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Chair: Mr. Kemayah, Sr. (Liberia)

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

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

1. **Mr. Kishimori** (Japan), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of its fortieth session (A/73/21), during which a total of 32 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 commended the Department of Public Information's communications campaigns on the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights, climate action, eliminating violence against women and press freedom. One representative had called on the Department to continue to focus on the needs of Africa, while other speakers had underscored the Department's contributions in providing objective information on issues such as poverty eradication, climate change, human rights and disarmament.

2. With regard to multilingualism, participants had called for the Department to achieve parity among the official languages of the United Nations, including for press releases and archived webcasts, and had called for the Organization to respond to the increasing demand for information in Spanish, given that it was the second most widely spoken language in the world. Numerous speakers had praised the Department for producing materials in all official languages, as well as Kiswahili, Portuguese and local languages. 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.

3. The Department must work to counter disinformation, and there should be no restrictions on the dissemination of United Nations original content. The Department's new websites were more user-friendly, modern and public-oriented, and several representatives had praised the UN News smartphone application. The Department should also improve its internal management of new media platforms to ensure that they accurately reflected the positions of Member States.

4. Traditional media such as television, radio and print should be maintained 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. Additionally, several representatives had underscored the importance of communicating the aims and ideals of the United Nations to youth.

5. United Nations information centres played a fundamental role in mobilizing support for the Organization, and any rationalization of them should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis. Numerous speakers had expressed support for renaming the Department of Public Information the "Department of Global Communications", while also stating that reforms should take into account the priorities established by the Committee on Information, including multilingualism, and must include consultations with Member States. Several representatives had called for strengthening the support for United Nations information centres.

6. While a number of delegations had voiced their support for the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, other delegations 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.

7. Several speakers had 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.

8. Several representatives had recognized the United Nations Academic Impact for the work that it had done to engage academic and research communities in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in promoting global citizenship, human rights and tolerance to counter violent extremism. Other representatives had expressed support for the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, the Remember Slavery programme and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

9. Responding to comments from Member States participating in the session, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications had stressed that ongoing efforts to reform the Department were informed by the need to tell the United Nations story more compellingly. She had given her assurances that, where reform might involve specific products or services or the adjustment of respective expenditures, the Department would report to the General Assembly for its consideration; had emphasized that the information provided by the Department had to be accurate, impartial, comprehensive, balanced, timely and relevant, as well as multilingual; and had noted that the budget proposal for the biennium 2018–2019 had sought an additional \$4.2 million to enable the Department to meet some requests for multilingualism, but those resources had not been approved and in fact there had been additional

budget reductions. Nonetheless, the Department would continue to pursue multilingualism by taking advantage of technological tools and partnerships with language schools and universities.

10. The 158 websites under the Department's purview, along with the websites of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and their main committees were fully maintained in the six official languages. As for the websites of other Secretariat departments, their authors were responsible for their content, but the Department had helped them achieve a minimum level of multilingualism where possible within existing resources. While the Department had established social media teams in each of the official languages, as well as in Kiswahili and Portuguese, it remained fully committed to the production of audio, video and print to reach audiences with different capacities and of different generations. The Under-Secretary-General had also announced that, beginning in 2019, the Department would work within a July-to-December time frame for its reports to the Committee on Information and a January-to-June time frame for its reports to the Fourth Committee, towards ensuring a coherent and comprehensive narrative of its work.

11. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications), accompanying her statement with a digital slide presentation, said that the Department of Public Information was undertaking a reform plan under the Secretary-General's direction and guidance, with a view to becoming more agile in its operation and more impactful in its communications. Through a staff-led process and with the assistance of independent evaluation, the Department had started implementing a workplan based on three imperatives, namely, leadership and strategy, resource management and operational efficiency. In that connection, opportunities to brainstorm with Member States had been especially fruitful.

12. Reforms already under way included the decentralization of administrative and programmatic support to United Nations information centres to provide faster and more streamlined assistance in real time. The Department was also exploring ways to integrate and co-locate information centres with United Nations country teams and resident coordinators and to provide enhanced support to country teams when an information centre was not physically present in a Member State.

