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AS NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES BECOME 'CHANNELS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION', FOURTH COMMITTEE TAKES STOCK OF HOW PUBLIC INFORMATION DEPARTMENT MEASURES UP

Speakers Call for 'Transparent and Equitable Dissemination Of Information' in All Six Official United Nations Languages

New media technologies were not just instruments of communication, but “channels of citizen participation”, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) heard today, as it continued its consideration of questions relating to information, including in the context of how the United Nations Department of Public Information was measuring up to the challenges.

To strengthen democratic co-existence, Costa Rica’s delegate said, information flows must take place within the rule of law and go hand-in-hand with education. He urged States that were genuinely committed to closing the digital divide to create an “open climate for free expression”. Also crucial was to facilitate access to the new technologies, especially for youth.

A “healthy information society”, said Cameroon’s delegate, brought people together in the quest for peace and progress. He agreed that universal access, particularly to the Internet, was “indispensable” for reducing the digital divide. To increase the penetration of the Internet, Cameroon was constructing 5,000 kilometres of fibre optic cable. His country was wedded to the ideal of freedom of expression, and had nearly 700 newspapers, 77 radio stations and 15 television stations registered with its Communications Ministry.

Sounding a note of caution, the representative of Lebanon said that modern communications had indeed “submerged” the world in information, but with greater innovation came greater responsibility. He urged member States and the United Nations, as they participated in the “global network of ideas”, to consider the content, equity of access, and empowerment of the voices of those who suffered.

Censorship in Myanmar, said its representative, had been abolished in 2012, and today, the number of journals and newspapers was “mushrooming”. Media reform was regarded as one of the most dramatic areas of reform in Myanmar’s transition to democracy, and the Government had taken unprecedented measures to liberalise the media and information technology sectors.

The representative of Libya noted that the Libyan people had made many great changes in the information sphere recently, setting up television channels and launching dozens of newspapers, all of which operated under conditions of full freedom, with no political supervision.

The fast-changing media landscape also highlighted the need to mainstream multilingualism into the United Nations’ information activities. Speaking on behalf of the newly established Group of Friends of the Spanish (GAE), the representative of Argentina stated that, while the United Nations website was “an obligatory

source of information” for all, its general condition was a long way from the objective of respecting full linguistic parity, despite the increasing number of visitors to the website from Spanish speaking countries.

She stressed the importance of ensuring equitable treatment of all official languages in the Department’s activities, whether based on traditional or new media, while using existing resources on an equitable basis. Drawing attention to the draft resolution to be considered by the Fourth Committee, she said it had been decided, for the first time, that “scarcity could be managed on an equitable basis”. The Committee should rethink old models, she added.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Cuba, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gabon, Japan, and Sudan. An observer for the State of Palestine also spoke.

The Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. on Friday, 18 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 background information, see Press Release [GA/SPD/534](#).

Statements

MARIA CRISTINA PERCEVAL ([Argentina](#)) speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Spanish (GAE) to the United Nations, said that the group, which was speaking for the first time, had formally been established on 16 September, when representatives of all Spanish-speaking Member States had signed a charter. It was sent to the Secretary-General and became an official document of the General Assembly (A/67/998) under the agenda item of multilingualism. The growing interest of Spanish-speaking peoples in the Organization was the crucial reason for the group’s birth.

She said that, today, the United Nations website was “an obligatory source of information” for everyone, and the “GAE”, therefore, appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to improve its accessibility and design, news products and services, and in particular, the recent live coverage of General Assembly and Security Council proceedings in all six official languages, as well as in the language of the speaker. Nevertheless, her group was increasingly concerned that such new activities did not always bear in mind the principle of linguistic parity between the Organization’s official languages. In sum, “the general condition of the United Nations website was a long way from the objective of respecting full linguistic parity”. The continued growth in content of the Spanish-version website was only heightened, owing to the increasing number of visits it received.

The draft resolution to be adopted, she said, emphasized the importance of ensuring equitable treatment of all official languages in all the Department’s activities, whether based on traditional or new media. In the text, the General Assembly would underline the responsibility of the Secretariat in mainstreaming multilingualism into all its communications, within the existing resources “on an equitable basis”. The Group of Friends of the Spanish believed that the traditional resource constraints had been overcome because it had been decided for the first time that “that same scarcity could be managed on an equitable basis”.

That mandate also extended the need for daily Press Releases in Spanish, she said, explaining further that the draft resolution also requests the Department to develop a strategy, in close collaboration with other Departments, to deliver daily Press Releases in all six official languages through creative schemes. Her group was ready to collaborate and contribute ideas to the search for those “creative solutions”. It was high time to rethink old models in order to make room for everyone, without discrimination, by adapting to current times.

OSCAR LÉON GONZÁLEZ ([Cuba](#)), speaking on behalf of Community of Latin American Countries and Caribbean (CELAC), said that information management should be strictly in line with international law norms and the United Nations Charter. CELAC was concerned about the lack of a reference in the Secretary-General’s report to communication support provided by the Public Information Department in connection with the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament in September, unlike other events held. The bloc had

expressed its common position at that meeting and had offered concrete proposals. It had a solid stance on nuclear disarmament and considered that the dissemination of information by the United Nations relevant mechanism could contribute to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, he said, CELAC was encouraged that the Department, as part of its efforts to promote multilingualism, in June, had begun to provide live coverage of General Assembly and the Security Council meetings in the six official languages, as well as in the language of the speaker, but it called on the Department and the Secretariat, as a whole, to strive to address the lack of information that still was not available in all official languages with regard to the work of the Organization's main bodies.

In that connection, CELAC was deeply concerned about the Secretary-General's conclusion that Press Releases could not be published or translated in other languages without additional cost he said, calling on the Department to develop a strategy, in close collaboration with other departments, to deliver those documents in all six official languages through creative schemes and in a cost-neutral manner, and in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions. It further called for financial and human resources provided to the Department, to be properly distributed to ensure parity of its products in all official languages.

EDUARDO ULIBARRI (Costa Rica), associating himself with CELAC, as well as the Group of 77 and China, and the "GAE", said that to strengthen democratic co-existence, information flows must take place within the rule of law, hand-in-hand with education. The United Nations and its Member States, especially those from developing nations, should strengthen the role of traditional media while simultaneously encouraging the opportunities provided by new media and communications technologies. While the international community could not ignore the risk of new technologies, they were not just instruments of communication; they were also channels of citizen participation. It was crucial, therefore, to facilitate access and extend their use to all population sectors, especially youth.

He encouraged States genuinely committed to closing the digital divide to allocate resources to invest in infrastructure and develop better public policies, and stressed that the climate must be open for free expression. Improving the efficiency of communication was a central task for the United Nations, and he noted that the Committee on Information and the Public Information Department — operative body for communications within the Secretariat — had improved their mutual cooperation. However, much remained to be done to mainstream multilingualism. The recent establishment of the "GAE" would allow the international community to work more constructively to achieve that goal.

CHARBEL WEHBI (Lebanon), stating that modern communications had "submerged us" in information, warned that innovation brought greater responsibility. Content of information, equity of access, empowerment of the voices of those who suffered and the preservation of shared values were all important in that regard. The Department should engender a "louder voice of the United Nations and its values in the global network of ideas", he said, commending its work. Emphasizing that education was a crucial foundation, he highlighted several initiatives of his country and encouraged the Department, likewise, to foster platforms for youth. In conflict-afflicted countries, collaboration between the Departments of Public Information and Peacekeeping Operations was essential, using both traditional and modern communications networks to reach all communities. Awareness-raising also was critical, he added, reaffirming Lebanon's full support for the Department's Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine. Continued collaboration between the Committee on Information and the Department would "only bear greater relevance" as the world became increasingly interconnected, he said.

ABUZIED SHAMSELDIN AHMED MOHAMED (Sudan), associating with the Group of 77 and China, said that the Department played a pivotal role in disseminating information in the international arena on the activities of the United Nations, which helped to enhance growth and development. Sudan also took note of the Department's role in spreading information about decolonization, respect for human rights, conflict resolution, the culture of peace, Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 agenda, as well as the need for sustainable development. At the same time, his country was concerned about the expanding digital divide between developing and developed nations, which promoted social disparities. He, thus, called on the Department to intensify efforts to achieve linguistic parity between the six official languages, especially in Press Releases and other documents.

He expressed support for the Department's work in enlightening the world population about the question of Palestine and the need for the people to achieve self-determination, and called for more efforts in that regard. He stressed the need for the international media to always be objective and credible in the discharge of its work, which he said was invaluable to entrenching peace among nationalities and religions, as well as in promoting global development.

SHINSUKE SHIMIZU ([Japan](#)) acknowledged the efforts of the Department to enhance effectiveness and rationalise its operations. Welcoming the Secretary-General's appointment of Kaoru Nemoto as its Director, he noted that his Government had this year contributed approximately \$220,000 in support of the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo. Likewise, it appreciated the Secretary-General's participation in the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development. It was also grateful for the Department's efforts to promote the annual ringing of the Peace Bell, which had been donated by Japan in 1954. The Department's commitment to collaboration and outreach was evident in its support for the filming of the Japanese film *The Human Trust* in the General Assembly Hall in May. He favoured expanded use of social media, and said Japan looked forward to updates from the Secretariat on developments in that field. As the main organ for advocating the work of the Organization, the Department should continue to improve the efficiency and transparency of its activities.

TAHER M ALI GHIRANI ([Libya](#)), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, stated that mass media had the power to mold people's awareness and behaviour. Information was a main pillar of international relations, and the Department and Information Committee had big responsibility to strengthen the awareness of the world and promote dialogue among civilizations and religion. It was necessary to disseminate information in important topics such as climate change, peaceful settlement of disputes, human rights, rule of law and sustainable development. Libya emphasized the need for cooperation between developing and developed countries for minimizing the digital gap. The traditional media was the main and fundamental source of information in developing countries. Further, the Information Centres must be adequately resourced. Also necessary was to foster multilingualism and provide Press Releases in Arabic.

He said his country appreciated the partnerships between the Departments of Public Information and Peacekeeping Operations, as well as the training programme to prepare Palestinian journalist. Libya urged the Department to emphasize the plight of the Palestinian people, suffering under the yoke of Israeli occupation. The Libyan people had made many great changes in information in recent times, he said, noting that several television channels had been set up and dozens of newspapers launched. All operated under conditions of full freedom, with no political supervision.

MARCOS MONTILLA([Dominican Republic](#)), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, and CELAC, said that dissemination of the Organization's work was imperative. He highlighted the importance of using new information technologies, while also drawing attention to the need to narrow the digital divide between developed and developing countries. He called on the Department to publish daily news bulletins in the six official languages, without incurring additional cost, and in accordance with related General Assembly resolutions. The Department's work among civil society and especially youth groups was commendable, as was its growing presence on social media, radio, television and the internet. Calling the recent incorporation and acceptance by the General Assembly of the Friends of Spanish group "momentous", he hoped that would motivate wider use of "our ordinary language" in the United Nations' work. Given the large number of Spanish-speaking countries in the world, he urged increased dissemination of information in the Spanish language.

MIGUEL CAMILO RUIZ ([Colombia](#)), associating himself with the Group of Friends of the Spanish, CELAC and the Group of 77 and China, commended the Department for its work through various media platforms but urged it to continue to work with both the traditional and new media to reach the world population, which had different access to information tools. The United Nations Information Centre in Bogota had promoted better understanding of the Organization's work and had benefitted both the local and academic institutions. The Centre also fostered partnerships, including with a radio programme designed to raise awareness of topical Colombian issues through a network of more than 100 broadcasters throughout the country.

He stressed the need for language parity, especially in the dissemination of Press Releases, which, in many cases were only available in one of the official languages. He called on the Department to adopt a creative strategy to resolve the disparity, improve content on the web pages and provide statistics on the use of the website and the social media platforms to the Member States. Although new communication platforms enabled

new opportunities to easily and quickly access information, it was disturbing to see that the digital divide was growing, and he urged the international community to take steps to remedy that imbalance.

U HAU DO SUAN (Myanmar), associating with the Group of 77 and China and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that he valued the Department's dedication, professionalism and commendable work and commended its integrated approach. He urged it to maintain that momentum in keeping with the changing environment, he said, referring in particular to today's "inter-connected era" and "rapidly globalized world". The United Nations Information Centres played a pivotal role in the dissemination of information. He emphasized that the Department's news service should maintain objectivity and cautioned it from becoming involved in the redistribution of sensitive news reports from outside sources, as doing so could have a negative impact on the country concerned.

As for the widening digital divide, he welcomed the Department's commitment to ensuring that people in both the developed and developing countries were informed of its activities and encouraged its outreach efforts. He cited several examples of the Department's work in that area and noted that his Government had taken "unprecedented measures" to liberalise the media and information technology sectors. Media reform was regarded as one of the most dramatic areas of reform in Myanmar's transition to democracy. Among other steps, censorship of the media had been abolished in 2012, and today, the number of journals and newspapers was "mushrooming". A new Printing and Publishing Bill, which he hoped would soon become law, would encourage the media to exercise freedom and accountability in a balanced and harmonious manner, he added.

JOSÉ EDUARDO PROAÑO (Ecuador), associating himself with CELAC, the Group of 77 and China, and the Group of Friends of the Spanish (GAE), encouraged the United Nations to ensure that its information products reached the widest possible audience. That was a right of the international community and would address the pressing need for the international community to understand the scope and significance of the Organization's work. An important way to achieve "transparent and equitable dissemination of information" was to disseminate it in the six official languages. There was no mandate that restricted the dissemination of information to only two working languages. As a member State of the "GAE", Ecuador emphasized that multilingualism was a guiding principle of the Organization. Spanish was the second language of consultation on the United Nations' web page and social networks; however, it was scarcely used in the website's content.

The dissemination of information, he added, should be based on trust and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations. The recent news about a massive indiscriminate espionage system was an attack against human rights and also a violation of the sovereignty of States. Such actions encouraged serious instability among States. The security of any one country, however powerful that country might be, could not be achieved at the expense of other countries or human rights. Ecuador stood ready to participate in a frank and sincere dialogue about that threat, in an effort to seek an appropriate international framework for the privacy and inviolability of electronic communication for all the world's inhabitants.

CARLA ESPERANZA RIVERA SÁNCHEZ (El Salvador), associating herself with CELAC and the Group of Friends of Spanish, said that activities undertaken by the Department had enhanced the work of the United Nations. At the same time, the speaker called for more improvements to enable the world population to benefit fully with the work of the United Nations and to get acquainted with what was happening around the world. She commended the Department for promoting the work of the Alliance of Civilisations as a way to enhance relations and dialogue between cultures and religion, and facilitate harmony among people of different backgrounds. Such activities would help in building a viable foundation for the post-2015 development agenda. She called for a creative approach by the Department to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts and misunderstandings among nations, and stressed the need to address the digital divide and achieve parity in the Department's products in all the six official languages. The use of Spanish language must be ensured in the dissemination of all Press Releases and other United Nations' documents.

MAMOUDOU MANA (Cameroon), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, shared the United Nations' vision regarding information, which took concrete shape at Headquarters through the Department and on the ground through the various United Nations Information Centres. The work of the Department in promoting peace and human rights, in short, promoting freedom, was based on the Organization's essential values. Cameroon was wedded to the ideal of freedom of expression, with its nearly 700 newspapers, 77 radio stations, and 15 television stations registered with its Communications Ministry. In addition to freedom of information, