



# General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General  
31 March 2020

Original: English

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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 11th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 21 October 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Bahr Aluloom ..... (Iraq)  
*later:* Mr. Pindják (Vice-Chair)..... (Slovakia)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 54: Questions relating to information**  
(continued) (A/74/21 and A/74/283)

1. **Mr. Llorenty Solíz** (Plurinational State of Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish, said that the cross-cutting nature of multilingualism laid the groundwork for a genuine multilateral dialogue based on respect, equality, multiculturalism, inclusivity, diversity and international peace, and thus lay at the heart of the Organization's work. A culture of communication and transparency should therefore be incorporated into every level of the United Nations. The peoples of the world should be fully informed of the Organization's objectives, activities and achievements. Communication that was consistent and reflected linguistic and cultural diversity in a balanced manner was therefore not only efficient, but necessary.

2. Spanish was the second most widely spoken language worldwide and the second most commonly used language in searches of the United Nations website. During the period from February to June 2019, Spanish-language content had seen the greatest increase in audience numbers as compared with the same period in the previous year. The numbers of Spanish-language followers of United Nations social media accounts had also grown, as had audience numbers for United Nations News in Spanish. 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.

3. 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. 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.

4. 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. The Group was therefore concerned at the financial limitations that could affect the Department and, in particular, Spanish-language services. In order to promote and consolidate genuine multilingualism, the United Nations should adopt a strategic vision and gradually reprioritize its working methods in accordance with the needs of a culturally and

linguistically diverse global population. With that end in mind, Member States should formulate a strategic plan to reallocate resources with a focus on multilingualism, as the latter was a collective and shared responsibility.

5. **Mr. Jinga** (Romania), 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. 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 was also crucial to the success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding; three of the most important such missions were based in Francophone countries. Accordingly, it was recognized in General Assembly resolution 73/346 that multilingualism was an enabler of multilateral diplomacy.

6. Multilingualism should be mainstreamed into the information and communications activities of all departments, and action should be taken, in cooperation with the Coordinator for Multilingualism, to ensure the parity of official languages. The Group appreciated the growing popularity of the social media sites of the Department for Global Communications and welcomed the adoption of a new communications strategy focused on the public. It urged the Department to ensure that the six official languages were used in a balanced manner on the Internet sites of the Secretariat in order to eliminate the disparity between the use of English and the use of the five other official languages, and to reach a broader audience.

7. 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, and the work of the information centres should be sustained.

8. The Group was aware of the financial constraints faced by the Secretariat, especially the Department of Global Communications, and welcomed the solutions proposed by Member States and 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 limited the strain on resources; the archiving of webcasts in the various languages was a case in point. 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.

9. **Mr. Mimouni** (Algeria) said that his delegation appreciated the outreach efforts and communication campaigns conducted by the Department of Global Communications at a time when several milestones related to sustainable development, the environment and climate change had been reached. It noted the efforts made by the Department in response to the frequent collective appeals made by Member States and regional groups before the General Assembly and during the thematic debate held by the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly concerning discrepancies in the content of the press releases released after meetings of United Nations bodies and the partial, subjective and misleading nature of their headlines. His delegation called on the Department to continue to improve its output in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in relevant resolutions and decisions, and it urged the Under-Secretary-General to ensure strict adherence with those principles.

10. His delegation fully supported the Department's efforts to address such issues as disarmament, the promotion of human rights and decolonization. It urged the Department to expand its efforts to disseminate information related to the Non-Self-Governing Territories in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, with a special focus on the implementation of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2011–2020). It called on the Department to brief the General Assembly on the main activities implemented in that context and recommended that an assessment of the main achievements be conducted. The information centres in the relevant regions should seek new and innovative ways to disseminate materials to the Non-Self-Governing Territories in accordance with the principle that no one should be left behind. The Department

should also continue to update web-based information concerning the assistance programmes available to the Non-Self-Governing Territories, and should brief the Assembly on the progress made.

11. It was imperative for the Department to ensure wide media coverage of the United Nations system and, in particular, to give global audiences a deeper understanding of the role of the General Assembly, thereby promoting the revitalization of its work. At a time when unilateralism was gaining traction, it was important to give greater visibility to the work of the United Nations. The Department should consider strengthening cooperation with the media in order to foster multilateralism and enhance the Organization's role in maintaining peace and security, promoting sustainable development and upholding international law.

12. His delegation remained concerned at the potential for public information to be politicized, and for information and communications technology to be misused, in order to interfere with the internal affairs of States. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/324, it was important to make use of all the official languages of the United Nations and ensure their full and equitable treatment in all the activities of the United Nations system and, in particular, the Department of Global Communications. It welcomed efforts to mainstream multilingualism into all communication and information activities, including webcasting services; multilingualism was vital for the transparency, accountability, ownership and sustainability of the Department's communications.

13. **Mr. Al Habib** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that said information and communications technologies, including social media, had the potential 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. Those technologies 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.

14. The Department of Global Communications should continue to inform the public about important decisions and agreements reached by the international community and should focus on issues that affected international peace and security. In particular, it could seek to promote such initiatives as the Dialogue among Civilizations and "A world against violence and violent extremism", which his Government had put forward at

the fifty-third and sixty-eighth sessions of the General Assembly respectively.

15. Among the main challenges facing the world was the aggressive unilateralism of the United States of America, which used arbitrary unilateral coercive measures, including economic terrorism, as an illegitimate instrument of its foreign policy. Such abhorrent measures contravened the right of nations to development and undermined their basic human rights; their persistence would have momentous repercussions for international peace, security and development. His delegation therefore urged the Department to help raise awareness of their negative impact.

16. 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 the question of Palestine and the training programme for Palestinian journalists.

17. 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. In addition to the six official languages of the Organization, information should be disseminated also in other languages, including Persian, which was used by tens of millions of people across several nations.

18. **Mr. Tiare** (Burkina Faso) said that the development of new information and technology platforms made it possible to reach a broader audience, particularly young people, but also entailed the risk of fake news and cybercriminality. Moreover, despite such progress, traditional media continued to be the main source of information for many people, especially in developing countries. The challenge was therefore not only to communicate with a greater number of people, but to have a truly global reach.

19. In the report of the Committee on Information, it was stressed the Department of Global Communications should ensure the full and equitable treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations in all the activities of the Department, with the aim of eliminating the disparity between the use of English and the use of the five other official languages. The United Nations should lead the way in promoting multilingualism, which was an intrinsic part of multilateralism. For their part, Member States should work to improve multilingualism within the Organization and ensure that

information was disseminated accurately, impartially and equitably.

20. The United Nations information centres around the world played a valuable role in increasing the visibility of the Organization's work. The information centre in Ouagadougou, which covered Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger, focused its activities on the priority areas of the Organization and the national cooperation framework of the United Nations system. At the national level, it had helped to ensure ownership of the United Nations system reform among staff members and the public. For instance, it had helped the Government of Burkina Faso to formulate a communication plan in the as part of the emergency plan for the Sahel and supported the establishment of field units in five regions of the country. The information centre was currently facing difficulties and would benefit from capacity building in order better to fulfil its strategic role at a challenging time.

21. **Mr. Gutiérrez Plata** (Colombia) said that it was important to continue ensuring that the Organization's communication channels were accessible, appropriate and easy to consult. As a member of the Group of Friends of Spanish, his delegation was convinced that a free, open and candid dialogue underpinned by equitable access to information and knowledge was the cornerstone of understanding among cultures. It would therefore continue to support the Secretary-General's initiatives to ensure that the means of communication at the disposal of Member States could fulfil that purpose efficiently. Because multilingualism was an enabler of multilateral diplomacy, equality among the six official languages was a matter of fundamental importance, and the Secretariat had a responsibility to integrate multilingualism into its activities in an equitable manner, within existing resources. When appropriate, the Department of Global Communications should also endeavour to use other languages in order to reach the widest possible audience across the world in support of the Organization's activities.

22. **Mr. Attelb** (Egypt) said that his delegation welcomed the development of mechanisms and tools that would amplify the voice of the United Nations via traditional and digital platforms, mobilize support for United Nations objectives, and raise awareness of the vital work of the United Nations and its Member States. The Department of Global Communications and the United Nations information centres played a critical role in conveying the values, purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, expressing the collective will of Member States, and delivering reliable and unbiased information to the public.