13. The change in the Department's name to the Department of Global Communications, taking effect in 2019, would reflect the ongoing commitment to serve

everyone within reach and signal a stronger department well situated to meet the communications challenges of the 21st century, amplify the messages of the United Nations and ensure that those who deliberated in its halls heard the voices of their peoples. Climate change was first and foremost among those challenges and a priority for the Department, whose efforts to raise awareness about United Nations action on the issue would include coverage of the meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Poland in December 2018 and the Secretary-General's summit on climate change in September 2019 at United Nations Headquarters.

14. The recently concluded high-level debate of the current session of the General Assembly had showcased anew the breadth and depth of multilingual, multimedia news coverage across both traditional and new media platforms. The Department had accredited some 4,000 journalists from 150 countries and covered the events on its own traditional and social platforms in up to nine languages. The Department's global media insight report had identified more than 310,000 individual articles about the Organization during the high-level period, with gender, climate change and migration garnering the greatest interest.

15. With better and earlier planning and coordination, the Department had produced more integrated, visual and impactful content across languages and platforms to reach audiences worldwide. Almost all metrics had showed larger audiences and greater engagement, and new features and enhanced relationships with external partners had amplified the reach of the Department's coverage, drawing in fresh audiences.

16. Increasing cross-promotion of news and social media were generating more views for both. Moreover, internal data indicated that the world was paying attention, with viewership of both the webcast of the high-level period and the United Nations website in the millions and average time spent per person on the site reaching two minutes and 15 seconds, significantly higher than the industry standard for institutional websites. Meanwhile, through its pro bono relationships with private sector partners, the Department's VIP social media space and Sustainable Development Goal media zone had attracted a wide range of personalities to engage with the public on key United Nations issues. The SDG Media Compact, a worldwide alliance of news and entertainment media networks launched by the Department to raise awareness and motivate action around the Goals, already reached a combined audience of more than one billion people. The creation of the Sustainable Development Goals Lions, a dedicated set

of awards at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, marked a surge in the creative sector's engagement with the 2030 Agenda.

17. Civil society remained a key pillar of a rules-based multicultural system working to achieve the Goals. The sixty-seventh annual Conference of the Department of Public Information for Non-Governmental Organizations had brought more than 1,000 representatives from some 400 organizations representing 80 countries to United Nations Headquarters in August that year, and the outcome document and a youth declaration had been adopted by acclamation. Youth engagement with the United Nations had received renewed impetus with the launch of the United Nations Youth Strategy. The launch, hugely popular on social media, had been spearheaded by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, an integral part of the Department, and by the United Nations Children's Fund.

18. Building and strengthening partnerships was a core component of the Department's work. Its deals with the entertainment industry included a collaboration with the toymaker Mattel to incorporate the Goals into storylines of the animated children's television series *Thomas and Friends* and the production and posting of a promotional YouTube video on the Goals by the iconic Japanese character Hello Kitty. The Department was also working with the International Publishers Association to create a Sustainable Development Goal book club for youth.

19. Under an initiative aimed at promoting achievement of the Goals, Sustainable Development Goal centres would open at 17 universities that had expressed their readiness to review best practices for each Goal and propose solutions that could then be adapted and applied worldwide. Currently in its thirty-eighth year, the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship programme had welcomed 15 young journalists from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, producing content across various media formats in English, Spanish, Khmer, Swahili, Serbian and Tamil. Seven journalists had been admitted to the Department's Palestinian media practitioner training programme.

20. She had attended the opening session of Africa Week, a series of dialogues on Africa that enabled the Organization to participate in interactive discussions on promoting socioeconomic progress across the continent, in line with United Nations and African Union agendas. For the Department, that endeavour would require a particular focus on the young. African States were among the chief and most loyal contributors to peacekeeping operations. A recently launched

Department campaign illustrating the contribution of peacekeepers would be rolled out worldwide. The Department was also working with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to find ways to support the Office's agenda and the annual work of the General Assembly.

