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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 12th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 20 October 2010, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Zamora (Vice-Chairperson) . . . . . (Costa Rica)

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*In the absence of Mr. Chipaziwa (Zimbabwe), Ms. Zamora (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

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

**Agenda item 54: Questions relating to information**  
(continued) (A/65/21 and A/65/277)

1. **Mr. Srivali** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the role of information figured prominently in the Association's plans for its future integration, which included the development of an institutional framework to facilitate the free flow of information among member States, the establishment of a secure and connected infrastructure to sustain the region's economic growth and competitiveness, and the use of information and communication technology, in particular the Internet, at all levels of education as well as for e-learning. ASEAN had undertaken major efforts to enhance connectivity and integrate physical infrastructure.

2. ASEAN appreciated the Department of Public Information's efforts to provide balanced coverage of many issues and recognized the Department's support for peacekeeping operations, to which ASEAN members had contributed nearly 3,500 peacekeepers serving in 14 missions. It believed that the Department had a significant role to play in raising global awareness and enhancing the transparency of the referendum scheduled for the Sudan.

3. ASEAN welcomed the Department's move into non-traditional media and its initiatives to expand the geographic reach and demographics of its target audience. The Information Centre to be opened in Luanda would serve Portuguese-speaking countries in the region and complement the work of other United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

4. ASEAN commended the Department's awareness-raising work with youth. The second annual Global Model United Nations Conference hosted by Malaysia in August 2010 had provided an opportunity for university students to learn about peace and development through an alliance of civilizations. The student conference on the theme "Discrimination and the rights of the child", to be held in December 2010, was also a valuable initiative.

5. While welcoming the Department's assistance to offices in posting web pages that were accessible to people with disabilities, ASEAN believed that alternative cost-effective means to generate such materials should be explored. ASEAN supported the Department's efforts to use the full potential of new media platforms, such as online media and social networking, but hoped that the information posted on social networking sites would be streamlined and organized to make it more easily accessible.

6. Strengthened cooperation between ASEAN and the United Nations in various fields, including communications and public information, would be mutually beneficial; the visit by Mr. Akasaka in May 2010, and the upcoming visit by the Secretary-General in October 2010, contributed to closer ties in that regard. ASEAN hoped that such visits would become more frequent in the future.

7. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that both the Committee on Information and the Department had a responsibility to ensure that the voice of the United Nations reached all parts of the world, strengthening its image and spreading its message of peace, tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect in a world buffeted by a growing number of global disputes, conflicts and challenges, most of which had become transnational and needed to be addressed through the combined efforts of States and Governments.

8. His delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to enhance the United Nations website and stressed the need to speed up the achievement of parity between the Organization's official languages, according greater attention to Arabic and eliminating the shortcomings of the Arabic site. The use of Arabic was declining, especially in radio programmes, which were an important tool for spreading the Organization's message in villages, districts and regions which did not have access to modern means of communication.

9. His delegation urged the Department to make greater efforts in monitoring the issue of Palestine, in view of the decades-long suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation and the systematic violation by Israel of human rights, international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The Department should continue to implement its special information programme on the question of Palestine.

10. His delegation affirmed the importance of expanding the network of United Nations information centres in developing countries. It urged the Department to redouble its efforts to correct the information and communication technology imbalance between the developed and developing countries, since large sections of the populations of developing countries were unable to access modern technological resources. Regional cooperation between developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, were very important in that regard.

11. The Department was playing a vital role in encouraging dialogue between civilizations and cultures to build bridges of understanding between nations and peoples. Freedom of expression was a universal right which must be protected and fostered and must not be used to attack the religious customs and beliefs and cultural heritage of others. The Department must explain the message of the United Nations and the importance of its work, particularly in the areas of combating poverty, disease and armed conflict, and mobilize the international community to put an end to all forms of colonialism and foreign occupation.

12. **Mr. Ribiero dos Santos** (Brazil) said that the Department, and the United Nations as a whole, must disseminate its message in as many languages as possible so as to ensure effective information delivery, increase awareness and improve the accountability of United Nations programmes and activities. Despite its limited human and financial resources, the Portuguese unit of United Nations Radio played an important role in disseminating information to Portuguese-speaking peoples worldwide.

