General Assembly
Seventy-eighth session

Official Records

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

Summary record of the 12th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 17 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Joyini . . . . (South Africa)

Contents

Please recycle

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

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

1. **Ms. Baños Müller** (El Salvador), speaking as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Information and introducing the report on its forty-fifth session (A/78/21), said that the Chair of the Committee, during the general debate held at that session, had noted that amid a rise unprecedented threats, such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change and the aggravation of new and existing conflicts, the Committee on Information should focus on prioritizing the dissemination of accurate and timely information, bridging the digital divide and achieving universal connectivity by ensuring equal access to broadband and data for all. The Chair had also acknowledged the work of the Department of Global Communications to combat hate speech, misinformation and disinformation.

2. Many delegations, including those representing large groups, had expressed concern about the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation surrounding the existential threat of climate change, the interrelated shocks to the food supply, fuel prices and other global challenges. Speakers had voiced their concern that information manipulation regarding the war in Ukraine was being used to deceive national and international audiences. In such an environment, the United Nations played a crucial role in obtaining reliable information for all.

3. Several delegations had emphasized the need for the Organization's communications to be more rapid, strategic and comprehensive. In addition, speakers had expressed concern over the suppression of information, as it catalysed violence. Representatives of Member States had also praised the Department for promoting objective, science-based information to combat the proliferation of hate speech, especially as related to religious persecution, xenophobia and racism. Many delegations had welcomed the Department's spearheading of several campaigns to combat the information crises and called for the continuation of those initiatives and the creation of additional ones to promote gender equality, prevent further conflict and achieve linguistic parity.

4. While many speakers had commended the Department for its use of social media and digital campaigns and initiatives to disseminate information on the work of the United Nations, concern had also been expressed regarding the growing digital divide within and among countries. Many speakers had urged the

Organization to take steps to secure greater Internet connectivity, especially in developing countries. One delegation had raised concerns about monopolies in modern communications technologies and about sanctions on developing countries that blocked technology transfer. Speakers had reminded the Organization not to neglect traditional media, such as radio, print and television, as a considerable portion of the world's population still relied on them. They had also noted that limitations on access to reliable, factual and multilingual information must be addressed. Several speakers had emphasized that multilingualism and other, more inclusive forms of media, such as closed-captioned videos and sign language interpretation, would be the best approach for closing existing gaps and ensuring that everyone had access to information distributed by the Organization.

5. Several delegations, including those representing large groups, had highlighted the continued importance of multilingualism in the content on United Nations web and social media platforms, and many delegations had touched on the issue of proper resource allocation for the Department's multilingual efforts. The use of the six official languages must be balanced in order to reflect diversity, effectively promote the Organization to a global audience and ensure equal access to information. Several representatives had noted the significant growth of the Spanish- and French-language audiences and asked the Department to take that into account when allocating resources. Many representatives acknowledged the limitations placed on the Department's ability to fund efforts related to multilingualism, especially regarding dissemination in non-official languages, and urged it to explore innovative and voluntary contributions in that regard.

6. Many delegates praised the work of the United Nations information centres for their role in promoting the Organization's mandates and garnering support for its work through the use of official and non-official languages. The Organization should continue supporting the information centres in order to strengthen their capacity to provide information to the most vulnerable populations.

7. Various speakers, especially those from troop- and police-contributing countries, had expressed deep concern over attacks on peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel in the field. Speakers had encouraged the Department to improve its strategic communications strategies for addressing anti-United Nations propaganda, which could incite mistrust and violence towards peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel. They had urged the Department to publicize the actions and goals of peacekeeping operations and of

peacekeepers serving under adverse conditions to galvanize further support.

8. Many delegations had voiced support for the Department's development of a global code of conduct that promoted integrity in public information, in line with the vision articulated by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Our Common Agenda" (A/75/982). Delegates had asked that the code be approached from a multilingual perspective while taking into account the perspectives and principles of relevant stakeholders. Numerous delegations had underscored the necessity of reaching out to young people in communicating the purposes and principles of the United Nations, with a special focus on media literacy, and some delegations had called for strengthening partnerships with the academic community to mitigate the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation.

9. **Ms. Fleming** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that cascading challenges, including senseless wars, climate change, human rights violations and deepening inequalities, were derailing progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Department currently had its largest number of active crisis communications cells ever, including in response to the unprecedented crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Accurate information was paramount in that situation, especially with greater proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on social media than ever before, which was already seriously distorting the facts and generating hate. The United Nations was trying to be the trusted source of information to which people could turn. Traffic to its news platforms had increased significantly, with over 1.3 million visitors since the crisis had begun. There had also been a remarkable increase in the reach and engagement of its social media platforms. The English-language Instagram account alone had reached 8.4 million people in the past week, an increase of 400 per cent, and news organizations around the world were quoting, republishing or broadcasting United Nations content on their platforms and programmes.