21. At a time when daunting global challenges made the Organization's work more important than ever, it was imperative for the international community to act promptly and work together. That effort was, however, beset by misinformation, disinformation and a lack of information, resulting in a lack of popular trust in news sources and in cooperation between States. Amidst such turmoil, she hoped that the Department of Global Communications would help close the trust gap by being a trusted source of information and discussion, as well as a source of energy to animate vast and diverse communities of engagement, both supportive and critical of the United Nations. The Department would continue to use innovative approaches to inform people in their language about the work of the Organization and issues that affected their lives. Succeeding would mean empowering people to be part of the solution and conveying the message that there was more to gain by working together than by forging a path alone.

22. **Mr. Abbani** (Algeria) said that after raising the issue on numerous occasions, his delegation, along with many other concerned delegations, had yet to receive a convincing response to their complaint that the press releases issued after the meetings of the Main Committees of the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies did not reflect the proceedings. Most surprising of all were the sensationalist headlines in the press releases issued after meetings of the Fourth Committee. He therefore requested a definitive response. Moreover, action must be taken to ensure that the press releases and their account of what had transpired at the corresponding meetings accurately reflected the proceedings and that their authors were prevented from interjecting their personal views on particular issues into the press releases, a practice that was not part of the Department's mandate. He asked the Under-Secretary-General to provide information on the measures that would be taken to that end.

23. **Mr. Husni** (Sudan) said that he would like to know what the Department was doing to address issues related to the Organization's work to foster a culture of peace and tolerance and combat hatred and violent extremist ideologies, which were issues of interest to people from all walks of life. He also enquired what action the Department was taking to extend its engagement with the peoples of the world in their various languages. In that connection, he stressed the importance of working

with all official United Nations languages equitably in order to deliver the Organization's message to the people of all Member States without exception. In future, resources should be made available to larger numbers of the world's peoples. While providing coverage of United Nations activities and proceedings on a daily basis was a formidable task, care must be taken to ensure that such coverage faithfully reflected the proceedings and did not unduly omit any important content.

24. **Mr. Arriola Ramírez** (Paraguay) asked how the Department planned to address the steadily growing demand for Spanish-language content on United Nations activities.

25. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that budgetary constraints made the Department's efforts to uphold its strong commitment to multiculturalism much more difficult. The Department's request for an increase in budget had not been granted, and a number of Member States demanded that any steps to enhance multilingual offerings be financed within existing resources. It would therefore be necessary to modernize technologies in order to deliver United Nations content to as many people as possible in their languages. Service in Hindi launched earlier that year illustrated the Department's commitment to multilingual offerings.

26. Despite the Algerian representative's understandable frustration at feeling that he was receiving the same response every time he had raised issues of concern, she stressed that the Department was actively considering how best to present its offerings and how to incorporate as many languages and interests as possible. She thanked the representative of the Sudan for emphasizing the importance of informing people accurately and serving the interest of peace by doing so calmly and with respect.

27. The Department had taken note of its growing Spanish-language audience and would do everything in its power to address that demand, picking up themes of interest to Spanish speakers and enhancing its Spanish-language content.

28. **Ms. Jiang** (Department of Public Information) said that she appreciated the interest in the Department's press releases, a product that had been highly appreciated by delegations over the years. She also thanked representatives for pointing out mistakes made in press releases, a matter the Department took very seriously. The valuable support and critique of Member States would enable the Department to further improve its work in that regard. Press releases were produced by highly professional press officers working under

tremendous pressure who occasionally made mistakes. However, press releases were not the official records of a meeting but instead provided a summary of the gist of the remarks made at the meeting.

29. **Mr. Abbani** (Algeria) said that, although the press releases did not constitute the official record of a given meeting, the information contained therein was targeting public opinion and was used by media. Its misuse did active harm to the objectivity, impartiality, transparency and independence of the United Nations system in general and the Department in particular. Furthermore, the systematic issuance of press releases with headlines that did not reflect the entirety of the proceedings amounted to much more than a mistake. Correcting the problem — a matter of the utmost urgency — would not require resources or effort but would merely entail giving a directive to the authors of the press releases to fulfil their duty to convey what actually happened at the meetings, instead of choosing a headline that reflected their personal views, which might unduly influence the target audience.

