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**Special Political and Decolonization Committee
(Fourth Committee)**

Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 18 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)
later: Mr. Almahmoud (Vice-Chair) (United Arab Emirates)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 57: Questions relating to information
(A/72/21 and A/72/258)

1. **Mr. Prasad** (India), speaking on a point of order, said that the Committee's second formal meeting on agenda item 57: Questions relating to information, scheduled for 19 October 2017, coincided with Diwali, a major holiday in India. In line with General Assembly resolution 69/250, wherein the Assembly stressed the need to avoid holding meetings on Diwali in view of its significance, the Committee should consider postponing the meeting.

2. **The Chair** said that, while the Committee had previously discussed the scheduling of that meeting during its consultations on its programme of work, he agreed with the representative of India on the need to observe holidays recognized by the United Nations. He therefore suggested that the Committee should postpone the meeting to 20 October 2017, with the exact time to be determined in consultation with the Secretariat.

3. *It was so decided.*

4. **Mr. Kishimori** (Japan), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of its thirty-ninth session (A/72/21), during which a total of 27 Member States and 3 observers had shared their perspectives on the state of global media and ways to raise awareness of the work of the United Nations. Speakers had emphasized that the main goal of disseminating information should be the promotion of peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples. The work of the Department of Public Information was important for garnering international support for United Nations activities, and the Organization needed to connect more effectively with the global public and ensure that its public information efforts yielded measurable results. Participants had commended the Department's initiatives on sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping missions and had urged it to provide multilingual support to other departments in their efforts to combat such abuse.

5. With regard to multilingualism, participants had urged the Department to narrow the gap among the different official languages on United Nations websites, particularly in view of the disparity between English and the other five languages. The fact that daily press releases were not issued in all official languages made it difficult for stakeholders to follow the work of United Nations bodies and fostered inaccessibility and a lack of transparency. The Organization should respond to the increasing demand for information in Spanish, given that it was the second most widely spoken language in

the world. As the most widely spoken official language, Chinese was another language that was underused in the Department's work, and languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese should also be used. While acknowledging the importance of mainstreaming multilingualism into the Secretariat's activities, speakers had pointed out the need for it to be accomplished in a cost-neutral manner within existing resources. It was also important to maintain traditional media such as television, radio and print in order to reach large populations without access to the Internet, given that electronic communications had widened the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The Department should also improve its internal management of new media platforms to ensure that they accurately reflected the positions of Member States.

6. The Department should maintain its neutrality and ensure that it disseminated balanced information and helped to combat the global rise of disinformation. Participants had expressed concern about the potential politicization of public information, in particular the inappropriate use of modern information and communications technologies to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign States and destabilize countries and regions. Noting the critical importance of the Department's work in view of the recent rise in radical ideologies worldwide, one speaker had proposed that the Committee on Information should provide recommendations for the development of an international strategy akin to those used to combat global epidemics in order to counter the rise of such ideologies.

7. While a number of participants had voiced support for the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, one delegation had expressed the view that it offered a biased and misleading narrative of the situation in the region. Several speakers had commended the Department on its training programme for Palestinian journalists. Some had also discussed the ways in which the Department could support United Nations efforts to tackle terrorism, unprecedented movements of refugees and migrants, and the new concept of "sustaining peace," and had called on the Department to pay special attention to the needs of Africa in formulating information policies. Furthermore, the Department should improve public understanding of the General Assembly's involvement in the selection of the Secretary-General.

8. The United Nations information centres had been widely praised for their role in amplifying the voice of the Organization and mobilizing support for its work by providing information on United Nations activities to

people in local languages. Speakers had also commended the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in particular the role of the United Nations Academic Impact initiative in disseminating information about the United Nations to academic and research communities. Participants had underscored the importance of developing strategic alliances with academia, the private sector and cultural institutions, and had noted with interest the Department's initiatives to empower youth.