10. Other crisis communications cells were addressing the war in Ukraine, the conflict in the Sudan, the aftermath of the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, and the unconstitutional change of Government in Niger. Communications colleagues across the United Nations system were monitoring media outlets and public opinion, exchanging updates on the work of the Organization and compiling a constantly updated document highlighting the work and messaging of agencies operating on the ground in those crises.

11. The rapid rise of artificial intelligence was turbocharging the spread of misinformation and disinformation and hate speech, which spread even more rapidly in crisis situations, reinforcing discrimination, stigmatization and marginalization, and potentially resulting in grave offline harm. Misinformation and disinformation were currently being directed at the United Nations itself, putting its staff members' lives at risk and harming its ability to deliver for the most vulnerable.

12. Since the publication, in June 2023, of the Secretary-General's policy brief 8 outlining potential principles for a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms, the Department had embarked on an extensive and inclusive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders, including Member States, digital platforms, youth, media organizations, academics, advertisers and civil society, and had created an online page for submissions, to which anyone could contribute. To better understand information threats worldwide, a global survey would be launched in the following weeks to map out the ways in which such threats were spreading and how they affected the work and priorities of the United Nations, as well as the communities it served. The Department had also convened a United Nations system working group on information integrity.

13. During the recent high-level general debate of the General Assembly, held on a full scale for the first time since before the COVID-19 pandemic, United Nations News, United Nations Photo, United Nations Web TV and United Nations Video had brought the event to the outside world in the six official languages and in Hindi, Kiswahili and Portuguese. A new live blog had captured a mix of news and contextual analysis in real time. In parallel, press releases had been issued in English and French on a daily basis. Full coverage of the 136 Heads of State and Government and 40 ministers who had taken the floor during the general debate had produced 473 pages of content. The Department had also provided global audiences with a general debate website updated in real time.

14. The Department had also generated substantial coverage of the recent Sustainable Development Goals Summit through a press package in all official languages and targeted outreach. The Sustainable Development Goals website had also seen a 7 per cent increase in traffic during that time, with over 7 million visits. The Sustainable Development Goals media zone had served as a lively hub for dialogue, with panel discussions on climate change and climate action, gender equality, food security, human rights and other topics. In addition, the United Nations information centres had creatively

adapted Goals-related messaging to make it relevant to their local populations. For example, the information centre in Pretoria had co-produced a book that matched quotes from Nelson Mandela with specific Goals, while the information centre in Rabat had placed Goals-related messaging on a tramway line that was visible to some 150,000 passengers.

15. More and more people were turning to United Nations web pages and the Department's digital platforms for information on climate change and the actions they could take to address it. Traffic to the climate website had increased to almost 1.7 million page views in September 2023, a 60 per cent increase from a year earlier. Between July and October, new audiences had been reached through extensive pro bono ad space on public transportation, digital kiosks and print magazines. Trains, pedicabs and billboards in many countries had prominently featured visuals related to the Department's Act Now campaign, which had originally revolved around climate action but had been broadened to also include actions related to the Goals. The result had been a corresponding increase in public engagement, with 15 million individual actions recorded by the end of September via an online application that could be downloaded to people's phones. Ahead of the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Department would soon be launching Verified for Climate, which would build on the Verified initiative launched to combat misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic and distribute accurate information on climate science and solutions, promoting support for urgent action and turning the tide on denialism, doomism and narratives of delay.

16. Teams around the world were marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the lead-up to Human Rights Day. Working closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Department had launched a digital campaign and was supporting the implementation of initiatives aimed at local audiences. The Department was also providing advice on celebrity and influencer advocacy to encourage individual action around human rights and supporting other international commemorations interlinked with human rights, such as Nelson Mandela International Day. The Department had hosted a visit to United Nations Headquarters in August by Viola Fletcher, who, at 109 years of age, was the oldest living survivor of the race massacre in Tulsa, United States of America, and in September the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme had co-hosted a

virtual discussion of the award-winning book *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews and the Holocaust*.

17. In spite of emerging new challenges facing the world, the Department spared no effort in communicating other United Nations priorities. The United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service had ensured that the voices of civil society organizations were included in United Nations dialogues by facilitating the participation of close to 600 civil society organizations in critical multilateral sessions in recent months. Visitors' Services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi had welcomed nearly 80,000 visitors for guided tours and specialized briefings on the work of the Organization in 28 languages. In August, *Africa Renewal* had launched the "Celebrating Africa's rising talent" series to highlight the achievements of young Africans in technology, agribusiness, entrepreneurship, sports, entertainment and other fields. In September, the 2023 Reham al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship programme had hosted 12 young journalists from developing countries, who had produced more than 100 news pieces for their media outlets. The online platform un-ilibrary.org had continued to expand rapidly, with the number of publications available on the site increasing to more than 11,000, and the United Nations sales website had been relaunched.