13. The United Nations Information Centre in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, had educated the Brazilian public about the United Nations for over six decades; Brazil encouraged the Department to operationalize the Information Centre in Luanda in order to address the needs of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. The Department and Member States should explore ways to support and strengthen the network of information centres; while several countries, including Angola and Brazil, were prepared to host information centres in rent-free and maintenance-free premises, other States, including developed countries, did not do so. All States in a position to do so should offer those facilities so

that the Department could concentrate its funds on its outreach and public information activities.

14. His delegation was strongly convinced of the importance of promoting both traditional and new media. While traditional media were the most used and most important means of communication among the world's poorest populations, particularly in developing countries, new media could improve networking capacity and provide timely information to a wide-ranging audience. Effective communication strategies should raise awareness of pressing issues, including the issues to be addressed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012.

15. Brazil commended the Department for its part in the international response to the tragic events in Haiti and Pakistan in 2010, when traditional and new media had played an important role. Although the Department had strengthened its ties with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, it should give more attention to the information and outreach activities of peacekeeping operations, since successful missions required constant contact with the local population.

16. His delegation appreciated the Department's work under the special information programme on the question of Palestine to sensitize public opinion and promote dialogue among journalists, civil society, the academic community and policymakers, in order to foster innovative and grass-roots initiatives for peace in the Middle East. It also appreciated the Department's efforts to promote the Alliance of Civilizations, including the Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in May 2010, and initiatives such as the outreach programme on the Holocaust which aimed to combat intolerance and contribute to a culture of peace.

17. Brazil commended the Department's efforts to preserve the historical memory of the United Nations through, inter alia, increased online access to information and the digitization of documentation. The digitization efforts needed to be combined with continued measures to ensure the durable preservation and appropriate access to documents, photographs and audio-visual records of historical significance to the Organization.

18. **Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) recalled that the Committee on Information had been established with a

view to promoting a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order that rose above the narrow confines of a misleading, biased and sometimes hostile media that was used to interfere in the internal affairs of countries and paint a stereotyped image of certain States to achieve narrow ends that were incompatible with the profession of journalism and the principles and goals of the Charter of the United Nations. The Committee on Information should strive to narrow the digital gap between the North and the South and facilitate the acquisition of information and communication technologies by developing countries.

19. His delegation called for greater coverage of United Nations activities relating to the issue of Palestine and Middle East peace. Certain issues deserved greater media attention, such as disarmament, the devastating effects of the lethal weapons, used in recent wars in flagrant violation of international law, African development and disaster relief. It was important to achieve parity among the six official languages of the United Nations.

20. His delegation drew attention to the high-level consultative conference on the Sudan called for by the Secretary-General, during which the Sudanese joint delegation had expressed its commitment to a free and impartial referendum to decide the future of Southern Sudan, and to the new strategy to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Darfur issue, which had obtained a broad measure of international, regional and local support.

21. **Mr. Selim** (Egypt) said that the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/65/277) clarified the role played by the Department over the past year, particularly in relation to the recently launched Academic Impact Initiative. His delegation commended the Creative Community Outreach Initiative, and, in particular, the Global Creative Forum; similar forums should be held in the Arab region, Africa and the less developed countries. It welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to explore ways in which the United Nations and the entertainment industry could join forces to raise awareness and mobilize the public around global issues. The United Nations had an increasing responsibility to promote international cooperation, close the knowledge gap between the North and the South and establish a fairer global information system. The Department should continue developing and updating the United Nations

media message to bring it into line with the spirit of the age.

22. Despite the increasing use made by several United Nations information centres of new media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, radio was still the most accessible medium in rural and remote areas where electronic facilities were not widely available. Greater attention should therefore be paid to radio services, especially Arabic-language programmes directed at the Middle East.

23. His delegation reaffirmed the importance of parity among the six official languages of the United Nations. There was continuing inadequacy in the timely posting of information in all six official languages on the website. Moreover, the manner of searching United Nations-related websites needed to be simplified.

24. His delegation hoped that the Department would continue to improve the quality and content of its coverage to raise the level of awareness of United Nations goals, formulate media messages characterized by greater focus, impartiality and reach, and improve the level of integration between the work of Headquarters and that of the information centres. It renewed its call for key information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria to be strengthened and for collaboration between those centres and regional centres in neighbouring countries to be supported. It called for an expansion of the United Nations information structure, particularly in developing and less developed countries and conflict zones.

25. His delegation encouraged the Department to continue with its programmes on economic and social development, particularly in Africa, and its special information programme on the question of Palestine. It reaffirmed the role of the Department in promoting international efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East by providing a comprehensive and objective media service, faithfully reporting developments on the ground and supporting efforts to end the Israeli occupation and achieve the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people for an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital and Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Syrian and Lebanese territories.

26. **Mr. Errázuriz** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, reiterated the importance, in the context of information, of the Charter of the United Nations, the

Constitution and regulations of the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Rio Group acknowledged the efforts of the Department of Public Information to bring about a better understanding and adequate promotion of the work of the United Nations on a wide range of issues of importance to the international community, in particular, thematic debates held by the General Assembly. It urged the Department to maintain objectivity, impartiality, accuracy and consistency in the dissemination of its messages.

27. The Department should continue to update its communications network for disasters in order to bolster the coherence and effectiveness of coordination and response protocols, thereby encouraging multilateral action rather than unilateral measures.

28. The Rio Group supported the use of electronic communications for many types of modern information exchange. However, in the light of the growing digital divide between developed and developing countries, traditional media must continue to be used to disseminate the message of the United Nations.

29. The Rio Group welcomed the Department's close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, in addition to the dissemination of information related to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It considered the work of the United Nations information centres to be essential in spreading the message of the United Nations and encouraged the Department to continue to support them through the effective use of the resources at its disposal. The Rio Group welcomed the establishment of a United Nations Information Centre in Luanda, which would make an invaluable contribution to meeting the needs of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

30. The Rio Group reaffirmed its full respect for freedom of expression and of the press, which constituted indispensable principles and values of a democratic society. Those freedoms must be exercised responsibly, in conformity with domestic legislation and with United Nations instruments. The Rio Group was concerned by violations of radio-electronic space and reiterated the need for radio frequencies to be used in the public interest and in accordance with the principles of international law.

31. Parity and respect for all the official languages of the United Nations were essential. The Rio Group was concerned about the growing lack of website content in Spanish and other languages when compared to English, resulting from limited resources for translation. Multilingualism was inherent to the United Nations and it was essential that, at least in traditional media, particularly radio programming, information should be disseminated in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese and indigenous languages. The Rio Group welcomed the Department's efforts to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities to the United Nations website in the six official languages. It urged the Department to maintain its level of services during the implementation of the capital master plan.

32. **Mr. Cohen** (Israel) commended the work of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme on promoting Holocaust remembrance around the world, creating educational programmes and establishing partnerships with Governments and civil society. As time passed and fewer Holocaust survivors remained to tell their stories, that educational work would become particularly important. His delegation was gratified that the Outreach Programme had raised awareness among students around the world through video conferences and other activities, including a Twitter campaign around the memory of Anne Frank. The publication of a discussion papers journal in all the official languages encouraged scholarship and learning about the Holocaust.

33. For the past two years, Israel had worked closely with the Department on the issue of autism; on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day in 2010, the Permanent Mission had hosted a special evening at Headquarters at which an Israeli film had been screened for an audience comprising diplomats, United Nations staff and civil society. Israel would continue to play an active role in promoting awareness of autism.

34. The limited resources of the United Nations, including those of the Department, must be used as efficiently as possible. Israel was disappointed in the special information programme on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continued to present a one-sided and distorted picture of the facts on the ground in the Middle East. While not opposing, in principle, an information programme on the issue, Israel would continue to refuse to cooperate with the programme as

long as its mandate remained one-sided and biased against Israel.

35. **Mr. Belkheir** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his Government valued the role played by the Department in raising global awareness of the goals of the United Nations and urges it to exert greater efforts to create an environment favourable to the dialogue of civilizations and religions. It proposed that the Department should convene seminars in cooperation with local media organizations to draw attention to the impact of violating holy places and insulting national characteristics. The Department should consider drawing up a draft international code of conduct to regulate the media profession and define its legal and ethical standards. Such a code would in no way conflict with the freedom of the media. His Government urged the Department to help close the digital gap between the developed and developing countries, without neglecting traditional means of disseminating information. Parity between the official languages must be achieved.

36. On 6 October 2010, the Libyan Arab African Investment Company had commenced operation of the first African satellite (QAF-1), covering the entire African continent, Southern Europe and the Middle East. Launched on 4 August 2010, the satellite had entered into orbit on 13 September 2010. It would save approximately US\$ 500 million — money which was being spent by Africa for the routing of its telecommunications via other continents. Some 36 African hospitals and universities were already connected internationally. The cost of the project was US\$ 400 million, of which Libya had contributed 63 per cent.