23. As multilingualism was an asset to the work of the United Nations, use of the six official languages should be encouraged when raising awareness of United Nations activities and programmes. His delegation therefore welcomed the references in the Secretary-General's report to the use of local languages by the United Nations information centres to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda. It was also important to strengthen coordination between United Nations information centres and other United Nations entities on the ground, including peacekeeping operations, in order to promote effective and integrated communication with the public and avoid creating the impression that United Nations entities operated in silos.

24. Problems such as terrorism and extremism threatened the cohesion of the nation State, the sovereignty and independence of its institutions, and the unity of its people and territories. In the light of the huge advances in communication and information technology, media outlets had a responsibility to exercise caution and uphold high standards of credibility, integrity and honesty. In recent days, however, certain media had increasingly resorted to spreading false news and adopted agendas intended to incite hatred and xenophobia, not to mention violence, terrorism, extremism and chaos. The international community should take a firm stand against such practices and uphold the principle of accountability. His Government was confident that the international community had the capacity to use the media effectively for humanitarian purposes.

25. *Mr. Pindják (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

26. **Mr. Viera Salazar** (Ecuador) said that, given the complex challenges facing multilateralism, it was essential to ensure that the deliberations and field work of the United Nations were communicated clearly and effectively. For that purpose, the Organization should promote multilingualism, which was an enabler of unity within diversity, tolerance and international dialogue. Although significant progress had been made towards mainstreaming multilingualism into the activities of the Organization, there remained a disparity between the use of English and French and the use of the other official languages. The United Nations should lead by example and close that gap. The Department of Global Communications should endeavour to ensure that the budgetary issues facing the United Nations did not affect the cross-cutting mandate for multilingualism, which served as a basis for genuine dialogue, respect, equality, multiculturalism, inclusion and diversity.

27. It was not always clear to outsiders what the United Nations was doing to eradicate poverty, tackle

climate change or empower women and girls. A culture of communication helped the Organization to connect with people around the world, disseminate information regarding its activities, and raise awareness of the challenges facing the international community. A range of media should be used in order to reach the greatest possible number of people. Particular emphasis should be placed on social media and innovative youth outreach strategies, without disregarding traditional media, which remained vital for significant numbers of people in developing countries. Given that so much information on the Internet was inaccurate or misleading, the Department should hold itself to the highest standards of accuracy, integrity and accountability, taking into account the complexities of social media communications, which often played a negative role by creating stereotypes or misconceptions.

28. As the second most widely spoken language in the world, Spanish had a particularly important role to play. His delegation hoped that when formulating its strategies, the Department would take into consideration the statistics set forth in the report of the Secretary-General, which showed that the growth in Spanish-language traffic on the United Nations website had been greater than that of any other language.

29. **Mr. Mero** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation commended the Department of Global Communications for its extensive outreach efforts and effective use of communication technologies. It particularly valued the significant work done by the information centres, often in local languages, to raise awareness of the routine activities of the United Nations and the challenges facing the world. Multilingualism was an important part of that endeavour, as it contributed to the realization of the sustainable development goals and helped protect linguistic diversity and improve the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization. It was important to support the information centres and build their capacity to reach the public in the relevant languages.

30. In order to address the disparities in language use in United Nations media, his delegation believed that the Organization should consider making Kiswahili an official language of the United Nations. Kiswahili was more widely spoken than any other African language, with currently 500 million speakers worldwide, and had been adopted as an official language by various countries and regional and subregional organizations. Efforts should be made through the young professionals programme to recruit greater numbers of Kiswahili speakers to United Nations media roles and thus to provide wider coverage of Kiswahili-speaking communities. While most information centres had good

working relationships with Governments and national media, more could be done to improve their engagement with the broader public. The centres, particularly those located in his country or using Kiswahili, should be given adequate technology and human resources to fulfil their functions.