18. **Mr. Strzhizhovskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the Under-Secretary-General had mentioned that there would be a survey on the code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms; however, the Committee had earlier been informed that an online global questionnaire on that topic had already been launched, with a deadline of 1 December 2023. He asked whether that survey had yielded any intermediate data concerning Internet users' views on such a code of conduct. He would also welcome more detail on the role of regional information centres in the implementation of the initiative.

19. **Mr. Rodríguez Gómez-Aller** (Spain) said that, in an evolving political and technological environment, there was a risk that multilingualism could recede as a priority. It could be tempting for the Organization to present itself to the world in only one or two languages, something that would undermine the Department's legitimacy and effectiveness. He asked whether the Department needed more support to combat disinformation in an equitable manner in all official languages, including as part of the Verified initiative, and whether it was planning to use the linguistic knowledge of its staff members to increase the number of staff working in Spanish and the quantity of content produced in that language.

20.   **Mr. Cisneros Chávez** (Mexico) said that it seemed as though the Department's strategy for improving multilingualism consisted of increasing staff numbers. He asked whether that approach was being complemented by a vision for incorporating new technologies, in particular, artificial intelligence, to increase what the Organization could accomplish with its current staff.

21.   He also wished to know how the Department was working with platforms, in particular social media networks, to implement and disseminate the code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms.

22.   **Ms. Mocanu** (Romania) said that the Department might wish to consider holding a special event for youth delegates, especially United Nations youth delegates, in early October 2024 in New York as part of the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly to preview the activities of Global Media and Information Literacy Week, since the youth delegates would already be at Headquarters at that time.

23.   **Ms. Fleming** (Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications) said that an online portal had been created to solicit a wide range of opinions on the code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. It was not a survey, but rather an opportunity for Member States, civil society, academia, media and other actors to contribute their thoughts. Those contributions would then be used in formulating the code of conduct and its recommendations. Separately, the Department was conducting a global online survey of United Nations personnel on how the online information environment was affecting their ability to carry out their work and the societies they served. Country teams, especially national staff, were well placed to provide insights in that regard. The survey's preliminary findings could be presented early in 2024.

24.   More resources were definitely needed to fight disinformation in multiple languages. The Department was asking colleagues working in other languages, as well as in the information centres, to help with the monitoring of and strategic reaction to misinformation and disinformation, and to be creative in how they ensured broader dissemination of trusted United Nations information. More financial support for the Verified initiative and for media literacy would be greatly appreciated.

25.   The Department did not have a vision for incorporating artificial intelligence, as it was wary of using the technology to replace humans at present. Media organizations might use artificial intelligence for help in research and for story ideas, but the technology was notoriously inaccurate. The Department worked in a journalistic way in very sensitive environments in multiple countries with multiple languages and had to make sure that it got things right. Artificial intelligence would also not work with meetings coverage, which entailed providing quick summaries of three-hour meetings in English and French for a primary audience of Member States, in particular those which could not attend all meetings. The Department had asked for 54 posts to produce such content in the other four official languages. The Department hired people with journalism backgrounds who knew the United Nations and had the judgment and expertise to summarize in a balanced way, while capturing everything. She did not believe that a machine could do that; indeed, it could create significant problems. The Department was doing its best to increase multilingualism within its current resources. Requests for more resources were usually not granted, so the Department worked with what it had.

26.   The Department had been appealing to social media platforms to apply the values of the United Nations, and even to live up to their own standards and guidelines. It had good relations with the platforms and had been working with them for years. In some cases, the platforms had amplified United Nations content or provided free advertisement. At the same time, the Department was constantly flagging harmful content and asking the platforms to consider removing, demoting or fact-checking it. The Department was also consulting with them in the context of the code of conduct, which had sparked great interest and would provide the United Nations system with a basis for advocacy. The Department would continue to advocate for making the platforms a space where hate speech was not tolerated, illegal content was banned, and misinformation and disinformation was not the content that people saw first. The Department would not be able to fine or sanction the platforms as did the European Union. It did however, have a moral voice for advocacy. That would be helpful for Member States, which could point to the guidance when trying to make information ecosystems in their own countries healthier and more humane.

27.   She would look into the proposal of the delegate of Romania. Young people should be involved in Global Media and Information Literacy Week, which was very important to the Department.

28.   **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

29.   **Mr. Romero Puentes** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group commended the Department on its global strategic communications response to a broad range of

challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and proliferating conflicts. The Department must make highlighting the challenges of climate change, which was wreaking havoc worldwide, a key communications priority, taking appropriate measures to enhance global awareness of multilateralism and strategic coordination in response to humanitarian crises and needs.

30. The information provided by the United Nations, which remained the foundation of a peaceful and just world, must be accurate, reliable and impartial. For its part, the Department should avoid the editorialization of breaking news stories and news alerts. In view of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, the Group encouraged the Department to establish and further strengthen partnerships with new and traditional media to address hate speech narratives and promote tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism and freedom of opinion and expression.