9. Responding to comments from Member States participating in the session, the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had stressed the Department's commitment to multilingualism, in particular its work to harness partnerships and technology to provide information in all official languages, as well as in Kiswahili and Portuguese, whenever possible. He had described a number of cost-effective collaborations that were contributing to multilingualism; had pointed out that guided tours at all headquarters duty stations were provided in the six official languages, as well as local languages; and had underscored the work of information centres to disseminate information in official and local languages. Recalling that a recent pilot attempt to translate press releases into Spanish had proven unsatisfactory owing to issues of timeliness and accuracy, he had indicated that a proposal for additional resources for the translation of press releases had been rejected by the Fifth Committee. With regard to concerns about discrepancies between language versions, he had emphasized that press releases, which were produced under pressure and issued within two hours of the conclusion of a meeting, were not intended to be verbatim records providing full coverage of intergovernmental deliberations.

10. He had indicated that both new and traditional media were integral to the Department's work and would continue to be used in a complementary manner, adding that the Department was strengthening its internal oversight of new media accounts and that the membership of developing countries in the United Nations Academic Impact initiative was increasing rapidly. Moreover, he had outlined the Department's efforts to publicize the Organization's counter-terrorism efforts, including through the creation of a dedicated web portal, and had stressed the Department's readiness to identify tools and best practices for tackling the problem of disinformation.

11. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on Questions relating to information (A/72/258), said that the report contained updates to the

information provided to the Committee on Information at its thirty-ninth session, including a summary of activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information from March to September 2017. As requested by the Secretary-General, the Department was working to provide information about the United Nations to a global audience in increasingly modern ways. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was conducting an evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the Department's key outputs in the changing media and communications environment, the results of which would be published in March 2018.

12. The Department's primary objective was to promote global awareness of the impact of the Organization's work on billions of people each day. It also sought to mobilize the public, different constituencies and Member States in support of the United Nations agenda, and particularly targeted its communications efforts at young people. In that regard, the newly appointed Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth had a key role to play in promoting youth participation in United Nations processes and activities. The Department was also responsible for demonstrating the Organization's efforts to fulfil its mandates, live up to the trust placed in it and use its resources judiciously.

13. The Secretary-General had tasked her with making United Nations communications more modern, streamlined, effective and results-based, and the Department's efforts had resulted in a growing audience for its products. The primary website of the United Nations had received some six million page views during the high-level period of the current session of the General Assembly, while uninterrupted live streaming of the entire general debate had, for the first time, been provided simultaneously on United Nations WebTV, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The United Nations Twitter account had attracted a ten-fold increase in followers, and the Department had collaborated with Facebook to create videos featuring the Secretary-General and other world leaders, which had received more than 40 million views.

14. The Sustainable Development Goal media zone organized at Headquarters had provided a vibrant platform for more than 200 speakers, including Heads of State and Government, to raise awareness of the Goals among a global, primarily younger audience. The Department had provided strategic communications support for three high-level meetings on gender, climate change and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. It had also been instrumental in launching the joint European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, and had launched a multilingual web portal featuring

information on efforts by the Organization to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. Notwithstanding the significant number of major international news stories that had coincided with the Assembly's high-level period, the Department had processed some 2,800 requests from media outlets to cover the general debate, and more than 1,000 broadcasters worldwide had aired the footage of the opening of the debate disseminated by United Nations Web TV. Furthermore, 15 young journalists from developing countries and countries in transition had participated in the 2017 Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists' Fellowship Programme and had filed more than 100 stories for publication.

15. The United Nations information centres had organized more than 3,400 activities designed to promote awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. The centre in New Delhi had organized a story competition celebrating outstanding achievements of women in India, while the centre in Lagos, in collaboration with Radio Nigeria, disseminated weekly programmes about the Organization's work to an audience of up to 40 million Yoruba speakers. The information centres played a vital role in promoting United Nations peacekeeping at the local level, and the activities recently undertaken by the centres in Buenos Aires, Dar es Salaam and Dakar were consistent with the Secretary-General's call for the Department to work with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support to highlight the contribution of troop- and police-contributing countries.