30. **Mr. Verdier** (Argentina) said that the change in the Department's name to the Department of Global Communications had profound implications, namely, that the Department and the Secretariat would no longer serve as the sole source of information that shaped the Organization's image in the world. The growing number of actors with a role in influencing the perception of United Nations activities ranged from the Organization's own entities to specialized organizations, private media outlets and Member States, a dialogue facilitated by modern technology. The increasingly collective nature of communications about the United Nations was a positive development.

31. His delegation valued the Secretariat's involvement in facilitating the exchange of best practices between Member State press officers. With the paradigm shift under way, the Department was taking on an even greater responsibility as producer of key content; it was more important than ever to produce impartial and multilingual content available in at least the six official languages, in order to engage global audiences. In that connection, he underscored the need to continue promoting multilingualism. In a paragraph adopted by the Committee on Information in May that year, the Committee had been recognized as the main subsidiary body responsible for making recommendations on the work of the Department, taking multilingualism into account as one of the priorities established by it in the course of reform. He requested additional information on the tangible ways in which reform of the Department could foster more multilingual communication.

32. **Mr. Simon-Michel** (France) said that pitting multilingualism — a priority for many delegations — against consideration of existing resources created a false dichotomy. While existing resources must indeed be taken into account, it was incumbent upon the Department to reconfigure its communications plan as an inherently multilingual one instead of issuing communications and attempting to have them translated into other languages at the tail end of the process. It was not necessary to formulate communications in a single language from the outset.

33. **Mr. Aleksaev** (Russian Federation) said that at the fortieth session of the Committee on Information, several delegations had expressed concern about the discontinued access to archives of Economic and Social Council and General Assembly meetings and the halt in publication of the metadata of meetings in all official United Nations languages. The recommendations had been renewed and included in a draft resolution on United Nations public information policies and activities. He enquired whether a deadline had been set for addressing the problem.

34. **Mr. Halfaoui** (Morocco) said that his delegation commended the efforts and role of the Department in informing the public on United Nations activities. The Department's neutrality and professionalism, as evidenced by its coverage of Committee meetings, were laudable. The constraints it faced were understandable. He hoped that the reforms undertaken by the Department would contribute to promoting the work of the Organization.

35. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that the Department was making important strides with the adoption of its initiatives for 2018 and 2019 under the reform programme, which featured multilingualism prominently as a foundational element of each of its 14 workstreams. Despite the formidable challenge posed by its limited financial means, the Department remained committed to meeting the needs of delegations while maintaining the quality of its existing offerings.

36. **Mr. Nasser** (Department of Public Information) said that the Department's work on fostering a culture of peace, pursued alongside its effort to elicit concerted action on the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change, encompassed a number of activities commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, the Department was organizing events to commemorate the International Day for Tolerance and the International Day of Peace, collaborating with Model United Nations associations around the world on the latter.

37. **Ms. Jiang** (Department of Public Information) said that the Department of Management and the Office of Information and Communications Technology were mandated to keep audio and visual records. As for the Department of Public Information, it posted those meetings that were webcast, not as official records of the proceedings but strictly for the purpose of on-demand viewing. As a result, older and rarely viewed videos were deleted so that the Department kept within its budget for online storage. While her Department did provide official audio and visual archives on demand to delegations or media outlets making specific requests, a budget cut of over \$4 million had prevented it from providing the service it had the previous year, namely, preserving the metadata in all official languages. It had managed to secure additional resources during the high-level debate of the current General Assembly session in order to cover the plenary meetings in all the official languages and post searchable metadata in all the official languages. Regrettably, that exceptional effort would be unsustainable as a result of continued budget cuts.

