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Agenda item 10

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

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Liliana Verónica **Baños Müller** (El Salvador)

Chapter III

General debate

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the representatives of Uganda (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the European Union (on behalf of its Member States), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (on behalf of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors), the Dominican Republic (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish), Brazil (on behalf of the Community of the Portuguese-speaking Countries), Latvia (on behalf of the Baltic States), Costa Rica, the Russian Federation, Pakistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Haiti, Uruguay, Brazil (in its national capacity), Germany, India, Lebanon, the Philippines, Argentina, Nepal, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Bangladesh, Madagascar, Portugal, Thailand, Ukraine, Spain, the United States of America, Italy, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Algeria, Japan, Cuba, China, Mexico, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), the Republic of Korea, Morocco, the State of Palestine and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

2. The general debate commenced after a statement by the Chair of the Committee. He noted that the international community was facing renewed international tensions, such as the worsening crisis relating to sustainable development and climate change, and that there had been a rise in misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. He stressed the role of the Committee in combating the various challenges by prioritizing the dissemination of accurate, reliable and timely information. He then stated that the session would consider and deliberate wide-ranging issues, such as the role of the media in shaping public opinion, the crucial importance of bridging the North-South digital divide and the imperative of effectively combating disinformation and hate speech, including by neutralizing harmful content and false narratives. In that regard, the Chair acknowledged the work initiated by the Department of Global



Communications to combat hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, and to develop certain principles for ensuring information integrity.

3. The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications also made a statement, outlining the various activities and initiatives conducted by the Department. She noted that there was no shortage of global crises on the agenda of the United Nations. Issues such as the climate crisis, inequality and injustice, the spread of polarization and hate speech fuelled by digital disinformation, and armed conflict, acts of terror and violence were so ubiquitous that they could no longer be ignored as their impact grew. She stressed the need to use factual and unbiased information to offer hope and to provide practical examples of solutions to the more significant collective problems rather than simply defining them. In that regard, she noted that the Department communicated to global audiences by creating and disseminating clear, accurate and impartial information. She further highlighted that the Department understood the importance of multilingualism and called attention to the activities that it was undertaking to make balanced multilingualism a reality.

4. In addressing the substantive issues before the Committee, many delegations, including those representing large groups, expressed concern about the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation surrounding the existential threat of climate change, the interrelated shocks to the food supply and fuel prices, in addition to other global challenges. Speakers voiced their concern that information manipulation regarding the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Gaza crisis was being used to deceive national and international audiences. In that regard, many speakers highlighted the crucial role of the United Nations in obtaining reliable information for all. Several delegations emphasized the need for the Organization's communications to be timely, neutral and comprehensive. In addition, speakers expressed concern about the suppression of information, information manipulation and the spread of digital censorship, as they catalysed violence. Speakers voiced their support for the work of the Department and its essential role in providing precise, fact-based information to a global audience, conducting outreach activities and offering tools to address the issue of information integrity. Several delegations also acknowledged that the forthcoming Summit of the Future was an opportunity to revitalize multilateralism and to commit to integrity in public information.

5. Numerous delegates noted the proliferation of hate speech, especially as related to religious persecution, xenophobia and racism. Several representatives also highlighted that women were disproportionately affected by cyberbullying and cyberharassment. On that note, the representatives of Member States praised the Department for promoting objective, inclusive and science-based information, and fact-based narratives, to combat that trend. In that context, several delegates expressed concern about restrictions on freedom of expression, in particular in countries involved in ongoing conflicts. Several delegates touched on the need to protect the safety of journalists and their ability to carry out their work, especially in situations of violence. Delegations also stressed the importance of independent media to ensure public access to information.

6. The efforts of the Department efforts in spearheading several campaigns and initiatives to combat the information crises were welcomed by many delegations. Several delegates appreciated specific endeavours, such as the Verified initiative, the Shireen Abu Akleh Training Programme for Palestinian Broadcasters and Journalists and the Service and Sacrifice campaign. They also called for the continuation and creation of other activities to promote gender equality, prevent further conflict and achieve linguistic parity.

7. While many speakers commended the Department for its use of social media and digital campaigns and initiatives to disseminate the work of the United Nations,

they also expressed concern regarding the growing digital divide within and among countries. Many speakers urged the Organization to take steps to secure greater Internet connectivity, especially in developing countries. A delegation raised concerns about monopolies in modern communication technologies and about sanctions on developing countries that blocked technology transfer. Speakers also reminded the Organization not to neglect traditional media, such as radio, print and television, on which a considerable portion of the global population still relied. In addition, speakers noted that limitations on access to reliable, factual and multilingual information must be addressed.

8. A recurring theme was the growing prevalence of generative artificial intelligence, with many delegations inviting the Department to play a larger role in addressing the widespread risk of the use of such technology in disinformation and deepfakes. Representatives further stated that artificial intelligence had enormous potential in the field of information, and that the Department should do more to promote that technology as a positive innovation and a tool that could be used to strengthen information integrity and counter disinformation.

9. A key topic raised by several representatives, including those representing large groups, was the continued importance of multilingualism in disseminating content on the United Nations web and social media platforms and its crucial role in multilateralism. 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. Furthermore, the issue of proper resource allocation for multilingual efforts within the Department was touched on by many. Several representatives noted the prominent growth of the Spanish- and French-language audiences and asked the Department to consider that factor when allocating resources. Many representatives acknowledged the limitations placed on the Department's ability to fund efforts towards complete and balanced multilingualism, especially regarding dissemination in non-official languages, and urged it to explore innovative and voluntary contributions in order to accomplish its goals in that regard.

10. Recognition for the United Nations information centres was also a consistent theme. Many delegates praised the work of the centres for their role in promoting the mandates of the United Nations and garnering support for the work of the Organization through the use of official and non-official languages. Delegates emphasized the need for the Organization to continue supporting the information centres in order to strengthen their capacity to provide information to the most vulnerable populations.

11. Several speakers, especially those from troop- and police-contributing countries, discussed the growing levels of violence owing to misinformation and disinformation that had an impact on active peacekeeping missions. In addition, those speakers expressed deep concern over the attacks on peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel in the field. Following those comments, speakers encouraged the Department to improve its strategic communications approach to address anti-United Nations propaganda, which could also incite mistrust and violence towards peacekeepers and other United Nations personnel. They also urged the Department to publicize the actions and goals of peacekeeping operations and of peacekeepers serving under adverse conditions to galvanize further support from their communities.

12. Many delegations voiced support for the Department's development of global principles for information integrity that would help to guide Member States, digital platforms and other groups in their efforts to make the digital space more inclusive and safer for all. Several delegates expressed their willingness to contribute to the process and asked that the principles be approached from a multilingual perspective, while considering the relevant stakeholders' perspectives and principles.

13. The relevance of partnerships with the academic community was acknowledged by a few delegates, who reiterated that the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation could best be mitigated through the strengthening of such collaboration. Several delegations emphasized the importance of partnering with civil society and the private sector. Numerous delegations underscored the need to reach out to young people in communicating the purposes and principles of the United Nations, with a special focus on exploring media literacy and strengthening independent, pluralistic media.

14. Lastly, representatives stressed that a culture of communication, transparency and multilingualism should permeate all levels of the Organization with a view to informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations. They stated that the Organization's communication efforts should always be guided by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
