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(Fourth Committee)****Summary record of the 10th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 14 October 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Drobnyak (Croatia)
later: Mr. Poels (Vice-Chair). (Belgium)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 53: Questions relating to information
(A/71/21, A/71/227, A/71/383 and A/71/383/Add.1)

1. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee's thirty-eighth session (A/71/21), during which the Committee had welcomed Paraguay as a new member and the League of Arab States as an observer. In addressing the substantive issues before the Committee, speakers had highlighted the important role of the United Nations in global issues ranging from peace and security to sustainable development and climate change. In that regard, the Department of Public Information played a critical part in the Organization's success, using new technologies, multilingualism, partnerships and collaboration with Member States and United Nations country teams in furtherance of its strategic campaigns to publicize and raise awareness of the Organization's work and highlight key areas of focus.

2. In emphasizing the importance of multilingualism in that context, many delegations had applauded the Department's efforts to offer increased content on websites, social media and traditional media in all six official languages of the United Nations, while at the same time lamenting the fact that daily press releases were not available in each of those languages. Many had also acknowledged the need to mainstream multilingualism in the work of the United Nations, with some stating that such work should be accomplished in a cost-neutral manner using existing resources, and others regretting that the General Assembly had not approved the request for increased budgetary resources to meet multilingualism demands.

3. The United Nations information centres had been universally praised for their vital role in shaping public opinion of the United Nations and its work, notably in promoting tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue among civilizations, and strengthening the capacity of those centres in developing countries had been widely supported as a means of better promoting the Organization's public image. The information centres were also seen as instrumental in reaching people in local languages through local media and thus making the Organization's work more accessible and relevant.

4. Speakers had commended the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld library, in particular its efforts to make information about the United Nations available in all six official languages and to digitize, in conjunction with the United Nations Office at Geneva, some five million pages providing millions of individuals with access to important documents found only at the United Nations. The work of the United Nations Academic Impact initiative to engage and disseminate information about the United Nations to the important constituency of academic and research communities had also been commended, with some speakers adding that such work should be strengthened, including by increasing outreach to universities in developing countries.

5. Speakers had expressed strong support for the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine as a means of raising awareness about the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and had commended the Department's training programme for Palestinian journalists.

6. Responding to comments and queries from Member States participating in the session, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had emphasized the Department's commitment to multilingualism, which was mainstreamed into its work and factored into all communications campaigns and products. Lacking sufficient staff to produce press releases in all six official languages of the United Nations, the Department was nonetheless seeking creative ways to enhance its multilingual reach and impact. She had acknowledged the substantive support provided by Member States to the United Nations information centres, many of which had taken the lead in promoting, both inside and outside the Organization, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with strong support from developing countries. She had also underlined the importance of communicating information about the Organization's work in peacekeeping and conflict prevention and resolution, adding that the Department would also work to raise the profile of the human rights agenda, in concert with relevant United Nations offices and departments, and would seek partnerships with civil society and academia, notably in order to mobilize young people.

7. **Ms. Gallach** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), introducing

the report of the Secretary-General on questions related to information (A/71/227), said that the Department of Public Information welcomed the fact that, in its report on public information and communication policies and practices in the United Nations system (A/71/383), the Joint Inspection Unit had reaffirmed the strategic role of communications in strengthening the image, credibility and reputation of the United Nations; underscored the enhanced impact of the global network of United Nations information centres; praised the Department's work in evaluating communications outcomes and its support for multilingualism; and, importantly, called for strengthened social media capacities.

8. The Department's work to achieve its primary objective of supporting the substantive goals of the Organization by effectively communicating them to a global audience, including through newer and ever more effective ways in addition to the array of digital, traditional and other means already employed, had been amply demonstrated during the earlier high-level segment of the current session of the General Assembly. News products and social media tools enhanced by the Department had attracted a record number of users, while viewers of the live or on-demand webcast of the general debate had increased to a record 2.5 million, thanks to the Department's action in response to requests from Member States to expand the coverage and archive the footage in all six official languages. First-time visitors had accounted for around 60 per cent of the huge volume of traffic to the United Nations News Centre portal and many thousands worldwide had been able to watch live feeds streamed by external media partners.