31. The growing trend of fake news and disinformation on online platforms, including social media, had contributed to social discord, incitement, racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, negative stereotypes and related intolerance. The Group was deeply concerned at the increase in disinformation and misinformation directed against United Nations peacekeeping operations. It encouraged the Department to support efforts to provide accurate content, including in local languages and in coordination with national authorities, to strengthen understanding of mandates, manage expectations and garner confidence and support. The Group therefore urged the Department to intensify its support for United Nations efforts to fight against disinformation, which would require addressing the underlying societal tensions, advancing respect for human rights and supporting a pluralistic civic space and media. Efforts must be redoubled to disseminate factual, timely, targeted, clear, accessible, multilingual and science-based information on all platforms.

32. The Group was seriously concerned at violence against journalists and associated personnel. It hoped that the Department would pay particular attention to the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development. In view of the digital disparities among States, the relevant organizations should take steps to secure greater Internet connectivity, especially in developing countries, and rectify the existing imbalance in order to make the media more just, equitable and impartial.

33. The Group encouraged the Department to mobilize adequate resources, including through voluntary contributions and innovative financing options, to promote multilingualism, which would contribute to ensuring inclusivity, diversity and tolerance, as well as maximize outreach at the grass-roots level. It encouraged the United Nations information centres and country offices to disseminate information about the work of the Organization in local languages. The United Nations must move from a culture of translation towards producing content in different languages, in line with General Assembly resolution 76/268 on multilingualism.

34. The Group welcomed the Department's campaigns to showcase troop- and police-contributing countries and encouraged the Department to develop more integrated communications strategies for that purpose. It noted with interest the policy briefs on specific issues, such as information integrity on digital platforms, in view of preparations for the Summit of the Future to be held on 22 and 23 September 2024 in New York. Such documents could serve as important inputs to the Summit's preparatory process, bearing in mind that States Members of the United Nations would make the final decision on intergovernmental agreed elements to be included in its outcome, "A Pact for the Future".

35. The Group urged the Department to continue to strengthen and rationalize the United Nations information centres, in consultation with all concerned Member States.

36. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, said that the Department would have a more effective reach if its messages were disseminated in the six official languages. The Group therefore welcomed the Department's efforts to raise awareness of the consequences of climate change, the centrality to the international community of the struggle of the heroic Palestinian people, the contributions of peacekeeping operations and the need to end colonialism and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

37. More than forty years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 34/182 on questions relating to information, much work remained to be done to establish a new world order of information and communication based on universal, inclusive and non-discriminatory access to information. Many people faced obstacles to accessing information and communications technologies, and the digital divide between the Global North and the Global South continued to grow every day. Concrete efforts must be made to democratize access to such technologies, including the Internet, as they could help accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, access to

such technologies was often hindered by unilateral coercive, restrictive and punitive measures, which flagrantly violated the Charter of the United Nations and all norms of international law. Such measures thwarted international efforts to promote digital cooperation and connectivity, while also preventing the modernization of national telecommunications systems. The Group called for their complete and immediate end.

38. Joint action must be taken, in particular under the auspices of the United Nations, to address issues related to countering the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for criminal purposes and strengthening their secure use. Such technologies should not be used to subvert and destabilize independent and sovereign nations. It was essential to ensure that new and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, were used for peaceful purposes.

39. The Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes should strictly implement its mandate and submit a draft convention for the consideration of the General Assembly before the conclusion of the current session. The draft should be comprehensive: it should include a broad categorization of criminal acts and provide for proactive procedural measures and the collection and exchange of electronic evidence for a wide range of offences.

40. The Group condemned the alarming proliferation of disinformation campaigns, in particular on online platforms, which were created, disseminated and amplified by certain Governments and non-State actors for political or ideological reasons. Such campaigns could undermine political sovereignty and disrupt social cohesion while promoting hate speech, racism, xenophobia, fascism and other similar ideologies and further inciting violence, intolerance and discrimination. Responsible members of the international community must take urgent measures to prevent and counter that trend, while redoubling efforts towards the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence. The Group categorically rejected the malicious use of ICTs to interfere in the internal affairs of States, to promote destabilization or to carry out attacks against critical infrastructure. The code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms developed by the United Nations could serve as an important reference for Member States in that regard. Such a document should not, however, serve as a basis for discussions within the framework of the forthcoming Summit of the Future, as it was not the product of an intergovernmental process led by States.

41. **Mr. Da Cruz** (Angola), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, said that the Community commended the Department of Global Communications for its continued efforts to raise awareness of the Organization's work and its willingness to undertake reforms, with a view to expanding the reach of trustworthy information on global crises presented in languages that people understood. The Department should continue to employ a combination of Internet-based media and traditional means of communication, so as to reach households in developing countries with limited access to the Internet.