37. The United Nations discourse must be in harmony with the global objectives which the Organization was striving to achieve, including environmental protection, climate change and United Nations reform. The Department must publicize the international and regional impact of the issue of the Palestinian people, who had been living under the yoke of occupation for more than 60 years. It should reflect the terrible images of the tragedy which the Palestinians experienced on a daily basis. His delegation asked why the Department had ignored the impact of the Palestinian issue on issues of international peace and security and why it presented the Palestinian issue as one of conflict between two parties, ignoring the reality that the basis of the dispute

was the occupation of Palestinian Arab land by people who had come from around the world.

38. A report published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in May 2010 noted that 125 journalists working in conflict zones had been killed in 2008 and 2009. His delegation called on the Department to prepare a draft international instrument to ensure the safety of journalists in times of conflict.

39. **Ms. Chong Wan Yieng** (Singapore) said that around the world social networking was growing rapidly, as people spent more and more time online, increasingly on social media and blogs. Industry reports showed that sales of mobile Internet devices were rising exponentially, aided by the spread of smartphone technology. The United Nations must keep pace with new technologies and use them to complement its work in traditional media, enabling the Department of Public Information to optimize outreach and engage peoples around the world in a confluence of conventional and new media.

40. In Singapore, ministries and government agencies were complementing their official websites with a range of social media initiatives to provide information to and interact with the public and also to buttress public education, outreach, marketing, crisis communications and public consultation efforts. Her Government had made use of social media to tap into youth culture and engage the public during the recent Youth Olympic Games held in Singapore. It had also created active citizenry programmes to enable people to express their opinions on national issues and play a more active role in policymaking.

41. While the digital age held the promise of helping to raise living conditions and spread education to all parts of the world, the United Nations had a critical role to play in bridging the digital divide between the information-rich and the information-poor. Her delegation commended the organization of two recent forums on the emerging role of social media; although the Department had promoted the exchange of experiences and best practices among Member States, more must be done to ensure that all Member States had access to and could benefit from new technologies.

42. **Mr. Sangqu** (South Africa), recalling that on 18 July 2010 Nelson Mandela International Day had been observed, for the first time, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/13, said that South

Africa extended its gratitude to the United Nations, especially the Department of Public Information, Member States and other partners for their support on that day. His delegation also commended the Department for its work in commemorating the life of Mahatma Gandhi during the International Day of Non-Violence, and in observing such days as the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of Holocaust and the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery.

43. His delegation supported the Department's system-wide communication strategies for raising awareness on the important issues of climate change and sustainable development. As final preparations were being made for the sixteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, he appealed to the Department to strategically execute its communication mechanisms to drum up support for a positive outcome. The Department had played a very positive role in the build-up to and during the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals. His delegation called on the United Nations in general and on the Department in particular to focus more on raising awareness about the plight of the poor as part of the many other awareness campaigns related to the Goals.

44. The United Nations radio, print and television services had been of great help to developing countries in terms of communication within and beyond their immediate communities, including through the use of local languages such as Kiswahili. To the poor, especially in the developing world, information was a matter of survival. He therefore called on the United Nations to distribute radio and print services widely and to keep remote communities informed about local and international matters. He acknowledged the work of the Department in disseminating information on decolonization and on the Middle East peace process, in particular the question of Palestine.

45. His delegation encouraged the Department to continue using new information technologies, including social media, and to maintain and sustain the work it was doing through its global network of United Nations information centres.

46. **Mr. Iqbal** (Pakistan) expressed appreciation to the Department of Public Information for its work in projecting the heavy human and material losses inflicted by the unprecedented floods in Pakistan, the

plight of over 20 million displaced people and efforts to help them as part of the massive relief and recovery efforts being conducted jointly by the United Nations and his Government. He also thanked the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General for organizing special briefings on the flood situation for the United Nations corps of correspondents, as well as daily situation reports. Those measures had helped to create awareness around the world of the magnitude of the problems created by the natural disaster, evoking timely international responses. Pakistan's needs, especially for reconstruction and rehabilitation, were great, and he hoped that the United Nations informational machinery would press on with its efforts to keep the Pakistani floods in the headlines.