38. **Mr. Aleksaev** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation was grateful for the Department's attempts to preserve metadata in different official languages on the United Nations webcast of specific meetings, enabling users to search for specific materials on the website. Metadata was not currently available in any language apart from English. However, at an informal consultation held that year, it had been stated that the Department had managed to solve the problem, and the general concern about preserving metadata in all the official languages had been highlighted.

39. **Ms. Smale** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that she recalled the informal consultation cited by the representative of the Russian Federation. While the Department would take the request for metadata in all the official languages into account as it sought an appropriate and equitable solution, it could not promise to restore the previous level of service, as funding for that purpose could not be guaranteed.

40. **Mr. Mahfouz** (Egypt), 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 climate change, migration and refugees, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and sustaining peace, the question of Palestine and other pressing global issues. In addition, the Department should cover, on an equal basis, all

summits, international conferences and high-level meetings mandated by the General Assembly.

41. The Group reaffirmed the importance of multilingualism as one of the main promoters of unity and international understanding and a contributing factor to achieving the goals of the United Nations; promoting, protecting and preserving diversity of languages and cultures; and improving the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization. The Group remained concerned at the disparity in the use of the official languages in United Nations public information materials even as it recognized some progress on the issue. The Department should continue its efforts to narrow the current gap and prevent continued linguistic discrepancies between press releases of different United Nations meetings. The Group welcomed the work of the United Nations information centres to disseminate information about United Nations activities in the six official languages and in local languages. The Department should continue to support and strengthen the information centres, both in terms of staffing and equipment.

42. The importance of modern communications technologies currently available to the global public was undeniable, but traditional media must continue to be used given that print, radio and television broadcasts remained the main means of communication in developing countries. In addition, care must be exercised to prevent any inappropriate use of public information and any 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.

43. **Mr. Escalante Hasbún** (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that information and knowledge should contribute to human well-being and the furtherance of peace, cooperation, solidarity among peoples and sustainable development. The Secretary-General's report (A/73/288) highlighted the need for reform to allow for more agile communications in the face of fast-paced changes to the communications landscape and the emergence of big data, new technologies and competing sources of news and information. CELAC supported the Secretary-General's

reforms, which should be an inclusive process that took into account the opinions of Member States. The reform should also take into account the recommendations of the Committee on Information, especially with regard to multilingualism, as reflected in the relevant General Assembly resolutions adopted by consensus year after year.

44. CELAC recognized the Department of Public Information's recent communications campaigns on human rights and social and development issues. It also recognized the Department's efforts to enhance public understanding of the objectives and work of the United Nations. Notwithstanding the spontaneity, agility and enormous potential of digital communication, the perturbing digital divide between developed and developing countries showed nonetheless that the Department must continue to use traditional media as they were a major source of information in developing countries. Similarly instrumental in disseminating the Organization's message, the United Nations information centres would benefit from additional support and increased system-wide cooperation.

45. 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 an Internet governance framework 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.

46. 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. The Department should prepare a strategy to publish daily press releases in all six official languages, making use of creative solutions to do so at no additional cost. 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, the Secretariat should find a way for video files in all six languages to remain available after the end of each meeting, including by reallocating existing resources if necessary. 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.

47. 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 coverage of all 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.

48. **Mr. Arriola Ramírez** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish, said that multilingualism was of fundamental importance to the United Nations and allowed for a true multilateral dialogue and greater efficiency and transparency within the United Nations. Spanish was an important language and the Spanish-speaking public was increasingly interested in the work of the United Nations. Spanish was the second most widely spoken language worldwide and the second most commonly used language in searches of the United Nations website. The growth in Spanish engagement represented a challenge, since the United Nations needed to adapt to higher search volumes and greater interaction with the Spanish-speaking audience worldwide.

49. The Group recognized the Department's efforts to provide quality documents and services in the six official languages, but it remained concerned at the disparity between the use of English and the other five. Since its website and its pages and profiles on social networks were the first points of access to the United Nations, the different language versions must have the same quantity and quality of information and must be kept up to date. Worldwide publicity campaigns must be multilingual from their conception in order to reach the widest possible audience. The United Nations information centres had played an important role through their use of local languages and their adaptation of messages from the global level to the local context, and the rationalization process of the centres must proceed on a case-by-case basis.