9. The Department had provided the concept and content for "SDGs in action", a smartphone application launched in September 2016, aimed at engaging new audiences in the work of the Organization, with particular reference to its efforts for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that connection, the Department had interacted with global leaders, celebrities, Sustainable Development Goals Advocates and Young Leaders to promote the SDG Media Zone, developed with lead input from its social media team and located on the United Nations Visitors' Plaza in New York. By providing content and guidance, the Department was also leading the collaboration among the world's largest advertising conglomerates in the

new Common Ground initiative launched by the Secretary-General to create promotional campaigns in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. She cited a collaborative effort with the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe to mount a permanent interactive museum exhibit on the Sustainable Development Goals, as an example of partnerships forged with various United Nations information centres with a view to advancing achievement of the Goals through art, sport, technology or public information campaigns. The information centres provided added value in many other ways, such as in bringing together journalists from numerous countries to participate in WebEx briefings given by senior United Nations officials in the lead-up to historic occasions or special events. Partnerships with a range of actors would also be used to promote the Secretary-General's newly-launched "Together — Respect, Safety and Dignity for All" campaign addressing the issues of inclusion and xenophobia. Above all, however, the Department was working to strengthen its partnerships with Member States, as robustly demonstrated by its efforts to raise awareness of the essential work of peacekeeping.

11. The Department was also providing crucial integrated communications support for upcoming key events worldwide, among them an academic conference on sustainability and climate change organized in Marrakech, Morocco, in collaboration with the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, to coincide with the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on climate change; the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador; and the Global Conference on Sustainable Transport in Ashgabat. It also provided crisis communications support to the Organization, whether in connection with outbreaks of disease or efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

12. Multilingualism was a priority for the Department, which had reorganized, reintegrated and strengthened its United Nations multiplatform news coverage along language lines in order to provide better information services to audiences. The Department was also reaching many millions globally, in their own languages and with content tailored to their interests, through a variety of social media,

including Facebook Live and the United Nations Chinese-language Weibo account. The new vibrant and powerful United Nations website “splash page” had received some 15 million views since its launch in August, while traffic to the site continued to increase annually by 10 per cent. Should the General Assembly endorse a recent request from Member States to increase the multilingual nature of specific products and initiatives, the Secretary-General would seek to identify the requisite additional resources in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019.

13. The Department, which in fact housed the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, also particularly targeted its communication efforts at young people, whose potential as active contributors to the implementation of the United Nations agenda across the board had been borne out by the high youth participation in the sixty-sixth Annual Conference of the Department of Public Information for Non-Governmental Organizations held earlier in 2016 in the Republic of Korea.

14. Likewise earlier in 2016, the United Nations iLibrary had been launched as the first comprehensive global search, discovery and viewing source for digital content created by the United Nations, providing unparalleled online access to United Nations publications, with data set to be added in the near future. A new Dag Hammarskjöld Library website had also been launched in August 2016 in the six official languages, featuring expanded multilingual content and an improved search function. Thanks to a generous five-year donation by the Government of Qatar in 2014 for preserving the Organization’s historic documents, some 42,000 of them had been digitized and uploaded. She looked forward to support for a proposal developed by the Department and shared with interested Member States and other possible donors for over US\$4 million in further funding for that project.

15. In its endeavour to seek out and implement modern and innovative communication methods and tools to inform, engage and empower citizens as agents of positive change in an ever-challenging and ever-changing environment, the Department relied on Member States to help it reach as many people in as many languages and in as many countries as possible. The goal was for those people — allies in building

“The future we want” — to know and understand the work of the United Nations and its Member States.

16. **Mr. Pawutiyapong** (Thailand) requested further information concerning the Department’s efforts to communicate in local languages and asked whether any attempts were being made to assess the impact of the Department’s information campaign in terms of increasing public awareness and knowledge of United Nations activities. He further asked whether the Department viewed any of the many useful recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit as a priority and, if so, what it envisaged as the way forward to their implementation.

17. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) asked whether the Department had taken steps to rectify the incongruity in the allocation of posts to which he had drawn attention at the previous session. Specifically, the Director of a United Nations information centre serving a population of under 1 million held a P-5 post, whereas the Director of an information centre serving a population of over 100 million held only a P-4 post.

18. **Ms. Gallach** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the primary task of United Nations information centres was to impart the United Nations message to local communities through the vehicle of local languages, which involved tremendous efforts and resources. The website of the Brussels-based United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe was available in all the languages spoken in the area it served, for instance, while the visibility icons for the Sustainable Development Goals had been translated into over 60 languages.

19. The Department was acutely aware of the need to widen its analysis of the impact of its activities beyond social media alone and was currently engaged in such an exercise with reference to the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held in New York in September 2016. New interactive tools, such as those employed in the Sustainable Development Goals Action Campaign, were also proving helpful for analysis purposes. The recommendations set out in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit were useful, and the Department was in the process of analysing and considering how best to implement them.

20. Concerning the allocation of posts, the staffing of United Nations information centres was based on various processes and decisions, rather than on any particular geographical rationale. While it was true that the presence of those centres was either non-existent or less than ideal in a number of populous and dynamic countries, the Department would make the most of any opportunities that arose for increasing that presence, within the available resources. In making any necessary adjustments, however, the rigidity of the system would have to be balanced with needs, as in the example of a post recently reallocated to North Africa, which had effectively boosted the team in place in the run-up to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Marrakech.