47. At a time when the world was beset with polarization and misunderstandings between and among societies, religions and culture, it was important that information and communication should be used to serve as a bridge between different cultures and religions. His delegation appreciated the work done by the Department in covering issues of importance to the international community.

48. As the largest troop-contributing country for peacekeeping operations, Pakistan knew that the peacekeepers' work was very challenging. Their success stories must be shared with all citizens of the world.

49. Adequate resources should be allocated to ensure the effective functioning and strengthening of the United Nations information centres in developing countries. The centres were a vital source of information and helped bridge the gap between developed and developing countries in terms of access to information and communication technologies. In securing rent-free premises for the centres from the host countries, it was important that the economic conditions of those countries should also be kept in mind.

50. His delegation commended the efforts being made by the Department to achieve parity among the official languages. It welcomed the initiative of the United Nations information centres to publish information materials and translate important documents into languages other than the official languages and to develop websites in local languages.

51. Freedom of expression was a universal right which needed to be promoted and protected. That right

should not be abused to create misunderstanding among cultures, civilizations and religions. The Committee had a central role to play in ensuring that United Nations public information policies aim to forge greater harmony and respect among peoples. His delegation urged the Department to encourage discussions at the regional and international levels, organize exhibitions and seminars and issue publications to that end.

52. His delegation emphasized the importance of accurate, objective and balanced news and information services in print, radio, television and over the Internet. It was important to continue strengthening technology, multilingualism and partnerships in all those areas. His delegation supported the continuation of outreach to civil society, as well as efforts to improve the accessibility of library services and a wide range of other initiatives. He called for the strengthening of training programmes for media personnel from developing countries by ensuring the provision of professional training facilities under the International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO. His delegation fully supported the Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Scholarship Fund, which provided scholarships to journalists from developing countries. His Government was committed to freedom of expression and free media. Pakistan was among the countries where government policies had created an enabling environment for private media; as a result, there had been an unprecedented surge in the electronic media.

53. Member States had consistently requested the Secretariat to provide additional passes to press officers during the high-level segment of the General Assembly; he hoped that the Secretariat would accede to that request.

54. **Mr. Ariyoshi** (Japan), commending the work of the Department of Public Information and of the United Nations information centres around the world, said that Japan had received a visit from the Secretary-General in August 2010, which had offered an opportunity for views to be exchanged on global issues and for the Secretary-General to travel to Nagasaki and Hiroshima and attend the Hiroshima peace memorial ceremony, thereby sending a strong message in favour of a world free of nuclear weapons. The United Nations information centre in Tokyo, under its new director, would continue its close cooperation with the Department in order to realize sound management and

promote strategic public information activities. He expressed appreciation for the effective assistance provided by the Department's News and Media Division in facilitating wide coverage by the Japanese media of the statements made by Japan's high-level representatives at the opening of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

55. **Mr. Tharoor** (India), recalling his tenure as head of the Department of Public Information and later as Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said that he valued the opportunity to address some of the same issues on behalf of his Government. The general public formed impressions about the workings of the United Nations from the mass media and from opinion leaders in their own countries, and it was in the interest of the United Nations to influence their perceptions. The Organization must therefore develop innovative forms of contemporary communication, along with the continued use of conventional media, to reach out to the widest possible audiences.

56. In India, freedom of speech and expression were among the six fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Freedom of the press was therefore an article of faith in his country, and the media's role in public education was fundamental to its political culture. India remained one of the very few countries in the world where every kind of media — radio, television, Internet and print — was growing. India's landmark Right to Information Act of 2005 had, moreover, become a revolutionary tool for the common citizen to access information and was transforming the governance of his country. The Department of Public Information should give more priority precisely to the role of information in the life of the common citizen, especially by reaching out to people in the information-starved corners of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

57. The populations in developing countries needed to benefit from all aspects of the information and knowledge economy, and to receive information in their own languages. That goal was achievable with the use of the widest possible spectrum of technologies, and by an even broader outreach in local languages by the Department — beyond the roughly 80, including 3 of India's languages, in which it already produced information.

58. The role of United Nations information centres in disseminating information about the activities of the

United Nations, especially in developing countries, was critical. The Department should consult closely with host countries, other countries served by those information centres and the region concerned in order to get the most out of the information centres. As Internet penetration grew in developing countries, the creation of websites in local languages would greatly help create interest in the United Nations. Adequate budgetary resources must be assigned to the information centres so that they could pursue further initiatives.