42. Multilingualism facilitated multilateral diplomacy, which strengthened dialogue and tolerance among peoples and countries. The Department was encouraged to strengthen its multilingual approach to promote the principles and the work of the United Nations by disseminating content in as many languages as possible, beyond the six official languages. The Community was pleased to note the strong interest in content produced in Portuguese, given the number of visitors to the United Nations News in Portuguese web page, and would continue to advocate the use of that language in national and international contexts. It also welcomed the ongoing cooperation between the Department and the Government of Angola to operationalize the United Nations Information Centre in Luanda in order to address the needs of the African countries using Portuguese as an official language.

43. Given that informed citizens made informed decisions, it was imperative to guarantee a safe and credible information ecosystem, with established accountability mechanisms, in which misinformation, disinformation and hate speech had no place. Member States and relevant stakeholders must therefore support and contribute to the development of a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms, while seeking a balance between regulation and freedom of expression. The Community encouraged the Department to continue its efforts to counter disinformation and hate speech on digital platforms, which jeopardized information integrity, trust in technology, progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, peacekeeping missions and humanitarian operations.

44. **Mr. Ladois** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and, in addition, Georgia, said that the European Union welcomed the attention given to human rights, the gender digital divide and the challenges posed by information manipulation in the resolutions adopted by the

Committee on Information in May 2023. The Department of Global Communications should ensure that all communications issued by the United Nations system consistently employed the terminology used in General Assembly resolutions and statements by the Secretary-General, in particular those that addressed grave violations of the Charter of the United Nations.

45. Welcoming the positive impact of the Department's communications campaigns and activities since the introduction of the global communications strategy in 2020, the European Union encouraged the Department to integrate multilingualism more fully into all its operations, treat all six official languages equally and disseminate information in other languages through United Nations information centres, in particular at the local level. The European Union supported the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications to coordinate communication throughout the United Nations system and engage with diverse and younger audiences. In that connection, the recently established United Nations Youth Office should be fully equipped.

46. The international community continued to witness widespread disinformation and information manipulation. Such efforts were sometimes carried out by State actors, including Russia, which attempted to justify its illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable military aggression against Ukraine. Furthermore, privately owned social media platforms often did too little to identify, manage and remove false information. Coordinated action was needed at the national, regional and international levels to counter information manipulation, notably in the digital space, with evidence-based corrections, in particular in times of crisis, such as the current situation in the Middle East. To that end, the code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms created guardrails for Governments and other stakeholders to come together in a whole-of-society approach for stronger joint action and accountability. The international community must promote responsible State behaviour in tackling information manipulation and ensure that the entire information environment in all regions was covered. The risks posed by artificial intelligence must also be addressed to ensure that the technology was not used for criminal purposes and did not further aggravate information manipulation. The European Union welcomed the imminent nomination of the high-level advisory body on artificial intelligence and called on the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology to consider those risks during the negotiations to establish the global digital compact.

47. The European Union stood ready to share its experiences, including with regard to its Code of Practice on Disinformation, which had been strengthened in 2022. It was working to establish legally binding frameworks to regulate the digital space, which would protect the fundamental rights of all users; establish a level playing field to foster innovation, growth and competitiveness; and define clear responsibilities for providers of intermediary services, such as social media, online marketplaces and search engines.

48. The international community must promote digital literacy and accountability to empower citizens worldwide with the skills necessary to make informed choices and fortify their resilience to discriminatory, violent, false or misleading content. Such efforts must be undertaken while safeguarding all human rights and fundamental freedoms and striving to reduce inequalities and the digital divides between and within countries.

49. The European Union reiterated its support for the essential work of United Nations accredited journalists, who were the cornerstone of free societies and often took on great risks to inform citizens. It was regrettable that freedom of the press was under pressure in many parts of the world and that many journalists were under attack for their reporting. In that connection, the European Union had taken strong action to improve conditions for journalists within its territory and would continue to advocate their safety and protection in multilateral forums.

50. **Ms. Thomas Ramírez** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, said that the creation of the Group reflected the commitment of its members to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations with a view to ensuring the full participation of all Member States and protecting multilingualism as a fundamental value for effective multilateralism. Respect for multilingualism was necessary to maintain linguistic equality, given that the preservation of different cultures and languages was indispensable to fostering tolerance and a culture of peace. The Group recognized the significant role played by the Department to incorporate the six official languages in its working methods and publish information on various platforms, as well as its work at the local level to improve communications coordination with other United Nations bodies. However, the United Nations must do more to provide timely and consistent information to its entire public. For instance, it remained difficult to reach the Spanish-speaking public regarding various aspects of the Organization's work, given that many of the relevant virtual spaces were available only in English or French.