21. **Ms. Rivera Sánchez** (El Salvador) expressed a concern about how any additional budget allocations proposed for the vital purpose of strengthening the multilingual aspects of the Department's work could be squared with the rationalization of United Nations information centres mentioned in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.

22. **Mr. Mazzeo** (Argentina) said that the statistics showing that visitors to the English pages of the United Nations website accounted for less than one half of the total indicated the increasingly urgent need to satisfy the public desire for multilingual communications. Although one third of the website's users were Spanish speakers, the quality of its Spanish content was inferior. His delegation therefore endorsed the move to allocate additional resources in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019 to strengthening multilingualism and also requested more information about the reorganization of the United Nations multiplatform news coverage.

23. **Ms. Alvarado Quezada** (Mexico), speaking in her capacity as Chair of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, said that the Group welcomed the emphasis already being placed on multilingualism by the incoming Secretary-General and praised the Department for its efforts to bring fresh ideas to the table, within the limits of its resources. Statistics relating to the impact of the Organization's work across the board should be disaggregated, however, in order to provide more detail and promote effective decision-making, including about those

resources and indeed the role of United Nations information centres, which were both matters of concern in view of the breadth of the issues on the global agenda.

24. **Ms. Gallach** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the concerns voiced should be alleviated by awareness of the determination driving the gradual progress of multilingualism, thanks to the support of Member States and the effectiveness of the more structured approach adopted by the Department to that particular aspect of its work. The Department was doing its utmost to fulfil the clearly keen desire of Member States for coverage of all United Nations events and activities by all media in all six official languages. Two of the multiplatforms were being unified in order to optimize news coverage and raise its multilingual profile, which was among the reasons for seeking additional resources. She concurred with the view that precise statistics were important for channelling the Department's work towards attracting more followers in all languages, adding that the existing rise in followers was no doubt attributable to the robust efforts to disseminate a greater amount of multilingual information.

25. **The Chair** thanked the Under-Secretary-General for the information she had provided and drew attention to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on public information and communications policies and practices in the United Nations system ([A/71/383](#)).

26. **Mr. Herman** (Senior Advisor on Information Management Policy Coordination, United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination), introducing a note by the Secretary-General ([A/71/383/Add.1](#)) transmitting his comments and those of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, said that organizations of the United Nations system had welcomed the report and its strategic view of communications, with many indicating a willingness to implement the benchmarks and recommendations identified. Some had observed, however, that the report would have benefited from a deeper exploration of areas such as social media, pointing out that communications were but one element to be leveraged as an important tool in support of programme delivery. Photographs were also only the start of what visual

imagery could accomplish, given the broad array of techniques available for conveying compelling images.

27. In short, organizations' responses clearly indicated a consensus view that the recommendations and benchmarks set out in the report offered a constructive approach to addressing public information and communications within organizations and across the United Nations system.

28. **Mr. Plasai** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Department's outreach efforts and multimedia communication campaigns were vital for building the knowledge base and accurate understanding crucial to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It should also continue to promote awareness of other key issues of global interest, inter alia peacekeeping, disarmament, the question of Palestine and poverty eradication. As an important means of promoting unity in diversity and international understanding, multilingualism should be integrated into all United Nations activities and efforts to narrow the persistent disparity in the use of all six official languages of the Organization. Multilingualism also helped to connect the United Nations with people in developing countries, and United Nations information centres should therefore be strengthened in terms of both staffing and equipment so as to facilitate their work of disseminating information and raising awareness through the medium of local languages.

29. While social media were crucial to enabling the United Nations to reach as many audiences as possible in a globalized and digitalized world, they should not be used at the expense of conventional media because Internet access in developing countries was frequently limited. By continuing to use print, radio and television in those countries, the Department would help to close the information gap amid the widening digital divide. Care must be exercised, however, to preclude any inappropriate use of public information or abuse of information technologies to disseminate incorrect or distorted information. In that regard, the United Nations and the Department in particular should lead by example in adhering to the highest standards of accuracy, integrity and accountability and in complying fully with the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and international law. His delegation would continue to support the

Department's work of conveying United Nations messages to global citizens.

30. **Mr. Djani** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), welcomed the Department's focus on raising awareness and promoting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement; raising awareness of the need for a humane and coordinated global approach to dealing with large movements of refugees and migrants; and explaining and increasing the visibility of the broader work and impact of the United Nations as it moved towards new leadership. He also commended the Department's efforts to promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a variety of means and events.

31. Peacekeeping operations helped to change conflict-affected countries for the better and create a positive image of the United Nations. Their global visibility should thus be increased, together with that of other United Nations activities similarly demonstrative of the critical role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security, as enshrined in its Charter. In its work to disseminate information far and wide about United Nations peacekeeping achievements, the Department should therefore collaborate further with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations country offices worldwide. The same applied to its work with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and those country offices to communicate the vital global message of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons concerning the socioeconomic and other benefits of eliminating such weapons as a matter of urgency.

32. While social media had proved their worth as a vehicle for disseminating information about United Nations activities and for interacting with a wider youth audience in particular, a cautious approach was nonetheless required in order to avoid any risk of their misuse and abuse as a means of communication. In that vein, the Department should continue to support initiatives promoting messages of peace, mutual respect and understanding, as well as interfaith dialogue, and at countering the spread of extremism, violence, hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance. Traditional means of disseminating information should also be maintained, notably for the benefit of

communities without access to advanced communication technologies.

33. In promoting unity in diversity and international understanding, multilingualism was a necessity well understood in the culturally and linguistically diverse ASEAN region. The Department's cooperation with scores of United Nations information centres worldwide was therefore highly commendable. Equally satisfying was the news that those centres had translated the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant information into a multitude of local languages, a practice that should be pursued in general in order to keep the public informed and enhance its participation in addressing global issues of mutual concern. The Department and relevant United Nations agencies should also make full use of all six official languages of the Organization. ASEAN remained committed to supporting the Department in its key role of better connecting the United Nations to its stakeholders — the people of the world — in order to promote peace, security, social progress, improved living standards and human rights for all.

34. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), applauded the continued efforts and initiatives of the Department in publicizing the important work of the United Nations to the widest possible audience and thereby potentially accelerating human understanding, bridging differences and inculcating global awareness of the challenges facing the Organization's diverse membership. The United Nations information centres, one of which served 19 English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean territories from its location in Port of Spain, played a vital role in that regard and would benefit from strengthening aimed at further coordinating the approach to promoting the image of the United Nations worldwide.

35. Information should be free, unbiased, accessible and understandable in order to keep all individuals updated and engaged in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, with no one left behind. To that end, all official languages of the Organization should be appropriately used in all aspects of its work and should be accorded equal status, including on its website. The digital divide between developed and developing countries was a matter of concern, however, notwithstanding the

innovative use of social media to advance the Department's outreach to wider audiences, especially young persons. The Department and the United Nations information centres should not therefore lose sight of the relevance of traditional methods of communication in many developing countries, such as those in CARICOM, which often lacked the capacities and technology to access online media.

36. In its commendable efforts to raise awareness of landmark occasions and events in the calendar of the United Nations and indeed its work more generally, the Department should do its utmost to ensure that the relevant information was readily available and accessible to all. CARICOM appreciated the Department's ongoing work to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through outreach, campaigns and observances, which included activities in which the United Nations Information Centre for the Caribbean Area in Port of Spain had been involved as either an organizer or a participant. Those activities additionally included information dissemination and outreach support for the promotion of women's rights, gender empowerment and action to end violence against women through the implementation of related United Nations campaigns in various CARICOM States.

37. CARICOM commended the Department's efforts to raise awareness of the transatlantic slave trade and the struggles of its victims, including the organization of activities to mark the annual observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Conducted as part of the Remember Slavery programme, the activities had included a panel discussion, a film screening and a videoconference involving students from Senegal, the United States and Trinidad and Tobago. As a reminder of the darkest chapter in human history, the Department had also published a brochure on the Ark of Return, the permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which had been unveiled by CARICOM at United Nations Headquarters.

38. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, it was imperative for the United Nations to equip young persons with the skills, knowledge and confidence for understanding the global importance of those Goals and driving long-term sustainable

development. The Department's important role in advocacy and outreach could not therefore be overstated, and indeed it had made significant strides in that sphere by improving the means through which information was disseminated in all official language of the United Nations. CARICOM would continue its collaboration with the Organization through the United Nations Information Centre for the Caribbean Area.

39. **Mr. Van Den Akker** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, Iceland and the Republic of Moldova, said that his delegation supported the Department's efforts to communicate the ideals and work of the United Nations to as many people as possible in as many languages as possible and across multiple media platforms. Further application of that integrated approach to outreach on the priority issues for the Organization would ensure the participation of all layers of society in its work. His delegation advocated the bottom-up approach that included non-governmental actors, civil society, public-private partnerships and celebrity endorsements, as well as the increased support and coordination of regional information centres that facilitated a more horizontal and localized approach to outreach, while also boosting efficiency and effectiveness in the context of resource constraints. Such outreach mechanisms were essential for promotion of the fundamental values shared by the United Nations and the European Union, which was thus committed to supporting the Organization in all its outreach and communication endeavours.

