo 2025 in Osaka would provide an opportunity for Member States to seek solutions and share best practices on topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals. It was time for bold action and concrete steps towards achieving the Goals and improving of the information landscape while ensuring that no one was left behind.

72. **Mr. El Mezouaghi** (Morocco) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of the Department to disseminate reliable information about the work of the United Nations in the areas of sustainable development, peace and security, climate change and the food crisis. It appreciated the Department's efforts to promote the use of the six official languages, as well as Hindi, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Urdu. It welcomed the allocation of additional resources, which had made it possible to promote the use of all the official languages on the website of the United Nations.

73. His delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to combat the proliferation of disinformation through innovative responses such as the Verified initiative. Peacekeepers continued to face the consequences of misinformation; his delegation therefore welcomed the continuation of the Service and Sacrifice campaign. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution [75/309](#), proclaiming 18 June as the annual International Day for Countering Hate Speech, particular attention had been paid to that issue, in part thanks to the work of the Department.

74. The United Nations information centre in Rabat played an essential role in disseminating information about the work of the United Nations in Morocco and in the wider region. It was imperative to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries and, in the meantime, to continue to use traditional media such as radio. His delegation fully supported the proposed code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms.

75. **Mr. Ray** (Nepal) said that the expansion of the Verified initiative to address issues beyond the initial focus on COVID-19 demonstrated the Department's adaptability and dedication. His delegation was pleased to see the Organization's use of efficient and multidimensional ways of sharing information, including through the main United Nations website, United Nations Web TV and YouTube, Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter). The Department thus had a crucial role in harmonizing the Organization's work on climate action, disaster response and emergency preparedness. Nepal welcomed the Act Now campaign, which was aimed at promoting individual climate-friendly actions.

76. The digital revolution had opened new horizons for information; but the development of digital technologies was outpacing regulatory frameworks and exacerbating the digital divide. One third of the world's population, primarily from the developing world, remained unconnected to the digital realm. The rise of misinformation and disinformation, especially on online platforms and social media, was leading to societal tensions, discrimination, hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance. Digital platforms had also been misused to spread hate against United Nations peacekeeping missions and humanitarian operations, leading to targeted attacks against peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel. The Department was instrumental in countering that trend. His delegation looked forward to the development of the proposed code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms.

77. The Service and Sacrifice campaign had enhanced public recognition of the invaluable contributions of peacekeepers. His delegation urged the Department to also highlight the contributions of individual troop- and police-contributing countries and to enhance its collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission.

78. Nepal appreciated the Department's worldwide network of 59 active United Nations information centres. The Department should continue to expand the array of languages used in its news and publications. In particular, his delegation would welcome more content in Nepali. The centres' technical capability and infrastructure should be enhanced to bolster their reach to the local communities. In addition, the United Nations should seek to balance its use of digital and traditional platforms, especially in view of the importance of radio, television and printed materials in rural and remote areas. The Department should collaborate with regional, subregional and local organizations, including civil society organizations, and with youth, women and educational institutions.

79. **Mr. Sabarudin** (Malaysia) said that although ICT had made information much more readily accessible, digital platforms were being exploited to disseminate lies and hatred which threatened national security, governance and social stability. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation heightened the collective responsibility of Member States to respond to the global demand for accurate, fair, comprehensive information. Malaysia was particularly concerned by the disinformation campaign that Israel was conducting with regard to its aggression and the atrocities it was committing against Palestinians. Such disinformation endangered public trust in the media and undermined the credibility of international institutions, including the United Nations.

80. A new form of racism had emerged, characterized by xenophobia, negative profiling and wrongful stereotyping of Muslims, which had led to a wave of hatred, discrimination and even acts of violence against Muslims. Such acts must not be legitimized under the guise of human rights; the burning and defilement of the Qur'an were clear expressions of Islamophobia, designed to incite hatred and provoke conflict. It was essential to promote narratives that fostered tolerance, peaceful coexistence and interfaith and cultural harmony.

81. The Department of Global Communications had a vital role to play in that regard. It should intensify its efforts to disseminate factual, objective and reliable information. It should also continue to engage with Member States, the proprietors of digital platforms and other stakeholders to develop a code of conduct for information integrity. There was an urgent need to bridge the digital divide, which was widening due to the emergence and rapid development of new technologies which were not equally accessible. The United Nations should focus on multilingualism in all its activities in order to enhance its visibility and the effectiveness of its work, connect with a wider audience and foster inclusivity, diversity and tolerance. Malaysia commended the Department for its efforts to disseminate information in multiple languages, and for its tireless work to counter the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

82. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) said that her delegation commended the efforts of the Department to confront the growing threat posed by misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. The establishment of a centralized team for information integrity and the training of United Nations personnel in that area were steps in the right direction. Her delegation likewise welcomed the steps taken towards developing a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms.