51. The goal of the Group was to ensure that communications about the work of the United Nations were disseminated in Spanish as fluidly as in the other official languages. After all, Spanish was the fourth most widely spoken language, with 540 million speakers worldwide, 470 million of whom spoke it as their native language. The Secretariat was urged to continue producing original content in Spanish, with a view to reflecting the inherent linguistic diversity of the Spanish language. The United Nations must go beyond the culture of translation and work towards creating content in all its official languages, under the principle of equality as enshrined in the most recent resolution on multilingualism. The Group further emphasized the need to hire and train competent linguistic staff that reflected an equitable geographical distribution and was diverse from the perspective of language, ethnicity and culture. Any gaps in information consistency would have a negative effect on the global communications strategy; stakeholders must therefore work together to ensure that the existing resources were matched with growing demand.

52. Despite the Department's considerable efforts, a hierarchy of languages, albeit unintended, still remained. The Group worked to eliminate barriers to access to information that was trustworthy, factual and multilingual. Multilingualism was cross-cutting in nature, creating the foundation for multilateral dialogue based on respect, equality, multiculturalism, inclusion, diversity and international peace.

53. **Mr. Nguyen** Hoang Nguyen (Viet Nam), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that, in the context of increasing geopolitical tensions, fragmentation and conflicts, the role of the United Nations in providing accurate, reliable and balanced information was more important than ever. A culture of communication and transparency should permeate all levels of the Organization, with a view to promoting greater awareness and understanding of the Organization's work and priorities, in accordance with the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter. The Department should continue to support and strengthen the United Nations information centres and collaborate with regional organizations and other entities. ASEAN called on Member States to provide additional support to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to provide crisis communications when needed.

54. Advances in ICTs created new opportunities for economic growth and social development and could support the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals. There was a need to strengthen economic resilience, including by accelerating inclusive

digital transformation. Cross-border flows of data should be facilitated, alongside efforts to protect personal information and strengthen consumer and business trust in the digital economy.

55. ASEAN was concerned about the increasing number of malicious attacks on information and essential civil infrastructure, as well as the spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and cybercrime. In that connection, the leaders of ASEAN had endorsed an operational framework for computer emergency response teams with a view to raising regional cybersecurity capabilities, including through the exchange of information and best practices, and would soon finalize guidelines on the management of government information in combating fake news and disinformation. ASEAN welcomed the launch of the website on countering disinformation on the main website of the United Nations in February 2023 and commended the Department for its efforts to counter the activities of bad actors using the name and reputation of the United Nations to propagate disinformation and perpetrate deceptive and fraudulent activities. The United Nations was encouraged to establish a central information integrity team to develop innovative strategies and approaches to address hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, and ASEAN looked forward to further consultations on the promotion of information integrity in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future.

56. ASEAN was committed to further deepening cooperation with its partners on the digital economy, in particular in terms of financial technology and e-commerce. It had developed several initiatives to enhance digital connectivity, close the digital divide and deepen digital cooperation. In that connection, ASEAN looked forward to receiving more support from the United Nations and other partners for the implementation of its digital transformation agenda, known as the Bandar Seri Begawan Road Map, and would be stepping up its efforts to establish a digital economic community by 2045. ASEAN supported the Secretary-General's Road Map for Digital Cooperation and looked forward to advancing discussions on the role of digital technologies in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

57. **Mr. Wallace** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that CARICOM valued the important work undertaken by the Department and the network of United Nations information centres in ensuring the dissemination of fact-based, reliable, accurate and science-based information. Access to accurate and timely information using modern communication technology and effective

interconnected communication networks created an opportunity to educate and mobilize across geographic, political, economic, social and cultural divides. However, the misuse and abuse of digital technology and communication networks could also result in grave threats to economies, national security, governance and social stability. In that connection, CARICOM welcomed the launch of the website on countering disinformation. It recognized the Department's contributions to the review and update of the United Nations crisis management policy and its continued support to the Department of Operational Support by implementing the standing surge capacity list to facilitate the rapid deployment of communications staff to address crises in the field. CARICOM looked forward to the completion of the updated standard operating procedures for United Nations communications groups during a crisis.

58.	The Department of Global Communications was urged to continue its work by not only providing education and information, but also inspiring and mobilizing action on global issues. It played an important role in promoting awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and highlighting the progress made. CARICOM was pleased to note the broad interest in the Football for the Goals initiative, which provided the global football community a platform to advocate the Goals.

59.	CARICOM urged the Department to continue to raise awareness on climate change, which remained a matter of the utmost priority. In that regard, the United Nations information centres continued to demonstrate their relevance and effectiveness by providing communication support, including to resident coordinator offices and United Nations country teams. CARICOM commended the information centres for their multilingual advocacy and unrelenting efforts to translate and adapt messages and campaigns to reach the widest possible audience. The activities of the information centre located in Trinidad and Tobago, which served various territories in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, should be further enhanced.