50. The Group reiterated its concern at the continuing linguistic disparity in daily press releases, in which English and French continued to be prioritized over the other official languages. The press releases and webcasts should be made available in all official languages.

51. The Group appreciated the informative meeting with the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications on the changes that were being implemented in the Department. Such changes must take into account those aspects of public communications that were prioritized in General Assembly resolutions, in particular in the area of multilingualism. In implementing those changes, multilingualism should not only be preserved but should be strengthened.

52. **Ms. Krisnamurthi** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that ASEAN supported the Department's efforts to create rapid, strategic and integrated communications for the United Nations system. The reforms should bring improvements and efficiencies to the activities of the United Nations to better communicate its values and work to a wider public, especially in developing countries. 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 and peacebuilding operations as the United Nations shifted its focus from peacekeeping to activities across the peace continuum. All the relevant United Nations departments must work

together to give a real-time picture of the realities and challenges faced by peacekeeping operations and United Nations missions on the ground, as well as to disseminate information regarding recent developments in peace and security reform efforts.

53. Although social media was an excellent means to disseminate information on the work of the Committee, not everyone had access to the Internet. The Organization must therefore maintain its use of radio, television and print media. For its part, ASEAN had established a 10-year strategic plan for information and media, covering the period 2016–2025, to guide the development and cooperation of the information and media sector in the region.

54. The Department must counter the rise of misinformation by providing accurate, reliable, timely and up-to-date information. It needed to remain consistent as a responsible United Nations messenger and must continue to promote unbiased information about the work of the Organization. Representing a culturally and linguistically diverse region, ASEAN called on the Department to work with the 59 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. The Department should make greater efforts towards regionalization or localization of staff so as to promote diversity in staff composition, diversity in viewpoints and increased local engagement. 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.

55. **Ms. Razafitrimo** (Madagascar), speaking on behalf of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors, said that communicating information to the peoples of the world using all means and in languages they understood was crucial to fulfilling the mandates given to the Secretariat and achieving common goals. Given that language affected policies, national ownership over the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was impossible without multilingualism at all stages of implementation. Furthermore, the mandates given by the Security Council could not be implemented without taking into account the contexts, notably the languages, in which such mandates were deployed.

56. Multilingualism was the corollary of effective multilateralism. All countries must have the same opportunities to take part in debate and to access transparent information in the Organization's official and working languages, to ensure that the United

Nations was truly understood and accepted by host countries and society, particularly young people. Multilingualism should be mainstreamed in the information and communications activities of all departments, and efforts should be made to ensure the equal status of all official languages, including on the Organization's website.

57. 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. The role of United Nations Radio in disseminating information in official and local languages, particularly in developing countries, should be enhanced. The Group was aware of the financial constraints faced by the Secretariat, especially the Department of Public Information, and welcomed the solutions proposed by the secretariat of the International Organization of la Francophonie to contribute high-level expertise in order to improve integration of multilingualism at the United Nations. The Department must protect the budget allocated to safeguarding multilingualism. By working collectively, solutions could be found that did not require additional resources. Lastly, Member States should pay 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.

58. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that while modern technology and communication networks made it possible to reach wider audiences, they also presented new challenges, notably the spread of misinformation. Consequently, the voice of the United Nations must be heard, its work seen and its presence felt, now more than ever. In order to counter misinformation, the United Nations must actively promote its principles and promulgate its efforts to advance the global development goals. CARICOM therefore appreciated the work of the Department of Public Information for its continued efforts and initiatives in publicizing the work of the United Nations to the widest possible audience.

59. Inclusivity remained essential to ensuring that all individuals were kept fully updated and engaged in the process towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Robust efforts must be made to ensure the effective use of existing communication platforms and to find innovative ways of using new and evolving media. The Department should therefore pursue mechanisms of information-sharing, using traditional

and modern media, in order to galvanize action by all constituent groups in support of sustainable development, particularly among youth. CARICOM reiterated the continued need to use all official languages in the activities of the Department, thus eliminating the disparity between the use of English and the other five official languages.