16. The Department was engaged in fruitful partnerships with United Nations entities and intergovernmental, civil society and media organizations. It had concluded an agreement to promote the Sustainable Development Goals at the annual Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity and had organized events as part of its Remember Slavery programme. It continued to promote the economic and social development of Africa, and the recent work of the information centres in Nairobi, Dhaka, Mexico City, Port of Spain and Yangon had demonstrated the Department's important role in coordinating crisis communications. In that regard, in its capacity as Chair of the United Nations Communications Group, the Department had led the process for adopting standard operating procedures for crisis communications across the United Nations system.

17. Multilingualism remained a priority for the Department, which sought to target audiences in a balanced manner by disseminating information in a variety of languages and formats. To that end, it had

established a multilingual social media team to ensure that strategic and coherent coverage was provided across all social media platforms in all six official languages, as well as in Kiswahili and Portuguese. The Department would soon launch a mobile-friendly United Nations news web platform in those eight languages and had also upgraded its "UN Audio Channels" and "UN News Reader" applications. A new edition of *Basic Facts about the United Nations* published in May 2017 would soon be available in all six official languages, and the Department was continuing its multilingual umbrella communications campaign, "Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World". In response to increasing demand for free and easy access to information on the Organization's activities, the Department had developed a series of short explanatory videos on subjects such as the role of the United Nations, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for dissemination through the United Nations website. It had also recently launched a website, "The Essential UN," which featured fast facts and an overview of United Nations history, and had launched the United Nations Digital Library which, together with the United Nations iLibrary, provided searchable access to the Organization's digital content in the six official languages. In addition, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had developed 52 online research guides on topical issues in all official languages, and its online knowledge base, Ask Dag, provided authoritative answers to questions about the Organization. The number of visitors participating in the multilingual guided tours offered at Headquarters in 2017 was expected to reach 240,000 by year-end, a 4 per cent increase from 2016 that also reflected a twofold increase in the number of New York City public school students. In addition, the Department would soon launch its Children's Corridor programme focused on outreach to youth and educational institutions.

18. In 2018, in commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Department, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, would launch a campaign to promote the values enshrined in the Declaration, mobilize youth and take stock of progress made towards implementation. An agreement had also been reached between the United Nations Academic Impact Initiative and the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding to organize an annual conference on global citizenship education, with the inaugural conference on the topic of human rights to be held in New York in 2018. In addition, the Department would report on the lead-up to the adoption of the global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration and the global compact on refugees in

September 2018. In conclusion, the Department would continue to unify and modernize its communications tools with a view to building greater support for the Organization and its agenda.

19. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) asked Ms. Smale if she had identified any priority areas for her work as Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications.

20. **Ms. Rodríguez Silva** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) asked which obstacles the Department needed to overcome in the short and medium term in order to fulfil its mandate of broadening the reach of the United Nations. She also asked how the Department could contribute to discussions on the need to prevent the irresponsible use of information and communications technologies for the purpose of interfering in the affairs of sovereign States.

21. **Mr. Mero** (United Republic of Tanzania) requested further information on the Department's efforts to establish a multilingual social media team, expressing concern about the potential impact of that initiative on United Nations news coverage.

22. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that, as her term of office had only recently begun, she had not yet identified a specific set of priorities, but sought to provide greater clarity with regard to the Department's goals as her tenure progressed. She would pay particular attention to youth outreach and to raising awareness of the extensive impact of the Organization's work. With regard to future obstacles, she hoped that the Department and the Organization as a whole would evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing communications environment at a realistic pace and in line with the wishes of Member States. In addition, preliminary statistics had indicated that the social media team was helping the Organization to reach broader audiences around the world.

23. *Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

24. **Mr. Zambrano Ortiz** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group appreciated the outreach efforts and communications campaigns undertaken by the Department to promote awareness of recently adopted milestone agreements and other issues relating to sustainable development. The Department should continue to disseminate information on, inter alia, decolonization; the advancement of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations; the promotion of a world against violence and violent extremism; peacekeeping, peacebuilding

and disarmament; the question of Palestine; poverty eradication; and climate change. In addition, the Department should cover, on an equal basis, all summits, international conferences and high-level meetings mandated by the General Assembly.

25. As an important means of promoting unity in diversity and international understanding, multilingualism should be integrated into all United Nations activities, and efforts should be made to narrow the persistent disparity in the use of all six official languages of the Organization, including by recruiting Department personnel from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. United Nations information centres should also be strengthened in terms of both staffing and equipment so as to facilitate their work of disseminating information and raising awareness of contemporary challenges through the medium of local languages.

26. While social media were crucial to enabling the United Nations to reach as many audiences as possible in a digitalized world, they should not be used at the expense of conventional media, as Internet access in developing countries was frequently limited. By continuing to use print, radio and television in those countries, the Department would help to close the information gap amid the widening digital divide. Care must be exercised, however, to prevent any inappropriate use of public information to disseminate incorrect or distorted information. In that regard, the United Nations should lead by example in adhering to the highest standards of accuracy, integrity and accountability and in complying fully with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Efforts must also be made to prevent the use of information and communications technologies in a manner that was detrimental to any State and contravened the principles of sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and the internationally recognized rules of civil coexistence among States.

27. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the Community applauded the Department's tireless work in upholding the role of the United Nations as a beacon of hope and promoting its efforts in support of global development goals. It particularly appreciated the Department's coverage of the Secretary-General's visit to Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda to survey the damage caused by recent hurricanes, which had illustrated the impossibility of ignoring the threat of climate change and the need to bolster international support for those countries, as called for by the Secretary-General.

28. The Community was grateful for the communications support provided by the Department for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. It also strongly supported the United Nations Information Centre for the Caribbean Area in Port of Spain, which served 19 English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean territories. The Centre had worked closely with Governments and other strategic partners to promote the Organization's work in the region, in particular by contributing to the United Nations public information campaign on the Sustainable Development Goals and hosting an exhibit on the Goals in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. The Centre had also provided outreach support to the multi-country office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for the Caribbean and for the implementation of various United Nations campaigns to promote women's rights and end violence against women. CARICOM welcomed the Department's efforts to organize activities in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Centre had also commemorated Nelson Mandela International Day by organizing, in cooperation with the United Nations Volunteers programme, a briefing session for young adults on the role of volunteerism in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. Noting the valuable initiatives undertaken to involve youth in the realization of the Goals and the importance of including all individuals in the implementation process, CARICOM encouraged the Department to use traditional and contemporary media platforms in order to galvanize action by all constituent groups in support of sustainable development. In that connection, all official languages of the Organization should be appropriately used in all aspects of its work and should be accorded equal status, including on its website. The Community particularly welcomed the work of the United Nations information centres to translate the Sustainable Development Goals, which were currently available in 50 local languages. Considerable work remained to be done to fulfil the Department's mandate, and CARICOM particularly looked forward to its efforts to enhance global awareness of, *inter alia*, communicable and non-communicable diseases.

30. **Ms. Rivera Sánchez** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the development of information in the United Nations context should remain strictly in keeping with the norms established in

international law and the Charter of the United Nations, with the ultimate aim of promoting peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples, in addition to human well-being and sustainable development. The Committee of Information played an important role in establishing a new, more just and more effective world information and communications order, and CELAC recognized the Department's efforts to enhance public understanding of the objectives and work of the United Nations. The changing international situation required innovative methods to improve the flow and precision of information and to ensure non-discriminatory and inclusive access thereto. Notwithstanding the spontaneity, agility and enormous potential of electronic communication, the perturbing digital divide between developed and developing countries signalled nonetheless that the use of traditional methods of communication — a major source of information in developing countries — must continue. Similarly instrumental in disseminating the Organization's message, the United Nations information centres would benefit from additional support and increased system-wide cooperation.

31. Freedom of speech and the press should be fully respected but also exercised responsibly in accordance with national legislation and United Nations instruments. In 2015, CELAC had adopted a special declaration on Internet governance processes reaffirming the need to build national and regional Internet governance frameworks that represented the interests of all States regardless of their stage of development and that respected human rights, the sovereignty of all States and the right of all to privacy. The media and information and communications technologies should be used in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and CELAC was therefore concerned at the violations of radio frequencies, which were intended for use only in the public interest. It rejected all use of information and communications technologies in violation of international law and the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, especially when the target was a Member State.