59. The rise of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, gave the Department an opportunity to inform and engage different audiences, especially young people. Several government departments in India had created Twitter and Facebook pages: as a developing country that was acquiring a cutting edge in information and communication technology, India had always encouraged the combination of traditional means of information and modern technologies such as social networking sites.

60. As the capital master plan for the reconstruction of the United Nations progressed, the Department of Public Information and the Department of Management must ensure the minimal possible disruption to the guided tours and exhibits which were, to so many thousands each year, the face of the United Nations.

61. The Academic Impact Initiative had the potential to revolutionize the manner in which scholars, university administrators and students placed their work in the context of the greater human cause served by the United Nations. India had the largest number among the more than 400 institutions that were already part of the Initiative. Another of the Department's programmes that he himself had initiated, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, had developed in a global, inclusive and non-political manner that remained a model for other outreach programmes, especially those on the transatlantic slave trade and the genocide in Rwanda, which must be given adequate resources. His delegation commended the Department's role in maintaining awareness of the long-pending question of Palestine; India attached great importance to the fulfilment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

62. The Department's strategic focus lay in the areas of peace and security, development and human rights,

and it needed to highlight related issues that affected large sections of global civil society, notably the Millennium Development Goals, disarmament, climate change, the United Nations humanitarian efforts and peacekeeping. In the case of peacekeeping, the success stories should be publicized, and accurate, impartial and timely information provided on the regular activities of United Nations peacekeepers, as well as the exceptional work they often performed. Many developing countries sent their soldiers out to the front lines of peacekeeping operations in distant countries and remote regions to which their own media could not afford access. The Department could perform a signal service by organizing, at its own expense, itinerant journalist seminars to such operations in order to facilitate reporting about those who represented the human face of peacekeeping, while also helping the United Nations maintain public support for its vital peacekeeping activity.

63. **Mr. Ulibarri** (Costa Rica) said that sustained, open, free, transparent, participatory and multidirectional flows of information were an essential feature of contemporary society and were also needed for the United Nations to properly fulfil its tasks. Yet the greatest importance of information was as a catalyst for the fulfilment of all human rights, nationally and internationally. Communication also facilitated knowledge, generated innovation and prompted the open debate characteristic of a democracy and the rule of law.

64. The United Nations should make better use of information to create a universal awareness of the effects of climate change and encourage universal commitment to the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The Department of Public Information had done excellent work with regard to the Millennium Development Goals and peacekeeping and through its media seminars and training programmes for Palestinian journalists. In conflict situations, it was crucial to encourage local and global media to shift from reporting on the aftermath of the conflicts to reporting on ways of preventing or resolving them. That was not an easy task, for it required education, dialogue with the media and journalists, and a rich flow of information. As sources of information, the United Nations and its officials should always seek transparency, openness and engagement with different segments of the public. That was the responsibility of all United Nations officials since every official was a

communicator, and all must be imbued with the same culture of accessibility.

65. The new media, ubiquitous and interactive, were a basic means of effective and open communication. The United Nations had used them well and should continue to do so, even as it worked to bridge the digital divide and encourage free use of the Internet. Untrammelled and pluralistic communication, the fruit of freedom of expression, was not only an individual and social human right but also a necessity for the proper functioning of societies. That had never been expressed more clearly than in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reflected the two main components of freedom of expression: freedom to seek information, and freedom to communicate it. Freedom of expression required some regulation, but that could not be an excuse for arbitrary controls and curtailment of public debate. That freedom could be restricted only if justified by an imperative public interest, if the restrictions were sanctioned by laws adopted by freely elected representatives, if they were proportional to and capable of achieving the intended aim and if they created the minimum possible interference with the exercise of freedom of expression. The representatives, legislators and judges of countries that were governed by the rule of law had to meet those standards; and the more they were observed, the more powerful information and communication would become as instruments of opportunity for individuals and of development for countries and institutions.

66. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) recalled that the Non-Aligned Movement had recently advocated the building of a people-centred information society, focused on development, the elimination of global imbalances and inequalities, and the use of information and communications technologies for the benefit of all, especially the developing countries. All imperialist invasions of developing countries were preceded by a media war in which monumental lies were disseminated and repeated, as in the case of the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It was now common practice to magnify urban violence and bloody events in order to persuade the public of the need for security and restrictions on freedom; classic techniques were used to erode any rational analysis and critical sense, thereby inhibiting any reaction that would bring change or rebellion.

67. His own country was the target of an untruthful and aggressive campaign by powerful international media, with the complicity of some private Venezuelan media, in the service of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Nevertheless, on its path towards 21st-century socialism and democratic freedom, his country had maintained its sovereignty and was helping to create a multipolar world in which equality among nations prevailed. The media were a powerful positive resource if they served social justice, truth, respect for national cultures and traditions and brotherhood among peoples; but they were a highly lethal weapon if they were used to entrench underdevelopment, ignorance, injustice and neo-colonial domination. Some of the Venezuelan media had fomented a failed coup d'état against his Government; other media, however, served the country's and the people's interests and promoted solidarity between peoples and nations.

68. His Government supported all the efforts being made by the developing countries to establish their own sovereign information and communications networks. Venezuela itself was making strides in that direction, having established a television network and a radio network that were helping to overcome information imbalances between the North and the South, create a new vision that reflected the realities and needs of the developing countries, promote solidarity between urban and rural communities and among countries and defend the sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples. In Venezuela, freedom of expression was unrestricted and uncensored. Open criticism and debate were flourishing as never before, but all institutions and individuals, without exception, had to comply with the Constitution and the laws and regulations governing the information and communication media. The Bolivarian revolution had produced thousands of alternative media that were helping to inform the people and raise their intellectual, cultural and educational standards.

69. **Ms. Sánchez Salazar** (Mexico) commended the Department of Public Information for its work in raising awareness about issues that were important to the international community, in particular, the recent High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals; that work was essential to the strengthening and revitalization of the Organization. Noting that the Department was making increased use of the new social media, she stressed the need also to

continue using traditional media, especially in the light of the growing digital divide between developed and developing countries.

70. Her delegation recognized the efforts made by the Department to increase the use of local languages but remained concerned about the lack of linguistic parity, particularly in view of the widening gap between English and other languages on the website. She encouraged the Department and the Secretariat to continue working to establish and maintain multilingual websites, bearing in mind, in particular, that Spanish had placed fifth in terms of the number of page views in 2009.

71. The Department should redouble its efforts to develop and apply communication strategies throughout the United Nations system on the issue of climate change. Special emphasis should be placed on disseminating a positive and consistent message on the possibility of achieving substantive results in the context of the sixteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Mexico from 29 November to 10 December.

72. An excellent level of cooperation existed between her Government and the United Nations Information Centre in Mexico, which was working on a number of projects organized in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to disseminating information on the work of the Organization among children and youth. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the work done by the Centre to keep its website up to date and use social media to promote the work of the United Nations among young people. Her delegation also encouraged the Department to continue to use innovative methods and expressed appreciation for the improved access to and digitization of documents of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

73. **Mr. U Nay Win** (Myanmar) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to disseminate information on issues of concern to the international community. Emphasizing the need to maintain objectivity, impartiality and neutrality, he said that the Department must continue to modernize its networks in order to present timely, accurate, impartial, comprehensive and coherent information. He welcomed the Department's commitment to ensuring that people in both developed

and developing countries were informed of its activities by means of both traditional and new communication technologies, including the social media. Stressing the need to rectify the imbalances in the development and use of new information and communication technologies, he pointed out that the Department could play a crucial role in efforts to bridge and narrow the development gap among nations.

74. His delegation welcomed the coordination of the system-wide campaign through the United Nations Communications Group task force, the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in connection with the launch of a major planning exercise to bring coherence to the many peacekeeping-related Web and digital activities, and the new system-wide plan of action focusing on the Millennium Development Goals and biodiversity. It took note of the endeavours to strengthen the communications capacity of the United Nations information centres at the national and regional levels. His delegation applauded the initiative of United Nations Radio to enhance its live radio broadcasting service by making more frequently updated reports in all six official languages. The effort to comply with the basic accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities to the United Nations website was a step in the right direction. The print and online services which produced the *UN Chronicle*, the *Yearbook of the United Nations* and *United Nations Today* were also invaluable.