40. The improved procedure for selection of the new Secretary-General had provided an opportunity to present the United Nations through a variety of media outlets, engaging worldwide audiences and bolstering the overall image of the United Nations. Public diplomacy was crucial as the Organization tackled the many challenges facing the global community, and communicating information to the right audience at the right time and in the right way was essential if the Organization was to achieve its goals. In order to reach broader audiences around the world, the Secretariat must engage all stakeholders, taking into account their varying levels of accessibility and resources availability, and with measures to improve the existing

platforms. An efficient evaluation scheme was required, as well as a clear communication strategy that was responsive to feedback and audience-oriented. His delegation therefore welcomed the recognition of the changing media landscape and the renewed emphasis on the use of digital platforms and social media, facilitated by more comprehensive social media analysis tools and products tailored to differing viewer habits and connectivity restraints.

41. The European Union and its member States, where 24 official languages and many more regional and minority languages were in constant use, attached great importance to the mainstreaming of multilingualism into the Organization's communication and information activities so as to promote accountability, transparency and global ownership of United Nations actions and values. Continued advances in the publication and dissemination of information in many different languages across different platforms should therefore be pursued, within existing resources. His delegation commended the Department for its public information campaigns on United Nations responses to crises around the world and emphasized that the full spectrum of human rights should remain high on its list of priorities and merited consistent year-round attention. His delegation also welcomed the newly-developed communication strategy on combating sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel, which was important to maintaining the image of the Organization through transparency and accountability.

42. In the fast-moving digital age, the continued diversification of media and information outlets was key to the further engagement of young people, who used platforms that tied in with educational outreach initiatives, including the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, so as to engage and empower the next generation of social innovators and world leaders. New methods of digital publishing offered opportunities for complementing and strengthening the important network of United Nations depository libraries providing official, academic, civil-society and public users with reliable, full, user-friendly and affordable access to official United Nations documents and publications. The Department's implementation of environmentally-friendly printing policies was another example of its work towards improving the overall sustainability of the planet for the next generation. The European Union and its member States remained ever

supportive of the Department in its enthusiastic, efficient and innovative efforts to continue its vital public diplomacy work.

43. **Ms. Arias Orlowska** (Dominican Republic), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the development of information in the United Nations context should remain strictly in keeping with the norms established in international law and the Charter of the United Nations, with the ultimate aim of promoting peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples, in addition to human well-being and sustainable development. The Committee of Information played an important role in establishing a new, more just and more effective world information and communications order, and CELAC recognized the Department's efforts to enhance public understanding of the objectives and work of the United Nations. The changing international situation required innovative methods to improve the flow and precision of information and to ensure non-discriminatory and inclusive access thereto. Notwithstanding the spontaneity, agility and enormous potential of electronic communication, the perturbing digital divide between developed and developing countries signalled nonetheless that the use of traditional methods of communication — a major source of information in developing countries — must continue. Similarly instrumental in disseminating the Organization's message, the United Nations information centres would benefit from additional support and increased system-wide cooperation.

44. Freedom of speech and the press should be fully respected but also exercised responsibly in accordance with national legislation and United Nations instruments. In 2015, CELAC had adopted a special declaration on Internet governance processes reaffirming the need to build national and regional Internet governance frameworks that represented the interests of all States regardless of their stage of development and that respected human rights, the sovereignty of all States and the right of all to privacy. The media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be used in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and CELAC was therefore concerned at the violations of radio frequencies, which were intended for use only in the public interest. It rejected all use of ICTs in violation of international law and the principles

of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, especially when the target was a Member State. Regional cooperation should be advanced in line with the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the WSIS+10 High-Level Event, in order to bridge the digital divide and build confidence, security and trust in the use of ICTs.

45. With multilingualism inherent to its existence, the United Nations must disseminate information in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese, Dutch and indigenous languages. CELAC was deeply concerned that daily press releases were not issued in all six official languages in accordance with repeated General Assembly resolutions, and it therefore called for the adoption of draft resolution B, contained in document [A/71/21](#), to resolve the unfairness of that situation. All six official languages should be fully and equitably used in all of the Department's activities so as to eliminate the disparity in favour of English, with the required resources assured through their inclusion in future budget proposals for the Department. Those resources should be distributed evenly among all the official languages and the potential of social media and the United Nations website should be further explored, including in the light of the statistics produced on the number of visitors by language, which would also assist decision-making on information and outreach activities. While the live coverage of General Assembly and Security Council meetings in the six official languages was commendable, more efforts were needed to address the lack of information available in all six official languages concerning the work of the main United Nations organs. In that context, CELAC welcomed the work of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations to achieve linguistic parity and further promote multilingualism.