32. With multilingualism inherent to its existence, the United Nations must disseminate information in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese, Dutch and indigenous languages. CELAC was deeply concerned that daily press releases were not issued in all six official languages in accordance with repeated General Assembly resolutions, and it therefore called for the adoption of draft resolution B, contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/72/21), to resolve the unfairness of that situation. All six official

languages should be fully and equitably used in all of the Department's activities so as to eliminate the disparity in favour of English. To that end, the Department must be provided with the necessary capacity in all official languages and the resources allocated to it should be distributed evenly among those languages. In addition, the potential of social media and the United Nations website should be further explored, including in the light of the statistics produced on the number of visitors by language, which would also assist decision-making on information and outreach activities. While the live coverage of General Assembly and Security Council meetings in the six official languages was commendable, more efforts were needed to address the lack of information available in all six official languages concerning the work of the main United Nations organs. In that context, CELAC welcomed the work of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations to achieve linguistic parity and further promote multilingualism.

33. CELAC commended the Department's efforts to ensure access to the United Nations website for persons with disabilities and urged it to continue disseminating information on decolonization as widely as possible, including through United Nations Web TV coverage of the meetings of the Special Committee on Decolonization. In an era where millions were excluded from sharing the benefits of the rapid development of information and communications technologies, the primary challenge was how to deliver United Nations messages to the widest possible audience, using both modern and traditional methods. CELAC would work to overcome that challenge on the basis of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

34. **Ms. Fofana** (Burkina Faso), speaking on behalf of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors, said that multilingualism was the corollary of multilateralism and a principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which was equally authentic in five other language versions. Multilingualism guaranteed not only respect for cultural and linguistic diversity in international organizations but also the widest participation in debates and the sovereign equality of States. Moreover, as recognized in General Assembly resolution [71/328](#), multilingualism was critical to the effectiveness of collective efforts in such areas as peacekeeping, human rights and sustainable development. Efforts must therefore be made to mainstream multilingualism in all of the Organization's information and communications activities and to ensure the equal status of all official languages, including on the Organization's website.

35. Although information and communications technologies offered unprecedented opportunities for the Organization to expand the scope of its activities and the reach of its message, traditional means of communication remained highly relevant to ensuring that those without access to modern technologies were not left behind. Attention must be given to bridging the digital divide between developed countries and developing countries, many of which had been unable to reap the full benefits of technological advances and continued to rely on traditional media as their main source of information. In addition, the capacities of United Nations information centres to fulfil their mission and broaden their audience should be strengthened, and the role of United Nations Radio in disseminating information in official and local languages, in particular in developing countries, should be enhanced.

36. Member States should devote greater attention to freedom of information and expression, given that the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media were key to democracy and the rule of law, as well as to the protection of all human rights. Sharing the values of the United Nations, including that of freedom of expression and information, the French-speaking world greatly appreciated the excellent cooperation it enjoyed with the Department, and the Group fully supported the Organization's communications work focused around the three pillars of development, human rights, and peace and security.

37. Speaking in her national capacity, she said that, although the right to information was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, equal access to information had still not been achieved in Burkina Faso and other developing countries, making it essential for developed countries to work towards access for all to new information media. The 2030 Agenda also offered a critical opportunity to bridge the digital divide. United Nations information centres played an important role in the Organization's communications efforts, and the capacities of the centre in Ouagadougou should be strengthened so that it could continue to assess the needs of the four countries it served and raise awareness of issues relating to poverty, development, food insecurity and natural disasters. In commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers in 2017, the Government of Burkina Faso had organized, in cooperation with the centre in Ouagadougou, a conference to raise awareness of her country's participation in peacekeeping missions.