31. Notwithstanding the growth of modern technologies, traditional media remained the predominant means of communication across generations at the global level. All Member States should regulate against the improper use of public information and inaccurate or misleading reporting, a problem whose impact had thus far not been grasped. His delegation called on the Organization and Member States to develop a standard norm that would make it possible to ensure full compliance with the highest standards of accuracy, integrity, and accountability while avoiding the inappropriate use of information and communication technologies in a manner contrary to international law and detrimental to any States or their citizens.

32. **Mr. Halfaoui** (Morocco) said that the strategic shift from the Department of Information to the Department of Global Communications reflected the Organization's capacity to adapt to current needs. In view of its unique legitimacy, it was more important than ever for the United Nations to provide reliable, neutral and objective information. The work of the Department should focus on the promotion of such causes as peace, international solidarity, tolerance, sustainable development and the fight against climate change. His delegation therefore welcomed its coverage of the summits held on the margins of the high-level segment of the General Assembly, particularly those on the climate and youth. The Department's programmes to combat extremism and intolerance and promote remembrance and dialogue among civilizations were particularly timely.

33. His country's longstanding commitment to openness, moderation, pluralism of culture and worship, human rights and respect for difference had been highlighted by the historic visit of Pope Francis on 30 and 31 March 2019. On that occasion, Pope Francis and King Mohammed VI had signed the Appeal for Jerusalem, in which they had emphasized that the specific multi-religious character, the spiritual dimension and the particular cultural identity of Jerusalem must be protected and promoted, and that full freedom of access and worship should be guaranteed to the followers of the three monotheistic religions. The Department's special programme for the question of Palestine was another commendable initiative.

34. As a longstanding major contributor to peacekeeping forces, Morocco appreciated the Service and Sacrifice campaign, which highlighted the work of United Nations peacekeepers. In anticipation of the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, it would be useful to organize an analogous campaign on peacebuilding, an area that was often little known to general audiences. The Department should continue to promote gender parity and the empowerment of women and to highlight the role of the Secretary-General in promoting those issues within and beyond the Organization.

35. All those tasks would require substantial human and financial resources. His delegation welcomed the Department's increasing use of new technologies and social media platforms, which could help compensate for the funding gap. Nevertheless, in view of the digital divide, the Department should also give due attention to traditional media, which continued to be the main source of information in many developing countries. Given the importance of new partnerships with public and private entities, Morocco intended to establish in the near future a group of friends of global communications.

36. Morocco was strongly committed to multilingualism, which offered a way to foster accountability and transparency, promote shared values and defend multilateralism. His delegation was aware of the resulting financial and logistical burden, and it commended the efforts that had been made to reduce the disparities in the use of the six official languages. It welcomed the Department's efforts to reach the widest possible audience, including by using local languages.

37. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that the League of Arab States welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish a more equitable, effective and far-reaching global information and communication system, and the actions taken by Member States, through the Committee on Information, to enhance communication in the six official languages. Media activities were one of the most important ways to strengthen the Organization's credibility in its main areas of work. The commitment shown by the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications to implementing the SDG Media Compact would thus play a valuable role in promoting the 2030 Agenda and ensuring that no one was left behind. The League had adopted a similar approach for its five-pronged strategic media plan to support the Sustainable Development Goals, foster a positive image of the Goals in the Arab world, improve media output in its States members with respect to development issues, and foster relevant initiatives at the level of the League.

38. The League of Arab States endeavoured to ensure that its media plans were aligned with those of the United Nations. One such plan sought to raise awareness of the need to resolve the question of Palestine, combat terrorism and extremism, and promote accurate representations of Arabs and Muslims. Social media and traditional media could play a significant part in raising awareness of such issues. For that purpose, it was important to leverage national capacities and the talent of women and youth. The League had strengthened its relations with United Nations media offices in the Arab region, particularly in Cairo, and had worked with the United Nations to organize media training courses for its staff with a view to exchanging experiences and building capacities. The involvement of the Department of Global Communications in Expo 2020, which would be hosted for six months by the United Arab Emirates, was a testament to such cooperation.