46. CELAC commended the Department's efforts to ensure access to the United Nations website for persons with disabilities and urged it to continue disseminating information on decolonization as widely as possible, including through United Nations Web TV coverage of the meetings of the Special Committee on Decolonization. In an era where millions were excluded from sharing the benefits of the rapid development of ICT platforms, the primary challenge was how to deliver United Nations messages to the widest possible audience, using both modern and traditional methods. CELAC would work to overcome

that challenge on the basis of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

47. **Mr. Tiare** (Burkina Faso), speaking on behalf of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors and underscoring the importance of all information and communication media to accomplishment of the Organization's goals, said that multilingualism was the corollary of multilateralism and a principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which was equally authentic in five other language versions. Multilingualism guaranteed not only respect for cultural and linguistic diversity in international organizations but also the widest participation in debates and the sovereign equality of States. Justly recognized as a core value of the Organization, multilingualism must be mainstreamed into all its information and communication activities as part of the daily quest to attract a wider audience and enhance the effectiveness of the collective efforts in such areas as peacekeeping, human rights and sustainable development.

48. The disparate membership of his Group reflected the diversity of a modern world in which ICTs, including the mobile Web, offered untold opportunities for the Organization to expand the scope of its activities and the reach of its message. Traditional means of communication nonetheless remained highly relevant to ensuring that those without access to modern technologies were not left behind. Sharing the values of the United Nations, including that of freedom of expression and information, the French-speaking world greatly appreciated the excellent cooperation it enjoyed with the Department. The Group fully supported the Organization's communications work focused around the three pillars of development, human rights, and peace and security, and it looked forward to the further efforts envisaged in that direction.

49. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that realization of the right to fair and equitable information for all posed a challenge for Burkina Faso and other developing countries unable to reap the full benefits of technological advances, with traditional media remaining the main source of information for much of the population. Countries leading those advances should therefore work towards access for all to new information media. United Nations information centres

played an important role in the Organization's communications efforts, and the capacities of the centre in Ouagadougou should be strengthened so that it could continue to assess the needs of the four countries it served and raise awareness of issues relating to poverty, food insecurity and natural disasters. Member States should devote greater attention to freedom of information and expression, given that the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media were key to democracy and the rule of law, as well as to the protection of all human rights. On that score, journalists were to be saluted for their professionalism, often in the face of danger, in defending the ideals of the United Nations.

50. **Ms. Alvarado Quezada** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, said that the Group was committed to multilingualism as the guiding principle for all United Nations activities and to the principle of parity and equity in the use of its six official languages. Those principles were prerequisites if the Organization's messages were to have universal impact and global reach in a world of so many challenges. With Spanish speakers being the second most numerous users of the United Nations information services, the Group would continue assisting in the work of the Department to disseminate information about the Organization's activities, as well as in that of the Coordinator for Multilingualism. It applauded the Department's efforts to seek innovative solutions to multilingualism within existing resources and praised the excellent work of those involved in producing the Spanish content for the United Nations Web TV and Radio, the United Nations website and the United Nations News Service.

51. The quantity and quality of the Spanish content of the United Nations information services should be improved in view of the growing interest of Spanish speakers in the Organization's work, which had in fact prompted the Group's establishment. The development of communication strategies emphasizing multilingualism from the planning stage would help to ensure that cultural references were not lost in translation and that the Organization's messages to local audiences around the world were clear, which was especially relevant for effectively disseminating information concerning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.

52. The Department should strengthen its cooperation with the Coordinator for Multilingualism to develop best practices for mainstreaming multilingualism into all communication and information activities, including by pursuing innovative ideas, such as the thematic focal points established by the language units of the United Nations websites in order to improve website content. A growing concern, however, was the reduced capacity for creating Spanish-language products, including promotional campaigns, even though the Organization had both the responsibility and the capacity to ensure that campaigns respected the principle of multilingualism right from the planning stage. On the other hand, the wide multilingual coverage of high-level meetings was encouraging and his delegation trusted that the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) would receive the same level of coverage.

53. United Nations information centres played a key role in ensuring that the Organization's messages reached every corner of the globe, and were a strategic tool for planning public information products. Their capacities should therefore be strengthened, not reduced. Furthermore, the Group underlined the need for structured reporting on the activities, staffing and financial resources of those centres in a standard reporting format that facilitated comparisons and provided a record of the work of and coordination among all information centres. Such details were necessary for making decisions regarding the functioning and sustainability of the centres, particularly in developing countries.