38. **Mr. Rahdiansyah** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the Department had conducted a

number of highly successful campaigns in 2017 and should continue to promote the messages of peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples. ASEAN welcomed the Department's priority areas for 2018–2019: the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development; the maintenance of international peace and security; the development of Africa; and the promotion of human rights, the effective coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts, the promotion of justice and international law, disarmament, drug control, crime prevention and counter-terrorism efforts. The Department should emphasize peacekeeping operations, which served not only to improve conditions in conflict-affected countries but also to reflect a positive image of the United Nations. All the relevant United Nations departments must work together to raise awareness of the new realities and challenges faced by peacekeeping operations, as well as to disseminate information regarding recent developments in peace and security reform efforts.

39. Although social media was an excellent means to disseminate information on the work of the Committee, not everyone had access to the Internet and the United Nations must therefore maintain its use of radio, television and print media. Both the Committee and the Department must counter the rise of misinformation by providing accurate, reliable and up-to-date information, with the Department continuing to operate as a responsible United Nations messenger. Representing a culturally and linguistically diverse region, ASEAN called on the Department to work with the 63 United Nations information centres not only in the six official languages but also in other languages where appropriate, with a view to reaching the widest possible audience. ASEAN also encouraged the Department to collaborate with United Nations regional offices for the translation of publications into local languages, thus motivating more people to participate in United Nations efforts and activities.

40. **Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, said that the Department of Public Information should continue to disseminate information on the ideals and activities of the United Nations in as many languages as possible, taking into account the linguistic diversity of countries and their varying degrees of digital development. The Department should continue to use a combination of traditional means of communication, including radio, television and print, and new Internet-based media. Given that Internet access remained limited in developing countries whereas radio could reach 75 per cent of all households

in those countries, traditional media should continue to receive special attention in strategic plans.

41. Although the Community was committed to multilingualism and ensuring parity among the six official languages of the United Nations, it was also aware that those six languages were spoken by only 40 per cent of the global population. The Community appreciated the Department's use of more than 20 languages in its information products and encouraged it to reinforce its multilingual approach even further. Portuguese was spoken by approximately 258 million people worldwide and was the most widely spoken language in the southern hemisphere. The United Nations News station in Portuguese, the first to become a full multimedia operation, had the third-largest audience of all United Nations News stations. Since 2013, the radio unit had established relevant partnerships with television channels in Portuguese-speaking countries and in countries with Portuguese-speaking diasporas.

42. The Community recognized the importance of the United Nations information centres in raising awareness of the work of the Organization and in disseminating its values in developing countries and Portuguese-speaking countries in particular, and it encouraged the Secretary-General and the Government of Angola to accelerate the establishment of the information centre in Luanda. It was important to respect diversity in the provision of public information, not only through multilingualism but also by ensuring diverse content and a variety of broadcasting styles and intended audiences. The Department should also continue to develop activities with academia and non-governmental organizations.

43. **Mr. Meza Cuadra** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish, said that the Group's main objective was to promote multilingualism as a key United Nations value that allowed for genuine multilateral dialogue. As the second most widely spoken language in the world, Spanish had a significant impact on the work of the Organization, whose Spanish-language webpages were also the second most frequently consulted. Noting the disparity between English and the five other official languages, the Group suggested overcoming inertia and promoting genuine multilingualism through a new strategic vision that took into account the needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse world. The United Nations website and its social media accounts operated as the public gateway to the Organization; consequently, it was crucial for the volume and quality of the information posted and the frequency with which it was updated to be the same for all six languages. Future reports of the Secretary-General on information should include more data

disaggregated by language, as well as statistics on social media. Adopting a multilingual approach to global information campaigns from their inception was not merely about reaching the widest public, but also about getting that public to take ownership of the messages conveyed.

44. The Group noted the positive impact of the use of local languages by regional information centres. In that regard, the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres should be conducted on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the needs and characteristics of each centre. The daily press releases must, as a matter of priority, be published in all six official languages through creative schemes that should adopt the thematic focal points system that had been applied by the language units of the United Nations websites.

45. **Mr. Van Den Akker** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the United Nations must react flexibly as global challenges evolved, in particular by reforming the peace and security architecture, the development system and its internal administration. Consistent communication was important to preserve and reinforce key messages, which should relate back to the higher-level objectives and visions for change, and in-person communication should be used when possible to establish relationships with stakeholders and overcome resistance to change.