60. The Community appreciated the communications support provided by the Department at several international conferences that year, and encouraged it to continue providing such support. It also welcomed the Department's efforts to organize activities in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It was essential to highlight the tragic legacy of the slave trade, the gains of people of African descent towards freedom and equality and the challenges they continued to face.

61. CARICOM strongly supported the Information Centre for the Caribbean Area in Port of Spain, which served 19 territories in the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The Community commended the communications assistance provided to the United Nations offices providing emergency relief to the countries affected by the 2017 hurricane season, and the efforts to enhance information dissemination on natural disaster support activities and climate change awareness. It also welcomed the Centre's efforts to disseminate information to and support the United Nations offices and campaigns promoting women's rights and empowerment. CARICOM reiterated its call for the United Nations system to disseminate information on the priorities of small island developing States and the Samoa Pathway.

62. The repositioning of the United Nations development system, including the merger of United Nations information centres with resident coordinator offices, would result in savings and increased efficiency. It was important to ensure that the transition did not diminish the gains made nor eliminate the communication tools that had been most effective for the region. The Community hoped that the merger would result in better delivery of public information services. Lastly, CARICOM looked forward to its continued collaboration with the United Nations and the Department to raise awareness of the work of the Organization, particularly in the Caribbean region.

63. **Mr. Fialho Rocha** (Cabo Verde), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, said that cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue were key to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Promoting the linguistic and cultural diversity

of the world set the premise for dialogue, information and communication, which strengthened multilateralism within the United Nations. The Department of Public Information, now the Department of Global Communications, was a cornerstone of the United Nations system in its dissemination and promotion of the United Nations message across the world in the six official languages and many others. The Community firmly supported the Department in its objective to disseminate United Nations-related information in Portuguese, and its use of a combination of traditional and new media platforms. Portuguese was spoken by almost 300 million people worldwide and was increasingly used on United Nations social media platforms.

64. The Community appreciated the work of the United Nations information centres in raising awareness of the Organization's work among local populations in their own languages. Notably, it appreciated the development of an interactive multimedia web portal in Portuguese by the information centre in Rio de Janeiro for the country team in Angola and the Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. The Department's willingness to reform in a world of rapid change and new technologies was commendable.

65. Cabo Verde would convene the fourth International Conference on the Future of the Portuguese Language in the World System in 2019, aiming to highlight the global character of the language and its contribution to multilingualism. Cabo Verde and the Community's other members looked forward to collaborating with the United Nations and its Member States in pursuing the common goal of multilingual communications and information in the world.

66. **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, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the objective of the Department of Global Communications to modernize its operations, strengthen its impact and increase engagement with all stakeholders and young people was commendable.

67. There was increasing interest in United Nations activities, with rising numbers of followers of the Organization's social media account and visitors to the United Nations news website. 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 gave rise to operational challenges but was nonetheless necessary to ensure inclusion, garner support and empower action. It was also a prerequisite for a truly multilateral system.

68. The European Union welcomed the commitment to youth through education outreach, the Academic Impact initiative and overall engagement with young people, which had raised awareness about their needs and rights. It also welcomed the work of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth and her team in that regard, and encouraged further partnerships with students and academics, including the successful ERASMUS+ student exchange programme. Public-private partnerships would be essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and the green economy offered attractive business opportunities for the private sector. The efforts of the Secretariat to partner with a variety of organizations, including civil society, were commendable.

69. Commitment to reform of the United Nations system should be demonstrated to the international community, with increased focus on global communications at all levels. The Department should pay proper attention to the work of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, which offered a unique platform for dialogue in the digital age. Technological innovation was critical in helping countries accelerate progress towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. Global communications had a role to play in addressing challenges related to security, equity, ethics and human rights in the digital age and seizing the potential of technology, while safeguarding against its risks.

70. Sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse affected every corner of society, and the European Union welcomed the Secretary-General's personal commitment to combat those scourges. It supported his efforts to ensure gender parity and the empowerment of women and girls, and welcomed the creation of a specialized team within the Office of Internal Oversight Services to focus on sexual harassment investigations, including fast-tracked responses to complaints.

71. 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. Journalists and media workers required protection to ensure they were able to work in an environment free from fear of intimidation, harassment, undue arrest and prosecution.

72. **Mr. Verdier** (Argentina) said that the world was witnessing a new communications landscape marked by the spread of social media and the growing use of artificial intelligence to offer users personalized content based on their interests. While the full ramifications of those developments were not yet evident, the Organization should take them into account in its communications strategies so as to deliver its message to a growing but increasingly diverse and segmented public.

73. The Department of Public Information should continue providing reliable, neutral information and should incorporate new tools and formats into its strategy, while not losing sight of the persistent digital divide between developed and developing nations, and within each region. Urgent reforms of the Department were needed, and Member States should guide the changes proposed by the Secretariat. In that regard, his delegation recalled that the Committee on Information was the main body charged with making recommendations on the Department's work.

74. 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. Spanish was increasingly used in searches of the United Nations website and in social media, and it had for many years been the second most widely used language in those contexts. However, information was often available in only one or two official languages and the Department had not responded to the growing demand for Spanish-language content. Resources should be reallocated in order to provide equitable treatment for the six official languages.

75. 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. His delegation was also concerned that the audio and video files of meetings of the General Assembly, the Security Council and their subsidiary bodies were not available in all six official languages, and it called on the Secretariat to restore those files.

76. His delegation reiterated its support for the United Nations information centres and in particular the centre in Buenos Aires for its Red Card to Child Labour campaign and campaigns on violence against women. It 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.

77. **Mr. Castañeda Solares** (Guatemala), commending the work of the Department of Public Information, said that the need for reform was clear. The Department must create more rapid, strategic and integrated communications to ensure that the messages of the United Nations reached people in languages they understood using both traditional and new media. Such changes went hand in hand with the change in the Department's name to the Department of Global Communications.

78. Multilingualism was crucial to effectively informing the public about the work of the United Nations, and parity must be achieved among all six official languages, and not merely between the two working languages of the Secretariat, both in the creation and dissemination of public information materials. Improved incorporation of multilingualism into the information and communications activities of the United Nations would enhance the effectiveness, accountability and transparency of the Organization. The quantity and quality of information on websites should be similar in all official languages, and the Department should expand its use of social networks in all official languages.

79. 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. It reiterated its concern that the daily press releases were still not being published in all six official languages. Lastly, his delegation welcomed the Department's close collaboration with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Support and Political Affairs and the Peacebuilding Support Office to enhance communications activities with regard to the main peace and security challenges facing the world.

80. **Mr. Tongrod** (Thailand) said that effective and strategic communications played an integral role in supporting the credibility, relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations and should be the ultimate goal in reforming the Department of Public Information.

Multilingualism enhanced the transparency and accountability of the United Nations by increasing access, understanding and support of the work of the Organization. The Department should therefore continue its efforts to advance multilingualism, particularly through the dissemination of information in local languages. In that regard, his delegation appreciated the availability of the United Nations website and various social media accounts in the Thai language.

81. Effective and strategic communications were a means both to promote and to deliver results. The evolving media landscape offered unprecedented opportunities, particularly the use of social media platforms, and could support the United Nations by enhancing participation and influencing ideas. Nonetheless, use of traditional media must continue, as they remained the primary means of communication in large parts of the developing world. The establishment of a clear and integrated communications plan would therefore be beneficial to all United Nations agencies. It was also important that the information disseminated was accurate, well-constructed and communicated in a timely manner. The development of such content required close coordination, adequate oversight and appropriate training to prevent the spread of misinformation.

82. The Tham Luang cave incident had illustrated the unique power of social media and digital technology; by covering the story accurately and effectively in real time, support and technical assistance had been able to reach the rescue team rapidly. That story stood as a testament to the power of collective commitment and modern technology in the face of considerable challenges.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.