

24 October 2012



General Assembly

GA/SPD/514

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Sixty-seventh General Assembly
Fourth Committee
12th Meeting (PM)

**PUBLIC INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, IN STEP WITH MAJOR TRENDS,
MANAGES UNITED NATIONS MESSAGE WITH PROFOUND IMPACT.
SAY FOURTH COMMITTEE DELEGATES**

**'Digital Bridges' Not Connecting Everyone.
Speakers Say, Urging Continued Use of Traditional Media**

Despite the formidable communications and information demands of today's world, the international community had a United Nations that could be accessed in a multitude of ways, as it broadened its reach to tell its story in step with the revolutionary technological trends, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) heard today as it continued its consideration of the topic.

The scope and breadth of the United Nations audience, said the representative of the Philippines, had been widened by the Internet, as countless documents, records, photos and videos were now available from the comfort of virtually any wired device. The many accomplishments of the Department of Public Information had made the United Nations "more accessible and more understandable".

Yet, paradoxically, even as millions were connecting through "digital bridges", the other half of the world's inhabitants were yet to make their first telephone call, he said. Indeed, the majority of the planet's inhabitants shut out of the promises of the digital revolution. That reality underscored the continuing relevance of traditional media, he said.

Similarly noting the "fast and furious" development of new media in recent years, the representative of Singapore emphasized that on par with making information accessible was the need to educate people to distinguish "facts from fiction", in the vast pool of information.

Since the lightning speed at which news was disseminated could twist a remark into a national or international outrage, the responsible use of information must be emphasized, he said, adding that transparency must be increased so as to minimize the possibility of an "information Trojan horse".

The media "not only conveyed the event, but also created the event", said Syria's representative, expressing concern about the negative role played by media when it was not objective and respectful. That was disturbing and could spread a culture of violence instead of a culture of peace. Information should be conveyed impartially, far from politicization and misinformation, he said.

Given the world's considerable geopolitical transformation, said Ukraine's representative, information must be reliable and credible so that strategic decisions, affecting millions, could be taken. Syria was an example, he said, of how the manipulation of information and misinformation could have serious consequences. He called for an end to "information wars" and for transparency in the coverage of the crisis, stressing the need for the United Nations to use well-verified, reliable information, avoiding provocative, unconfirmed information.

At the same time, he thanked the Department for its "exemplary efforts" to inform public opinion. He noted an improvement in the Russian language services, and commended the "utterly splendid" work that been done to organize journalists during the opening week of this year's General Assembly.

In that vein, the speaker from the United Republic of Tanzania underscored the importance of the Kiswahili Radio Unit, noting that the language was spoken by more than 200 million people across East and Central Africa and beyond. The Unit's utility in promoting the shared values and aspirations of the international community was "beyond doubt", and he called for its increased support.

Pakistan's representative welcomed the Department's efforts to make its publications available in 39 local languages, including Urdu. The delegate from Bangladesh called for restoration of the weekly half-hour Bengali programme on United Nations Radio. At a time when globalization was threatening many small languages, the Organization had a responsibility to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism, he said.

Other themes featured prominently during the discussion, such as the time-tested value of traditional media. The representative of Senegal said radio was still an important medium for the countries of the South. Even as those countries acquired new technologies, a situation in which the Department's radio programme was downgraded was unimaginable; "radio must keep its place" among the United Nations media, next to television and the web, he said.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Myanmar, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Colombia, South Africa, Japan, and Israel.

A representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine also spoke.

The Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. on Thursday, 25 October, to conclude its consideration of questions relating to information.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this afternoon to continue its consideration of questions relating to information. (For more information, please see Press Release [GA/SPD/513](#).)

Statements

RAMADHAN MWINYI ([United Republic of Tanzania](#)), associating with the statement made by the Group of 77 and China, underscored the importance of the Kiswahili Radio Unit, pointing out that the language was spoken by more than 200 million people across East and Central Africa and beyond. The Unit allowed a large part of that population follow the work of the United Nations and benefit from its educational broadcasts. The Unit's utility in promoting the shared values and aspirations of the international community was "beyond doubt". However, the station had operated under difficult conditions, and he called for increased support, including staffing. He was also encouraged that some outreach materials had also been translated in Kiswahili, in recognition of the importance of the language as a medium of information dissemination to the wider citizenry. In conclusion, he commended the work of the United Nations information centres, and reiterated that any further rationalization of their networks be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Member States concerned.