46. Within the European Union, 24 different languages were spoken, and the European Union therefore realized that multilingualism was not merely a fundamental United Nations value, but also a crucial tool for accountability and transparency. Multilingualism was especially important given the rise of new communications technologies that increased feelings of both interconnectedness and isolation; the European Union therefore welcomed the significant diversity of communications programmes presented in the report of the Committee on Information (A/72/21) designed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, establish multilateral partnerships, promote human rights and foster a culture of prevention. In particular, it supported increased coordination with the regional information centres, which allowed for a more localized and horizontal approach to awareness-raising, thus improving the effectiveness and efficiency of communications in a resource-limited context.

47. The European Union also welcomed the commitment to students and to educational and research institutions evinced by the Department and the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, and encouraged further partnerships with students and academics, including the successful ERASMUS+ student exchange programme. By involving young people and academic institutions in the discussion, the United Nations could foster a culture of prevention with regard to future natural disasters, conflicts or violent extremism. Recognizing the urgent need to address climate change, the European Union strongly supported the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Public-private partnerships would be essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and the green economy offered attractive business opportunities for the private sector.

48. The Department should continue to honour the victims of past human rights abuses and to foster a culture in which such horrors would never be repeated. Freedom of expression, information and the press — all under increasing attack around the world — should play a vital role in the contemporary world as the basis of participatory democracy. The European Union had ensured that those rights were respected in all its policies and would continue to defend them.

49. **Mr. Garcia Moritán** (Argentina) said that the communications strategies developed by the Department of Public Information should take into account the constantly changing media landscape to reach a growing, albeit ever more diverse and segmented public. To counter the scourge of misinformation, the United Nations must continue to provide objective information using new formats and tools, without overlooking those segments of the population that did not have access to new information and communications technologies.

50. 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. In order to meet the growing demand for Spanish-language content, the Secretariat should implement the necessary reforms, including with regard to the allocation of posts and hiring of staff. His delegation remained concerned that not all content was available in all six official languages on United Nations websites, and that parallel sites were not updated with the same frequency. It was also concerned that library searches revealed keyword inconsistencies across different languages.

51. Even though they did not provide an official record of meeting proceedings, daily press releases were in many cases the only way to ensure transparency, accountability and institutional memory. The Department should continue to ensure the rapid publication of press releases while guaranteeing the accuracy of the information they contained. There was no justification for why the press releases were only available in French and English, especially given the renewed mandate of the General Assembly to respect parity among the six official languages. The Department must therefore increase efforts to distribute the press releases in all six languages at no additional cost. His delegation was concerned at the efforts to make that initiative dependent on budgetary issues given that the Assembly had underlined, in its resolution [71/328](#), the Secretariat's responsibility in integrating multilingualism into its activities, from within existing resources, on an equitable basis. Nevertheless, the Department must have adequate resources to fulfil its objectives, and Argentina looked forward to actively defending multilingualism in the Fifth Committee. The Department should further integrate the work of the information centres into the broader activities of the Organization, including by increasing their staff and equipment. The Argentine Ministry of Education would continue to collaborate with the Buenos Aires Information Centre to disseminate United Nations information through an online platform reaching more than 1.3 million users, with a view to raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals.

52. **Mr. Sanabria Rivarola** (Paraguay) said that his delegation appreciated the proactive efforts of the Department of Public Information to incorporate new technologies in its working methods, as well as the online presence of the United Nations more broadly, but stressed that traditional means of communication remained vital to reach the majority of the global population. As technological advances were crucial for equitable development, his delegation was concerned at the growing digital gap between developed and developing countries. The international community must work to narrow that gap, in collaboration with regulatory authorities, Governments and the private sector. Uniform access to new information and communications technologies could become a driver of national prosperity and greater individual economic possibilities, especially for countries in vulnerable situations such as landlocked developing countries. However, developing countries required greater financial and technical cooperation to facilitate technology and knowledge transfer and build capacity.