54. Traffic to the Spanish pages of the United Nations website had increased exponentially, with Spanish now the second most widely-consulted language. The Group welcomed the Department's efforts to improve the website's accessibility and design, develop new services, products and portals, and collaborate with other departments on content. In the interest of greater precision and transparency, however, the disaggregated data on the use of the six official languages should in future cover all products developed by the Department and should include comparative diagrams. Only the equitable treatment of all official languages of the United Nations across the Department's activities would eliminate the current divide between English and the other five languages,

thereby raising the global profile of the United Nations. In the same vein, priorities and resources must be reassigned as necessary to developing a strategy for delivering daily press releases in the six official languages in a cost-neutral manner and in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. Indeed, it was time to rethink old models as part of a strategic vision for the dissemination of information, from within existing resources and on an equitable basis.

55. **Mr. García Moritán** (Argentina) said that the United Nations information centres merited additional staffing and equipment to further enhance their key contribution to the development of global information campaigns in multiple languages concerning the Organization's activities, citing as an example the excellent work undertaken by the United Nations information centre in Buenos Aires. The principle of multilingualism in the pursuit of those activities was also advanced by the Department's efforts to produce an appealing and multilingual United Nations website. Data showing that the website's Spanish pages attracted the second highest number of visitors were undoubtedly helpful, but future reports should include disaggregated statistics and a more detailed comparison of the use of the six official languages in all products developed by the Department, including social media. His delegation was concerned at the disparity in the use of the official languages and that new pages and products continued to be developed in just one or two languages without consideration of the multilingualism mandate from the planning stage. The programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019 should therefore take into account the capacities needed by the Department to carry out its activities in all the official languages.

56. Linguistic parity should also extend to the Organization's daily press releases, currently available in only two languages, especially as their production in all six official languages should have no budgetary implications, given the Secretariat's responsibility to mainstream multilingualism into all of its communication and information activities, within existing resources and on an equitable basis. Full mainstreaming of multilingualism into the Organization's social media accounts, including by creating hashtags in the language of the target audience, would also increase the reach of those activities. His delegation commended all those

working to disseminate information, including in Spanish, through such other facilities as the United Nations Web TV and Radio, the United Nations News Service and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and expressed appreciation for the openness, transparency, efficiency and professionalism of the Department's staff in responding to queries, concerns and requests articulated by Member States.

57. *Mr. Poels (Belgium), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

58. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that it was vital to address the imbalance in the Department's use of the six official languages of the United Nations in order to achieve parity among all those languages and facilitate the propagation of United Nations messages to a wider audience. Information was the primary weapon in the virtual battle for hearts and minds being waged as part of the war against terrorism and extremism, and the Department had a key role to play in countering the radical ideologies that were a root cause of terrorism. The Department should also continue to intensify its efforts to raise awareness of the plight and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Lastly, his delegation applauded the efforts of the United Nations information centre in Cairo to continue serving the region during a particularly challenging period in its history.

59. **Ms. Samarasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that the Department played a vital role in disseminating information about United Nations activities and the Organization's integral role as a unifying voice of humanity in areas such as women's empowerment, peacekeeping, human rights and sustainable development. In view of the myriad challenges facing the international community, it was more crucial than ever for the message embodied in the three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, development and human rights — to reach all corners of the globe. In its efforts to disseminate the values associated with that message, the Department had successfully widened the reach of the information it conveyed through a variety of languages and media by building information networks and collaborating with relevant communication partners, such as the private sector, academia and civil society, with which its cooperation should be further strengthened.

60. Challenges in the face of rapidly advancing technology included the inability of many in developing nations to keep pace owing to limited Internet access and

weak communication infrastructures. The Department must therefore consider resource mobilization to areas with the greatest need. The accessibility of the United Nations website could also be improved in regions such as Asia by expanding coverage to include local languages, although the use of traditional media should also be maintained on account of the continuing digital divide between developed and developing countries. As an enabler of freedom of expression in the digital age, access to high-quality wireless Internet services should in fact be a right. With its multi-ethnic and multicultural society, Sri Lanka had taken the lead in multilingual Internet initiatives catering for local languages. At the global level, continued investment and targeted capacity-building in the broadband sector was critical to transmitting the United Nations message to the world's remotest areas so as to reach the largest possible audience in an inclusive and comprehensible manner.