For the initiative to be successful, the relevant actors must be able to take ownership of the code, for which reason her delegation supported broad intergovernmental consultations and the establishment of a mechanism to enable wider input.

83. In recent weeks, disinformation about the conflict in the Middle East had undermined peace and cooperation and incited discrimination, hostility and violence. El Salvador was concerned about the enormous impact of disinformation on vulnerable groups, including migrants. The Department should support the efforts of Member States and the United Nations system to eliminate all forms of discrimination, stigmatization, hate speech, negative stereotyping and distorted narratives that generated negative perceptions of migrants and diasporas. There was a need for a public discussion, based on empirical evidence, aimed at recognizing migrants as agents of sustainable development and holders of rights. The Department should also analyse the increase in disinformation about gender and propose human rights-based measures and concerted action to counter it.

84. In the light of the deplorable attacks on United Nations peacekeepers and other personnel on the ground, the Department should continue to support efforts to disseminate accurate information to the public to improve understanding of the mandates of peace operations, manage expectations and gain the trust of local communities. The expansion of the Verified initiative to cover other areas, including communications about crises and conflict situations, was essential for helping the general public to identify accurate and reliable information.

85. **Ms. Pavluta-Deslandes** (Latvia) said that promoting information integrity, safeguarding the freedom of expression and media freedom, addressing disinformation worldwide and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable groups, societies and States remained top priorities for Latvia. Latvia thus supported the work of the Department, which delivered precise, facts-based, reliable information in different formats, supported the media around the world, conducted outreach activities and offered guidance on how to best address disinformation. Despite all the many global challenges, widespread uncertainty and rapidly changing information environment, the United Nations had managed to remain at the centre of global communication solutions. However, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, enabled by Belarus, posed a fundamental challenge to the international rules-based order. Russia was spreading disinformation on a massive scale, using it as a tool of warfare, including at the United Nations. Its war propaganda, designed to

justify its armed aggression and war crimes against Ukraine, had led to all too many deaths in Ukraine.

86. International missions, including United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa, were also the targets of information manipulation and disinformation campaigns, including by Russia-affiliated groups. The United Nations system and all Member States must continue to uphold the Charter of the United Nations and work to prevent the manipulation of information. Latvia welcomed the work done towards a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. Part of the process must involve demanding that the proprietors of online platforms act with greater transparency and take responsibility for the manipulation of information and misuse of their platforms by malign actors. Digital platforms had transformed social, cultural and political interactions everywhere, and Latvia had proactively imposed accountability and transparency requirements on them. However, in countering disinformation, it was essential to avoid undermining fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression. In addition, it was necessary to ensure that platforms were able to limit the spread of disinformation sponsored and disseminated by certain State actors.

87. The Global Declaration on Information Integrity Online, launched on 20 September 2023, was aimed at safeguarding the information ecosystem and guiding government efforts to uphold information integrity. The Declaration, which remained open for signature, was expected to strengthen the response to challenges generated by artificial intelligence.

88. In its resolution [75/267](#), the General Assembly had invited Member States to commemorate Global Media and Information Literacy Week each year from 24 to 31 October. In the current digital environment, media and information literacy was vital for resilient societies, and, alongside digital literacy, it would contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

89. **Mr. Sekeris** (Greece) said that there were many challenges in the area of information, including unequal access to digital technologies, threats to the freedom of expression, disinformation, and foreign information manipulation and interference. The deliberate spread of false narratives should be unequivocally condemned and countered with evidence-based information focused on human rights and gender.

90. As a Co-Chair of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists, Greece, together with Lithuania and France, considered the protection of journalists to be of the utmost importance, Particularly in times of crisis, where access to information could consolidate efforts to strengthen democracy, respect for

human rights and freedom. In view of the prevalence of disinformation at the current time, independent reporting was all the more important. Women journalists and media workers were especially vulnerable. The Group of Friends, which had been established in 2016, continued to work closely with United Nations entities, representatives of media organizations and non-governmental organization platforms.

91. Artificial intelligence could help to disseminate information, but it could easily be used to promote misinformation and disinformation. His Government had taken several initiatives to increase media literacy, in order to help its citizens to recognize and critically assess disinformation. Together with its partners, Greece was also working towards the adoption of the global code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. His delegation welcomed the imminent establishment of a high-level advisory body on artificial intelligence and called on the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology to make sure that risks related to the use of artificial intelligence were taken into consideration in the negotiations on the digital compact.

92. The United Nations should take a multilingual approach in all of its efforts to address the current challenges. His delegation encouraged the Department of Global Communications to mainstream multilingualism by dissemination information in more languages, especially at the local level through the United Nations information centres.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

93. **Ms. Maayan** (Israel) said that it was ironic that the Fourth Committee, while holding a discussion about disinformation and hate speech, allowed representatives of rogue regimes to take the floor and spread misinformation. Represented in the room were regimes which still had not condemned the massacre, rape and kidnapping of innocent Israeli civilians; which exhibited blatant disregard for the fundamental principles of free and open information dissemination; and which regularly restricted access to free and reliable media outlets and sources of information.

94. It had been ironic to hear the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a State which sponsored terrorism, promoted lies on social media and spread antisemitism on a daily basis, denounce the spread of misinformation. Israel mourned the loss of innocent lives in Gaza. The tragic events at the Ahli Arab Hospital on 17 October were a new reminder of the war crimes of Hamas and the ease with which the group viciously manipulated information. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror organization, which had been the

partner of Hamas in the 7 October 2023 massacre, had fired a missile salvo towards Israel. One of the missiles had misfired and landed on the Ahli Arab Hospital, resulting in many casualties and severe damage. Yet, some media outlets, as well as some Governments, had been quick to blame Israel. The Israel Defense Forces had not been conducting any operations in the area at the time of the impact. Responsible media outlets should not merely repeat false accusations and lies given to them by representatives of bloodthirsty terrorist organizations, such as Hamas. Such behaviour was not only unethical, it was dangerous: those false publications had led to regional riots, violence and incitement to murder. Hamas and Islamic Jihad had fired over 7,000 rockets at civilians in Israel over the past few days. They launched their attacks from civilian areas in order to use civilians as human shields, or as cannon fodder; as a result, Israel took the blame. Those who had cruelly murdered Israeli children were also murdering their own children, and were using their crime to fuel antisemitism around the world. Those who truly cared about civilian lives should forcefully condemn the war crimes perpetrated by Hamas and other terrorist organizations.

95. **Mr. Jung Jae Hyak** (Republic of Korea), responding to the remarks made at the previous meeting by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (see [A/C.4/78/SR.12](#), paras. 75 and 76), said that no one with an accurate understanding of history, or with common sense, would believe that country's allegation that the United States of America had instigated the Republic of Korea to launch a full-scale military invasion of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1950. The United Nations Command in Korea had been created legally and officially established in accordance with Security Council resolution [84 \(1950\)](#). It was universally recognized that the United Nations Command in Korea continued to contribute to the maintenance of peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The unilateral assertion by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that the Command should be dissolved therefore did not make sense.

96. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the representative of the Israeli regime had made baseless allegations against his country. Officials of that regime habitually attempted to portray Israel as a victim, and disseminated false, fabricated accusations against other countries in the region, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, in order to conceal their own country's atrocities and brutality against innocent Palestinians. In addition to waging a genocidal campaign, the Israeli regime was spreading disinformation designed to

demonize and dehumanize Palestinians and legitimize its unprecedented military action against them. For instance, it had fabricated news that 40 babies had been beheaded in an Israeli kibbutz, a hoax which had spread quickly on social media networks and had been widely promoted by prominent Western politicians and social media influencers. Despite the lack of any conclusive evidence, allegations of children being beheaded and women being raped had made headlines, and Israel had used those lies to justify its war crimes and the collective punishment of civilians in Gaza. In addition, it was spreading contradictory and false narratives regarding the bombing of the Ahli Arab Hospital in order to cover up its crime, which had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of innocent Palestinians, including women and children.

97. No amount of disinformation could cover up the criminal nature of the Israeli regime, which had pursued expansionist and warmongering policies for more than 70 years. Attempts by Israel to seek international sympathy were simply manipulative propaganda. Its unlawful acts, apartheid policies and war crimes had been documented by the United Nations. Over the course of its ruthless 10-day bombing of Gaza, the Israeli regime had killed thousands of Palestinians, including children and women. The regime was not a State, but a group of terrorist gangsters who posed a threat to all independent and freedom-loving countries.

98. **Mr. Strzhizhovskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the representative of Latvia had proclaimed the importance of upholding the freedom of the media; however, on 28 September 2023, the Latvian Parliament had approved a new national security strategy, according to which Latvian public media would be prohibited from broadcasting in Russian as from 1 January 2026. In keeping with its uncompromisingly Russophobic stance, Latvia had equated the fact that people in the country continued to speak, think and read news in Russian with a threat to national security. It was telling that such actions were being taken in a country where Russian, one of the official languages of the United Nations, was the main means of communication for some 40 per cent of the population. The fact that the decision had been adopted on International Day for Universal Access to Information was a cynical mockery of that country's commitments to protecting human rights.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.