IHAB HAMED ([Syria](#)), associating with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, stated that his country believed in the important role played by the Department of Public Information in reaching different regions of the world with its message of peace. Information was one of the most important tools at the international community's disposal to solve political, cultural and economic problems. The media "not only conveyed the event but also created the event". The negative role it played when it was not objective and respectful, however, was disturbing and could spread a culture of violence instead of a culture of peace. It was clear that information should be conveyed impartially, far from politicization and misinformation.

He said that the efforts of the Department must be strengthened when it came to Palestine, given the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the continued suffering caused by Israeli occupation in the Palestinian Territory, which had the support of certain countries. Also important was for the Department to achieve parity among official languages. In that regard, it was necessary to emphasize the need to remedy the shortcomings of the United Nations Arabic website. The Department should also focus on poverty eradication and furthering decolonization.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO ([Senegal](#)) said that he hoped the recommendations of the Committee on Information would be followed up. The United Nations was universal and multidimensional and must have an effective means of communication; therefore, it had acquired a set of tools to report on its activities, particularly on major issues affecting peace and security, economic development and health. The countries of the South were quickly acquiring new technologies, but radio

was still an important medium and he could not imagine a situation in which the Department's radio programme would be downgraded. "Radio must keep its place" in the United Nations, alongside television and the web. Alongside increasing use of new information technologies, the Department must continue to use traditional media.

Turning briefly to the substance of the Department's work, he said he was pleased that the Department regularly reported on the situation and supported efforts for establishing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. He highlighted the "dynamic effectiveness" of the United Nations information centres, which were in 63 countries worldwide to provide updated information, working closely with government, civil society, teachers, students and journalists. The Centres' success owed much to the high quality and range of products and services they offered. Senegal supported the Centre in Dakar and provided it with working space.

Implementing an ambitious communications strategy meant closing the digital divide, he declared. Most people in developing countries were still excluded from the rapidly evolving information and communication technologies. It was essential today that everyone took steps to close the gap. As the Secretary-General had said, "The human race as a whole must be able to benefit" from those technologies. Multilingualism was an essential component of multilateralism. In order for the United Nations message to be received and understood by all peoples, it must be available in as many languages as possible. He paid tribute to the work of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the high quality of interpretation, translation and record-keeping services that it provided.

MIAN JAHANGIR IQBAL (Pakistan), associating with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the importance of the United Nations information centres around the world could not be overemphasized. Those were the "eyes and ears of the United Nations" and helped to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries in terms of access to information and communication technologies. He urged the Department to allocate adequate resources to them and to consider restoring full services at the Centre in Islamabad.

Welcoming the Department's efforts to make available United Nations publications in 39 local languages, including Urdu, he emphasized the importance of accurate, objective and balanced news and information services in print, radio, television and over the Internet. His country was committed to freedom of expression and free media. As a result of the Government's media-friendly policies, there had been an unprecedented surge in the expansion of electronic media. At present, 82 private channels and 143 FM radio stations were licensed to work independently in the country.

ROBERT ERIC ALABADO BORJE (Philippines), associating with the statement made on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Group of 77, commended the accomplishments and activities of the Department in "making the United Nations more accessible and more understandable to the rest of the world". Though the communications demands of the world were formidable, for the most part, the international community had a United Nations that could be accessed in a multitude of ways. The Internet had widened the scope and breadth of its audience, making available countless documents, records, photos and videos from any virtually wired device. Additionally, thematic issues had been highlighted across the Organizations' media and news platforms.

However, he said, it was a paradox that while millions had become connected by "digital bridges", many large gaps were preventing all to benefit from the new technology. The International Telecommunication Union had illuminated the fact that, even with rapid developments in information and communication, half of the world's inhabitants were yet to make their first telephone call, even fewer had used the Internet and the overwhelming majority were completely shut out of the digital revolution and its promises.