60.	Inclusivity was essential to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, worldviews or language, remained updated and engaged in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Robust efforts must therefore be made to use new and existing communication platforms effectively. The Department should pursue creative mechanisms to address specific challenges and reach the most vulnerable. While recognizing the resource constraints facing the United Nations, CARICOM reiterated the need to use all official languages at United Nations

events and to apply multilingualism consistently, including at all information centres.

61.	**Mr. Norapoompipat** (Thailand) said that his delegation was pleased to note that United Nations communications were tailored to target audiences for inclusiveness, in particular through the introduction of closed captioning for key meetings and sessions; engagement with young people; innovative approaches to disseminating information, including through partnerships with social media influencers; and the use of local languages, which was critical to promoting multilingualism. Nevertheless, such outreach efforts could not be truly inclusive until fundamental barriers to access had been addressed, including the digital divide, the lack of Internet connectivity and development gaps.

62.	The need to address hate speech, misinformation and disinformation was more pressing than ever, as those phenomena undermined public support for international agendas and threatened the safety and security of peace operations. His delegation therefore welcomed the launch of the website on countering disinformation. However, the dissemination of correct and accurate information relied on informed recipients in order to be effective. Internet users, who were bombarded with information on a daily basis, could easily be misguided or manipulated. Digital literacy should therefore be promoted, in particular in developing countries and countries in fragile situations. The proposed code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms should take into account the contributions of all stakeholders and be framed within the global digital compact to be negotiated by Member States at the Summit of the Future. The international community must bear in mind that the primary responsibility to apply, monitor and enforce regulations on digital platforms, while safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, remained with States.

63.	**Mr. Jadoon** (Pakistan) said that his Government was grateful to the entire United Nations system and the international community for standing by Pakistan in the wake of the climate-induced catastrophic flooding that had occurred in 2022. Their response illustrated the importance of sharing information in a timely and sustained manner to mobilize national and international support in the wake of climate-related shocks and other disasters.

64.	The escalation of geostrategic tensions and conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere had provided a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation, which eroded mutual trust among States and exacerbated threats to international cooperation and peace and security.

Disinformation, fake news and hate speech must be analysed and addressed from the perspective of security, development and human rights in order to promote workable solutions. All purveyors of disinformation, both State and non-State actors, must be deterred. In 2021, EU DisinfoLab had uncovered a vast clandestine disinformation network that had waged an information war against Pakistan for the past 20 years and continued to target the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir, as well as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Hindus from lower castes. Disinformation campaigns were accompanied by strategies to suppress freedom of expression, including information blackouts, digital surveillance, the targeting of journalists and carefully crafted strategies to downplay human rights abuses. The vast, viral campaign of disinformation about the ongoing crisis in the Middle East underlined the need for fact-checking and information integrity. The Department must therefore address those hybrid warfare tactics.

65. Digital spaces were even more susceptible to disinformation and fake news with the introduction of artificial intelligence. It was therefore urgent to accelerate the creation and adoption of a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms. Major digital platforms must be involved in countering disinformation and fake news and must adhere to internationally agreed norms and regulations. The Department could also play a vital role in addressing the rapid spread of hate speech, Islamophobia, racial profiling and discrimination in traditional media, in particular in the digital space, which posed an unprecedented threat to social order, stability and the rule of law.

66. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that it was essential to uphold the principle of equality of the official languages and of preserving multilingualism in all aspects of the work of the United Nations in order to communicate its messages to the broadest possible audience. The United Nations information centres must be fully supported, and all impediments to their mandate should be adequately addressed. All Member States should work closely to tackle the increasing spread of misinformation and disinformation, especially on social media, and the accompanying increase in Islamophobia, xenophobia and hate speech, which was sometimes expressed under the false guise of freedom of expression.

67. **Mr. Kim** In Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that international information activities played an important role in overcoming global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the food and energy crises. Such activities

should promote the moral development of humanity and a better understanding of the world. In addition, impartiality and objectivity should be strictly observed in United Nations information activities. Rapid developments in ICT meant that international news was reported promptly, but they also allowed for the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which gave way to distrust, misunderstandings and sociopolitical instability. It was therefore necessary to take urgent action to ensure the objectivity, accuracy and transparency of the Organization's information activities.

68. The United Nations Handbook distorted the information on the United Nations Command in the Republic of Korea, presented as if it were a subsidiary organ of the Security Council when, in fact, it had been illegally established by the United States. In 1975, the General Assembly had adopted resolution 3390 (XXX) to dissolve the United Nations Command, and former high-ranking United Nations officials had recognized the illegality of its continued existence. The Department should therefore ensure that United Nations publications and media did not contain distorted or misleading information.