39. Despite tremendous progress in information and communications technology and social media, radio broadcasts remained an essential way to reach young people and should therefore be a priority area for cooperation between the League and the United Nations. Given the high numbers of Arabic speakers around the world, the Arabic language section of United Nations Radio should be commensurate with its English and French counterparts, as effective channels of communication could be marshalled to resolve crises in the region. United Nations media operations should carve out a role for national and regional Arabic-language media platforms, especially radio and television. They should increase investment in social media, with a particular focus on youth, women and persons with disabilities, and on the use of sign language.

40. The Department of Global Communications had played a leading role in protecting multilingualism and publicizing Arab causes, notably the need to establish a Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Department had also provided good coverage of issues related to Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. The League looked forward to further fruitful cooperation with a view to calling out terrorism and extremism, raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, and ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

41. **Ms. Saidane** (Observer for the International Organization of la Francophonie) said that it was vital to mobilize the Secretariat and Member States in support of multilingualism, which was a fundamental value of the United Nations. She therefore welcomed the vision developed by the Department of Global Communications and the results achieved thus far.

However, despite the Organization's efforts, the principle of multilingualism was not fully reflected in its work. In view of the current financial constraints, there was a significant risk that multilingualism could be called into question. With that challenge in mind, her organization had arranged for an international volunteer to assist the office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth in 2019 in order to promote outreach to French-speaking youth. It had also worked with the Secretariat to support a study on options to improve the incorporation of multilingualism into the Organization's work. In so doing, it had helped to formulate numerous operational recommendations, with a particular emphasis on human resources management processes.

42. The Secretariat should ensure that content was not merely translated into, but also produced in, the six official languages. Any shortcoming in that regard would hamper the Organization's ability to find solutions at a time of serious budget constraints, not to mention preventing the sharing of responsibility for multilingualism across the United Nations. On the eve of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, and its own fiftieth anniversary, the International Organization of la Francophonie looked forward to working creatively with the Department in support of representative multilateralism.

*Draft resolutions A and B: United Nations global communications policies and activities*

43. **The Chair** invited the Committee to take action on the draft resolutions before it under agenda item 54, which had no programme budget implications.

44. *Draft resolution A was adopted.*

45. *Draft resolution B was adopted.*

46. **Ms. Fleming** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that the Department of Global Communications was grateful for the Committee's support and mindful of the concerns expressed. She looked forward to engaging with Member States in order to ensure that the Department delivered information effectively and accurately in the service of humanity.

47. **Ms. Stanford** (United States of America) said that, as had been concluded in two reports of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (A/68/98 and A/70/174), international law, and in particular the Charter of the United Nations, was applicable and was essential to maintaining peace and stability and promoting an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and

communications technology environment. Her delegation wished to underscore that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was non-binding, did not create or affect rights or obligations under international law, and did not create any new financial commitments. Her Government recognized the Agenda as a global framework for sustainable development that could help countries work toward global peace and prosperity. It commended the call in the Agenda for shared responsibility, including national responsibility, and it emphasized that all countries had a role to play in realizing that vision. As was recognized in the Agenda, each country must work towards implementation in accordance with its own national policies and priorities. Moreover, in paragraph 18 of the Agenda, States were urged to implement the Agenda in a manner consistent with their rights and obligations under international law. In paragraph 58, it was stated that the Agenda and its implementation should support, and be without prejudice to, other processes and the decisions taken therein. The Agenda therefore did not represent a commitment to provide new market access for goods or services. It did not interpret or alter any agreement or decision of the World Trade Organization, including the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

48. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants set out goals and objectives that were inconsistent and incompatible with United States law and policy and the interests of the American people. Her delegation had not attended the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and it had voted against the Compact when the latter had been submitted to the General Assembly for endorsement on 19 December 2018. Accordingly, it dissociated itself from paragraph 9 of draft resolution B. Her Government maintained its sovereign right to facilitate or restrict access to its territory, in accordance with its national laws and policies and subject to its obligations under international law.

49. Her delegation also dissociated itself from paragraph 65 of draft resolution B owing to its longstanding concerns regarding the premise of a “right to development”, which was not recognized in any of the core United Nations human rights conventions and did not have an agreed international meaning. More work would be required in order to define a right to development consistent with those human rights conventions, which the international community recognized as enshrining universal rights that all

individuals enjoyed and could demand from their Governments.

*The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.*