Those facts, he said, should be a matter of great concern to Governments, the private sector, multilateral organizations, financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and individuals. That also underscored the importance of traditional media such as radio, television and print, on which many continued to rely, through the United Nations information centres. The Philippines was pleased with the efforts made by the centres to establish partnerships with schools and civil society to step up information campaigns.

The Philippines agreed, he went on to say, with other delegations that the accessibility of the United Nations website could be enhanced by improving content availability in all six languages. On the other hand, improving accessibility should not come at the price of the integrity of the United Nations websites and the information they contained. The security of the websites and internal communications must be protected from elements that sought to sow disinformation under the cloak of the United Nations.

KYAW ZWAR MINN (Myanmar), associating with the statements made by the Group of 77 and China and ASEAN, said that his country appreciated the Department's "dedicated efforts" with regard to its information activities around the Millennium Development Goals and many other areas, including counter-terrorism, international peace and development, and human rights. He also acknowledged the work of the Department on the Rio+20 website.

He said the United Nations Information Centres were playing a vital role in bringing the message of the Organisation to all populations in the world. Their communications capacity should be strengthened and system-wide coherence in their work should be promoted. He also underlined the need to ensure that sharing the benefits of new information and communication technology was more "just, equitable, and effective".

Turning to developments in his own country, he said his Government was taking various reform measures in media and information. Restrictions on domestic periodicals had been relaxed since August, paving the way for "practicing press freedom". A Myanmar Core Press Council had been established, which would develop a new draft law to protect media persons and a code of conduct on journalism ethics, and settle press disputes, among other responsibilities. Additionally, three State-run newspapers would be transformed into public service media. A "dynamic fourth estate" was a prerequisite for building mutual understanding and trust between the Government and its people, and an open and responsible media was crucial for developing Myanmar's economy, achieving national reconciliation and better integration into the international community.

RAYMOND WOLFE (Jamaica), associating with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the Department played a vital role in generating debate on key issues within the international community. He was particularly pleased by its efforts to bring warranted attention to the issue of the illicit trade in arms through its support of the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty held in July. He urged the Department to continue raising awareness of the negative impact of the unregulated trade in conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. He was also grateful for the attention drawn to the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

He encouraged the Department to play an active role in disseminating information on the upcoming third conference on small island developing States, scheduled to be held in the Pacific in 2014, thereby giving recognition to the unique and particular vulnerabilities such States faced. He commended the Department's dissemination of information and garnering of support for a memorial and monument in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and he urged it to continue building that momentum.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) expressed great appreciation for this year's commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, which had included a ceremony for fallen peacekeepers. Bangladesh was proud of the 109 Bangladeshi peacekeepers that had made the ultimate sacrifice while working under the United Nations umbrella, and he urged the Department to produce a publication or documentary that highlighted that sacrifice. He offered his delegation's support for such an endeavour.

Turning to the subject of global warming, he added that although Bangladesh had not contributed to the problem, it was one of the worst victims of it. The country was facing agricultural devastation, an increasing number of deadly diseases and even national security issues. "Cyclones that battered the coastal areas had taken countless lives and sudden floods uprooted thousands of families every year." He strongly urged greater international cooperation on that issue and sought the Department's help to spotlight it, for instance, through video footage by its UNifeed programme, stories that depicted the plight of coastal and small island countries.

Highlighting the importance of observing the International Mother Language Day, which fell on 21 February every year, he said that given "the country's historic role in defending the right to speak one's mother tongue", it strongly believed that International Mother Language Day deserved meaningful worldwide observance to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism, especially at a time when globalization had put many small languages "under threat". He also called for the restoration of the weekly half-hour Bengali programme from United Nations Radio which was recently discontinued.

EDUARDO ULIBARRI (Costa Rica), associating with the statements made by Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Group of 77 and China, said that freedom of expression and the free flow of multifaceted communication were crucial to strengthen democracy and combat corruption. Information flows reached their highest potential in an environment based on the rule of law and tolerance, and where they went hand-in-hand with education. The international community must

recognize and promote traditional media, while at the same time embracing the new opportunities offered by developments in information and communication technology.