53. His delegation emphasized the need to increase the real-time availability of informational materials in Spanish, which was the second most frequently consulted language on the Internet. The Group of Friends of Spanish, to which his country belonged, should continue its important work to reduce the time lag affecting Spanish-language information. The United Nations must disseminate comprehensive, balanced, objective and equitable information in all official languages, based on the principle of maintaining editorial independence, impartiality and accuracy.

54. The Department must enhance the coordination of messages and communications strategies concerning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, climate change, the results of the reform processes undertaken in 2017, the future of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, peacebuilding architecture and the interrelation between women, peace and security. In the case of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, the Department played a crucial role in raising awareness of new realities, successes and challenges on the ground. Those missions must have staff that was sufficiently trained to fulfil their duties because, despite major technological advances, nothing could replace the United Nations presence in the field. There should be greater coordination between the Department, the Office of the Secretary-General and the Office of the President of the General Assembly to ensure that the messages of the United Nations were coherent and timely.

55. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that information and communications technologies were useful 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. Social media 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. It was crucial to provide people worldwide with accurate and factual information; the Department of Public Information should therefore continue to promote important decisions and agreements reached by the international community and should focus on issues that affected international peace and security.

56. 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 Palestine and training programme for Palestinian journalists. The Department should also disseminate

information regarding the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with a view to assisting its fundraising programmes. His delegation also supported the Department's implementation of the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries.

57. 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 United Nations Academic Impact initiative had established direct relationships with over 1,000 universities worldwide, including 25 universities in his country; those relationships were a successful example of the Department's global outreach, which should be expanded to include more schools and academic circles. Multilingualism would contribute to the achievement of United Nations objectives. In addition to the six official languages of the Organization, information should also be disseminated in other languages, including Persian, which was used by tens of millions of people across several nations.

58. **Mr. Castañeda Solares** (Guatemala) said that his delegation recognized the value of using new technologies to disseminate the objectives of the United Nations, but emphasized that traditional means of communication, including radio and print, should not be abandoned. Information must be provided in all six official languages in order to have greater impact in the different regional groups. The Department of Public Information should expand its use of social networks in all official languages.

59. With regard to peacebuilding operations, his delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to promote the activities of the Peacebuilding Support Office and to raise awareness about the new sustaining peace agenda, including by providing communications materials through both traditional channels and social media platforms for the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund Pledging Conference. The Department should continue to collaborate closely with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Support and Political Affairs to enhance communications activities with regard to the main peace and security challenges facing the Organization.

60. Parity must be achieved among all six official languages on an equitable basis within existing resources, and not merely between the two working languages of the Secretariat. The creative and efficient use of resources in terms of public information was

more justified than ever. It was therefore necessary to modify the reporting structure of the United Nations in order to reflect the world's linguistic diversity. His delegation expressed concern that the daily press releases were still not being published in all six official languages.

61. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information were responsible for ensuring that the United Nations message reached all corners of the world and that its objectives and activities were represented clearly. At a time when conflicts and cross-border challenges such as extremism and terrorism were on the rise, the United Nations must assume a more positive role by raising awareness, spreading a culture of peace and rejecting all manner of conflict.

62. 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.

63. He commended the work of journalists who put their lives at risk to impartially report the facts on the situation in his country, particularly in areas in which armed terrorist groups associated with Al-Qaida were active, and denounced the targeting of such journalists, in particular the abominable actions of ISIL. His delegation rejected the description of terrorist groups as "armed resistance", "moderate armed resistance" and "non-State armed groups" by United Nations representatives, particularly since those representatives knew full well that the groups in question were terrorist entities designated as such by the Security Council.

64. The special information programme on the question of Palestine must be strengthened, given the ongoing human rights violations being committed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the targeting of journalists and peace activists, the apartheid wall, the desecration and destruction of Islamic and Christian holy sites and increasing settlement activity. The Department of Public Information must also redouble its efforts achieve parity among the official languages of the United Nations and remedy the deficiencies of its Arabic-language website. In addition, the Department could play an important role in encouraging dialogue and building understanding among cultures and peoples.

65. His delegation reaffirmed that 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 ending all forms of occupation, combating terrorism and promoting sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.