69. United Nations information activities should strictly adhere to the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. They should also be based on mutual respect, reconciliation and coexistence in order to foster friendly relations and economic exchanges among States. Unfortunately, the United States and the West continued to abuse modern information tools to interfere in the internal affairs of other States, spread Western values and degenerate lifestyles, censor the sociopolitical systems of independent countries and incite internal turmoil. For United Nations information activities to contribute effectively to international peace and security and socioeconomic development, there was a need to promote international cooperation and address such wrongful practices. To that end, his Government would continue to strengthen its cooperation with the Department and Member States to establish a fair international information order in the future.

70. **Ms. Niane** (Senegal) said that, in the current trying times for multilateralism, the work of the Department was essential to better engage the broader public in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular with regard to peace and security, justice, human rights, equality and climate action. The United Nations played a vital role in rallying people around concerted solutions for sustainable development that would leave no one behind. The Organization must remain proactive in meeting the challenges facing

sound, constructive and honest information that stemmed from the increasingly troubling use of ICT, in particular artificial intelligence, to spread misinformation and disinformation with a view to sowing enmity. It was therefore important to strengthen the international legal framework governing information integrity and better support the work of the United Nations information entities.

71. Diversity in the multilateral system made it possible for Member States to participate on an equal basis, and for each State to make its voice heard in its chosen language. The Organization must therefore ensure equal treatment of the official languages and better accommodate French as a working language. The timely availability of official United Nations documents in the six official languages, including on digital platforms, was crucial in ensuring that the message of the Organization could be received by all States and peoples worldwide, including in peacekeeping operations. Effective communication between peacekeeping missions, host country authorities and local communities was crucial in ensuring the integration and effectiveness of the personnel deployed on the ground. Relevant documents, including the standard operating procedures, should therefore be available in the languages understood by personnel, and digital content to support peace processes should be available in local languages and dialects. The Secretariat should continue to develop communications strategies to build trust between the missions and their host communities and to counter the dissemination of misinformation and hate speech.

72. As Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Senegal reaffirmed its support for the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine. Her delegation called on the parties to the most recent outbreak of violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to protect the lives of all civilians, including journalists, and called on the international community to put a stop to the grim toll of victims. Accurate and detailed information was needed more than ever to support the two-State solution, with secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Department should continue to implement partnerships in key areas and to mobilize extrabudgetary resources with a view to achieving its objectives.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

73. **Mr. Jung** Jae Hyuk (Republic of Korea) said the United Nations Command in Korea was recognized in Security Council resolution 84 (1950) as carrying out the functions of maintaining peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The allegations of the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that the United Nations Command bore no relation to the United Nations, and that the United Nations Handbook contained distorted information, were false and baseless.

74. **Mr. Birdi** (India) said that it was unfortunate that the delegation of Pakistan had chosen once again to misuse the august United Nations platform to propagate false and malicious propaganda by describing Jammu and Kashmir as occupied. Any interference in the internal affairs of India was wholly unacceptable and would be completely rejected. The union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh had been, were and would always remain an integral part of India, and no amount of rhetoric or propaganda from any country could deny that fact. Pakistan had no standing to pronounce on or interfere in the internal matters of India, including those related to Indian territories under the illegal and forcible occupation of Pakistan. It was regrettable that the leadership in Pakistan continued to engage in baseless and provocative anti-India propaganda and waste the time of United Nations forums instead of putting its own house in order. Member States were well aware of that country's established history of harbouring and actively supporting terrorists with training, financing and arms, while attempting to cover up sectarian violence and its systematic persecution of ethnic and religious minority communities.

75. **Mr. Kim** In Chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that it was deeply regrettable that the Republic of Korea was exploiting the Fourth Committee's august forum to spread misinformation and disinformation. The United Nations Command in the Republic of Korea had been an illegal tool of war since its inception. It bore no relation to the United Nations, whose name had been misused by the United States. On 25 June 1950, the United States had instigated south Korea to start a full-scale military invasion against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and had convened a meeting of the Security Council, leading to the forcible adoption of Security Council resolution 82 (1950), which branded the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as an aggressor. On 7 July 1950, the United States had cooked up Security Council resolution 84 (1950), allowing Member States to dispatch their forces to the Korean War and placing them under the control of the unified command, which, while using the United Nations flag, was in practice under the authority of the United States. On 24 July 1950, the United States had formally established the unified command in Japan.

In a report submitted to the Security Council the following day, it had unwarrantedly changed the name to "United Nations Command".

76.   The United Nations itself had recognized that the United Nations Command was not a subsidiary body of the United Nations, nor was it budgeted for by the Organization. In addition, it was not the United Nations but rather the United States that had the power to appoint United Nations Command forces. The existence of the United Nations Command meant that the security mechanism on the Korean Peninsula had become war-oriented and was failing to serve peacebuilding efforts on the Korean peninsula. It served instead the hostile United States policy against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and its geopolitical strategy for hegemony in the region. His delegation once again called for an immediate end to the misuse of the name and flag of the United Nations. For that purpose, the United Nations Command should be dissolved as soon as possible, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3390 (XXX).

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.