In the past, he said, efforts to reach the broadest audience possible had traditionally been “segmented, linear and costly”, but thanks to new technologies, it could potentially become a single, instantaneous act. That transformation revealed the “liberating and creative nature” of technology. Nonetheless, the digital gap was a barrier to be overcome and required not only an investment in infrastructure to facilitate access to such technology, but the promotion of the knowledge and skills necessary to take advantage of it. Also required were good public policies, legal security, business incentives, the promotion of civic participation and respect for the freedom of expression. There were some countries that, despite having sufficient resources, did not expand or improve their infrastructure, and in the worst of cases, deliberately obstructed its development, in order to maintain political and social control.

He commended the Department for its commitment to addressing growing challenges with decreasing resources through better internal coordination, the adoption of new technology and the development of alliances with media, non-governmental organizations, universities and civil society. That approach must be enhanced, as the Department disseminated information and encouraged discussion around new topics such as rule of law and the post-2015 development agenda.

YEO SHO HOR (Singapore), associating with the statement made on behalf of ASEAN and the Group of 77 and China, stated that the development of new media had been “fast and furious”. With the proliferation of smart phones, citizen journalism had been propelled to the forefront through blogs, Twitter, and social networking sites. At the same time, it was necessary to be discerning with the vast pool of information. Besides making information accessible, people must be educated “to discern facts from fiction”. Information transparency must be increased so as to minimize the possibility of an “information Trojan horse”. Since the lightning speed at which news was disseminated could twist a remark into a national or international outrage, the responsible use of information must be emphasized.

Emphasizing the disparity in accessibility and availability of information in different parts of the world, he said that the underprivileged were usually caught in a vicious cycle, in which the lack of financial resources and other environmental factors deprived them of opportunities to be well informed. Further, the international community must explore ways to engage with young people using modes of communication that were most natural to them. Sharing Singapore’s experience in that regard, he noted that ministers and representatives of government agencies were turning to social media to engage populations in direct discussions. Recently, the Government had started the “Singapore Conversation” using YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and face-to-face dialogue to reach all segments of society across the island. Singapore had also launched a five-year master plan to leverage new information technologies to connect and co-create with Singaporeans.

MIGUEL CAMILO RUIZ (Colombia), associating with the statements made by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of 77 and China, said that thanks to the Department’s dedication, the people of the world knew the objectives of the United Nations, and States and other actors had been inspired to generate new initiatives for the benefit of humanity. While recognizing that the Department had expanded its coverage, it was increasingly urgent to spread the Organization’s message to all peoples — even those who were difficult to reach, lacked modern technology, or spoke different languages. That required new and creative strategies.

He said that although new communication platforms presented new opportunities to easily and quickly access information, it was disturbing to see that the digital divide was growing. He called on the international community to take steps to remedy that imbalance and to continue using traditional media — radio, television and the written press — in areas where they were still common.

The United Nations information centres, he said, promoted better understanding of the Organization and had the benefit of being sensitive to local needs. He described a number of successes of the Centre based in Bogota, highlighting one project that had launched a radio programme designed to raise awareness of topical Colombian issues. It was distributed through a network of more than 100 broadcasters throughout the country. The Centre had three countries under its responsibility, and despite that all of the centres gave strong support to the Department’s work, their budgets constrained them.

In conclusion, he welcomed the efforts of the Department to provide electronic access to documents in different languages. It was important to achieve linguistic parity, especially in regard to Press Releases, which in many cases were only available in one of the official languages.

ZAHEER LAHER (South Africa), aligning with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, commended the Department for its “concerted communications effort regarding the

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development". He said that an equitable balance must be ensured in the usage of all available technologies. Traditional media such as radio, television and print remained important outlets for disseminating information, and the information centres carried out an indispensable function in disseminating information on the Organization's activities to the local populations of developing countries. The centres brought the added value of translating and publishing information in local languages, leading to maximum impact. It was also their network capacity and large footprint that had enabled the Nelson Mandela International Day to become a truly universal campaign of selfless service in action.

The Africa section of the Department, he added, had made valuable contributions to increasing the online visibility and support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which was a blueprint for Africa's economic development and recovery. Further, public dissemination of information in conflict and post-conflict situations could play a particularly helpful role in peacekeeping missions. He commended the work of the Information Centre in Pretoria in promoting the Model UN programme, which gave many young South African schoolchildren the annual opportunity to travel to the United Nations Headquarters in New York and experience multilateralism in action.