61. The Department's cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was particularly welcome to troop-contributing countries such as Sri Lanka, which was, on the other hand, concerned by the politicization of public information and the possible inappropriate use of ICTs to violate human rights, interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign States and destabilize countries and regions. Measures taken around the world to suppress journalists, bloggers and media outlets, often with impunity, heightened the consciousness of her nation as to the value of democracy and the rule of law in the light of its own experiences under the yoke of terrorism and an accompanying culture of impunity. Freedom of information formed the cornerstone of any democracy. Without it, there could be no meaningful advancement of peace, development or human rights, leading to social divisiveness, mistrust of public institutions and cyclical violence, as well as hampering the achievement of security and development goals. Her delegation welcomed draft resolutions A and B contained in document [A/71/21](#) and urged renewed commitment to the principles of freedom of the press, freedom of information and media independence, pluralism and diversity. The Department's continuous efforts would promote the attainment of United Nations goals, enhance the values of tolerance and help countries to overcome their development challenges.

62. **Mr. Gat** (Israel) said that the key to progress lay in the ability to absorb and analyse the virtually

limitless amount of available information in order to determine its veracity and relevance, including in order to provide mass audiences with accurate and balanced facts on issues worthy of attention. Critically, therefore, information must be disseminated in a diligent, professional and responsible manner so as to avoid the lightning spread of potentially dangerous misinformation across the digital universe. The abuse of information could propagate hatred, bigotry and prejudice, in contrast to the positive use of information for the benefit of humankind so aptly symbolized by the many life achievements of the recently deceased Nobel Laureate, Holocaust survivor and United Nations Messenger of Peace Elie Wiesel. Through his prolific outputs, Mr. Wiesel had educated his readers about human cruelty with the aim of preventing future generations from suffering the nightmares of his own youth. A tireless supporter of the world's oppressed, he had been described by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as an eloquent advocate of tolerance and peace who had called for constant vigilance in combating anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred.

63. In seeing the perpetuation of the Wiesel legacy as a goal of its own, the State of Israel was continually encouraged by the Department's involvement in the United Nations Outreach Programme on the Holocaust and by the significant audience growth achieved as a result of activities that were set only to broaden. Through its comprehensive website, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center offered numerous multilingual resources of benefit to Member States seeking to instil the lessons of the Holocaust in future generations. The remedy for the social disease of anti-Semitism evidenced by the hundreds of anti-Semitic incidents recorded in 2016 was in fact to provide more information of relevance, including by educating new generations about the horrors of the Holocaust. Indeed, the milestone High-level Forum on Global Anti-Semitism recently co-organized at United Nations Headquarters by the United States, Canada, the European Union and Israel had highlighted education and information as means for countering and eradicating the disease in an international effort in which other Member States were encouraged to participate.

64. Regrettably, no response had been received to a request made by 50 nations in 2015 for the Organization to step forward and play a pivotal role in

that effort. The fear that confronting the plague of anti-Semitism was too "political" or might anger a certain group of countries must be set aside so that the United Nations could instead lead the efforts to eradicate that rising plague, without politicization, including through the Department's organization of a special educational seminar on the subject, as requested by those 50 nations.

65. Israel remained deeply concerned by the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine, which had always offered a biased and misleading narrative of the region in a manner that undermined the Organization's integrity and impartiality. It was crucial to ensure that no United Nations platform, including social media, was abused for the purpose of disseminating anti-Israeli messages. A recent international media seminar on peace in the Middle East organized in Pretoria by the Department had been a grim reminder of the one-sided distortion and manipulation of information, evidenced inter alia by the open alignment of most speakers with the Palestinian cause. The flames of hatred were further fanned among young Palestinians incited through social and other media to kill Israelis, resulting in dozens of casualties over the previous year alone.

66. Activities against a Member State should not be promoted by the United Nations, which had a moral obligation to act in accordance with the purposes and principles of its Charter. The Department should consequently work to consolidate all political media platforms under one authority, strengthen its oversight role and guarantee that all communications disseminated by United Nations bodies lived up to the values promoted by the Organization. To that end, Israel was willing to help formulate a more constructive, balanced and consistent approach to future information and communication activities with a view to overcoming stigma, breaking down barriers and empowering the less fortunate through the promise of hope and opportunity.

67. **Mr. Castañeda Solares** (Guatemala) said that it was important to review the Department's public information policies and activities, and new technologies for the dissemination of information should not be used at the expense of traditional media. All possible languages should be employed for the information to have the greatest impact and the

Department should use social networks in all official languages of the United Nations, which should have parity. The Organization's information structure should also be adapted to take account of linguistic diversity, with particular reference to those six languages, and the Department should present viable options for narrowing the linguistic divide. The principle of parity should not be limited to the Secretariat's two working languages.

68. In meeting the needs of the United Nations audience, current information resources must be deployed in an equitable, creative and efficient manner. It was a concern, however, that daily press releases were not produced in all official languages. The potential allocation of additional resources in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019 in order to promote multilingualism was therefore welcome. The hope was that the Department would accomplish its objective of enhancing understanding of the Organization's work and principles through use of its official languages.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.