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Agenda item 10

Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session

Draft report of the Committee on Information

Rapporteur: Darren Camilleri (Malta)

Chapter III General debate

1. Statements in the general debate were provided by representatives of Guinea (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the European Union, Colombia (on behalf of the Groups of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations), Cabo Verde (on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries), the Philippines, Costa Rica, Japan, India, Portugal, Pakistan, Jamaica, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Brazil, Israel, Egypt, Malta, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Cuba, Latvia, Ukraine, Morocco, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), El Salvador, Argentina, Ecuador, Angola, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, Spain, Indonesia, Côte d'Ivoire (also on behalf of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors), Lebanon, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Iran (Islamic Republic of).

2. The general debate commenced after a statement by the Chair of the Committee. He noted that, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to affect people around the world, humanity stood at a critical juncture in history. He stated that the need for the United Nations to provide reliable, neutral and objective information had become even more vital to counter the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. He praised the “Verified” campaign of the Department of Global Communications as an important initiative to tackle such dangers in a timely manner. The Chair acknowledged the efforts made by the Department to guarantee that its outputs and services were multilingual, while also pointing out that more could be done in that regard.

3. The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, Melissa Fleming, also made a statement, outlining the various activities and initiatives that the Department had conducted. She noted that the “infodemic” had become an immediate



test case for the global communications strategy that the Department was starting to roll out and which represented an approach that could be applied to other issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals, women and peace and security, and climate change.

4. In addressing the substantive issues before the Committee, many representatives, including those representing large groups, expressed concerns about the “infodemic”, including the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many delegations noted that the pandemic had highlighted the need for United Nations communications to be more rapid, strategic and comprehensive. Speakers commended the Department’s efforts in tackling that problem by disseminating factual, timely and science-based information using modern and traditional media in the six official languages. Many speakers specifically noted with appreciation, and expressed support for, the “Verified” initiative led by the Department to combat misinformation and disinformation. Speakers especially commended the Department on its implementation of the “Only Together” and “Pledge to Pause” campaigns. Many speakers welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution [75/267](#), by which it had proclaimed 24 to 31 October of each year the Global Media and Information Literacy Week, which many noted would help to tackle that problem.

5. While many speakers commended the Department on its use of social media and digital campaigns to disseminate the work of the United Nations, speakers also touched upon the growing issue of the digital divide within and between countries, which many noted had widened during the pandemic. Many delegates encouraged the Organization to take steps to secure greater Internet connectivity. In addition, several speakers urged the Department to continue to allocate resources to traditional media, such as print, television and radio, on which a considerable portion of the global population still relied. Speakers highlighted the need for more inclusive forms of media, such as closed-captioned videos and sign-language interpreters, to ensure that everyone, including vulnerable groups and people with disabilities, had access to information distributed by the Organization.

6. Numerous delegates noted with concern the rise of hate speech over the past year, especially that related to racism, religious persecution and xenophobia. Many delegates condemned the proliferation of hate speech and praised the “Verified” initiative for leading the way with science-based and fact-based information to combat it. In that context, several delegates also expressed concerns about restricting freedom of expression. Several speakers touched upon the observance of World Press Freedom Day and highlighted the need to protect journalists and ensure public access to information, while one delegation stressed the importance of recognizing the contributions of journalists and ensuring their safety.

7. Many representatives, including those representing large groups, stressed the importance of multilingualism and language parity, not only to meet the mandates of the Department, but also to advance the values of the United Nations, including inclusiveness, transparency and accountability. The use of the six official languages must be balanced to reflect diversity and effectively promote the Organization to a global audience. Several speakers highlighted the need to produce original content in the six official languages, rather than translating from one language into another. One speaker reiterated that the Department must move away from the culture of translation and move towards a true multilingual culture. Several delegations also noted the prominent growth of the Spanish language audience and asked the Department to take that factor into consideration when allocating resources. While some speakers noted the limitations placed on the Department’s ability to accomplish its mandated tasks,

especially in the use of non-official languages, they urged it to explore innovative financing options and voluntary contributions.

8. Numerous representatives thanked the Department for ensuring business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic and for implementing the global communications strategy, the first such strategy for the Organization. One delegation noted that the strategy would be a useful framework to address various issues that the world faced today. Several delegations commended the multilingual and multimedia strategic communication policy of the Department to disseminate information and raise awareness about various issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change. Some speakers commended the Department on its special information programme on the question of Palestine, although one delegation expressed the view that it offered a biased and misleading representation of the situation. Some delegates noted with appreciation the call by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire to focus on the fight against the pandemic.

9. Recognition and praise for the United Nations information centres were also a consistent theme. Many delegates praised the work of the centres for their role in promoting the mandates of the United Nations and garnering support for the work of the Organization through the use of official and non-official languages. Several delegates commended the work of the centres in publishing information in 123 languages in 2019, including Braille. Delegates expressed the need for the centres to provide information to the most vulnerable populations during the pandemic. A large number of speakers reiterated their support for the centres and called on the Department to continue to make strides to strengthen their capacity.

10. The importance of strategic partnerships with civil society, academia (including through the United Nations Academic Impact) and the private sector was acknowledged by several speakers. Some speakers stressed that the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation could be best dealt with through such collaborations, by disseminating fact-based information to partners. Several delegations called upon the Department to strengthen partnerships with social media platforms, which had a major responsibility for protecting citizens. Numerous representatives also underscored the necessity of reaching out to young people in communicating the aims and ideals of the United Nations.

11. Various speakers stressed that communications must always be compatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, especially the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

12. Numerous delegations encouraged the Department to strengthen the promotion of the peacekeeping operations and peacekeepers serving under adverse conditions, including female peacekeepers. Delegates praised peacekeepers around the world for their continued work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