YEHOR PYVOVAROV (Ukraine) said that at a time when there had been a significant increase in the quantity of information available, the effective management of that information was crucial. Information today was a prerequisite for dealing with the various crises on the United Nations agenda. Communication between the United Nations and the international community was very important to keep people informed. That was also necessary to ensure the success of the Organization's work. A well-coordinated information strategy was one of the most important keys to achieving real effectiveness, and, in that regard, he thanked the Department for its "exemplary efforts" to inform public opinion. He noted that there had been an improvement in the Russian language services as compared to last year, and commended the "utterly splendid" work that been done to organize journalists during the opening week of this year's General Assembly.

Given the world's considerable geopolitical transformation, he said, information must be reliable and credible so that strategic decisions could be taken, as those affected millions. Syria was an example of how manipulation of information and misinformation could have serious consequences and complicate the search for a solution. He called for an end to "information wars" and for transparency and objectivity in coverage of the crisis. The United Nations must use well-verified, reliable information and avoid provocative information that had not been confirmed. Information was a powerful weapon that should be used to promote peace, democracy, mutual respect and all other United Nations principles.

TAKAHIRO NAKAMAE (Japan), expressing appreciation for the cooperation of the Department's Outreach Division during the commemoration of the first anniversary of the great east Japan earthquake, he said that Japan placed great importance in communicating the lessons learned from the earthquake and the effects of that disaster. His country valued the instrumental role that partnerships played in effective and timely information-sharing for tangible results, not only for the general public, but also within the political arena.

Commending the Department for its efforts to improve the quality of the United Nations website, he said that his country expected "consideration of efficiency and cost effectiveness" with regard to content availability of the website in all official languages. At the same time, Japan encouraged the Department's work in engaging with new media platforms.

YUSSEF KANAAN, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that on 30 November 2011, the General Assembly had adopted, by an overwhelming majority, resolution 66/16 emphasizing the importance of the Department's Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which reflected the broad international support for that Programme. The Programme was instrumental in promoting the international community's awareness on that subject and reaffirmed the importance of the Department's continued provision of assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development, through the annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists from the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He said that the Israeli occupying force continued to systematically target journalists striving to convey "the truth about Israel's aggressive and destructive policies and practices". For instance, on 28 September, a Serbian journalist and dozens of Palestinians had been injured and Israeli and foreign activists suffered severe suffocation after the occupying forces suppressed a peaceful demonstration. Palestine called on the Committee to step up efforts to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists.

The Palestinian leadership was convinced of the vital role of telecommunications and information technology in the development process, he said, and in spite of Israeli control of the

communications sector and the Palestinian frequency spectrum, the leadership was working to build the communication networks that would enable the people to overcome geographical and physical impediments to normal life caused by the occupation. He reaffirmed his delegation's commitment to a peace process that would end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

Right of Reply

The representative of Israel, exercising the right of reply, said that it was absolutely absurd to hear the Syrian representative, a representative of a regime that slaughtered its citizens on a daily basis, talk of human rights. She could address the claims made by the representative of Palestine by questioning his definition of "non-violent demonstration", however, the "information item" on the Committee's agenda was not the place to do so. There were several other items on the Committee's agenda dedicated to the Palestinian issue, yet there were none to discuss the atrocities in Syria. Maybe there should be, she added.

The representative of Syria, also exercising the right of reply, said that the misinformation provided by the representative of the Israeli occupying force was not a surprise, as the international community was accustomed to hearing such accusations whenever Syria criticized the way Israel was violating human rights in the Occupied Territory. What was odd was that the representative should speak of human rights violations at a time when everybody was aware that Israel had violated each and every one of them. There had been many violations against journalists and pacifists and activist who wanted to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people. For instance, there was the case of Rachel Corrie, an American citizen who had been killed by the Israeli authorities when she tried to stop a bulldozer from destroying houses. She was killed because she wanted to convey the truth about the inhumane Israeli practices. The peace flotilla and the killing of the activists on board was another example of that inhumanity.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record