75. **Mr. Al-Shamisi** (United Arab Emirates) said that modern information and communication technologies represented the most effective tools for steering political, economic and social change. The international community should develop an objective, balanced and multidimensional media strategy capable of serving the goals of peace, security and international cooperation for sustainable development. The free and balanced flow of information was essential for disseminating a culture of peace and strengthening sustainable development programmes, especially in developing countries, where it was difficult for people to have access to modern technology. The developed countries and international media organizations had a special responsibility to help developing countries acquire information and communication technologies and develop human capacities in that regard. An international media code of conduct should be established, defining appropriate legal and ethical

standards to ensure objectivity, transparency and credibility in reporting, and guaranteeing full respect for religious beliefs, values, heritage and cultural diversity.

76. The greatly increased global responsibilities of the United Nations required the mobilization of the media to help it discharge those responsibilities. His delegation called for staff skills in the Department and in regional centres to be developed, the scope of the Department's radio and television broadcasting, as well as the content of its website, to be widened and modern technology to be employed. He stressed the importance of promoting Arabic-language services.

77. The United Arab Emirates had adopted a methodical and balanced media policy, drawing on the most up-to-date print and audio-visual technologies and putting in place an information technology infrastructure to enable society to keep pace with modern developments, serve national, pan-Arab and humanitarian issues and foster openness and connection to other human civilizations and cultures, while safeguarding the values of the religion of Islam and the traditions of society. It had concluded a series of bilateral media and cultural agreements and memorandums of understanding with United Nations agencies and other entities and had strengthened its participation in regional and international media conferences, forums, exhibitions and projects. It had also increased support for developing and war-torn countries and countries which have suffered natural disasters.

78. His delegation called on the Department to strengthen reporting on developments in the Palestinian issue, the situation in the Middle East, and the suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of Israeli policies which led to the absorption of more Arab land and resources on a daily basis, the killing and wounding of dozens of innocent people, the destruction of property and starvation of the people, in the most shocking violation of the principles of human rights and relevant resolutions and of international law.

79. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) stressed the importance of the special information programme on the question of Palestine, which played a key role in raising the awareness of the international community about the Palestinian issue and the Middle East situation, which were issues of high priority on the United Nations agenda. The programme also helped

build support for the rights of the Palestinian people and their efforts to achieve a just, peaceful, lasting and comprehensive settlement on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the terms of reference of the peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative. His delegation commended the Department for organizing international media seminars, the most recent of which had been held in Lisbon in July 2010 on the role of the media, as well as the role of women, in advancing the Middle East peace process. It hoped that the Department would consider holding these seminars biannually.

80. In its address to the 32nd session of the Committee on Information, his delegation had stressed that the wide spectrum of issues relating to human rights for which the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section was responsible must not adversely affect the special information programme on the question of Palestine. It had noted that the General Assembly's request to the Department to organize fact-finding missions for journalists to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and to Israel, and to expand the collection of audio-visual materials on Palestine, had not been implemented. It hoped that the Department would receive sufficient funding and staff to enable it to carry out its tasks.

81. His delegation was concerned about the link on the United Nations website to the question of Palestine, which used to appear clearly on the home page but had been removed and replaced by a link to the "situation in the Middle East". It hoped that the Department would restore the original link on the United Nations home page. His delegation stressed the importance of the Department's annual programmes for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists from the occupied Palestinian territories.

82. The Israeli occupation forces continue to target, in a systematic and planned manner, journalists who reported on the bitter daily reality and the truth of Israel's illegal, aggressive and destructive policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. Those practices included the use of rubber bullets and tear gas against Palestinian and foreign journalists and photographers covering peaceful demonstrations and protests in Palestinian towns and villages against Israel's construction of the racist annexation wall and illegal settlements. His delegation called upon the Committee and concerned international organizations to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists and

ensure that they were able to carry out their work without the restriction of Israeli censorship and the threat of the use of military force against them. It affirmed the need to hold Israel accountable for all the war crimes committed against the Palestinian people, including against journalists and broadcasters.

83. The Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology devoted considerable attention to the development of the information technology sector. His delegation called upon the international community to support the Palestinian demand for the right of direct access to information and communications services and for Israel to stop immediately its unlawful interference with the Palestinian frequency spectrum, so that Palestinian networks can be established within the framework of State institution-building.

84. The special information programme on the question of Palestine had an effective role to play in helping to create a favourable environment for ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and establish a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is only in that way that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace could be achieved and, with it, security, stability and opportunities for development and prosperity for all the peoples of the region.

*The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.*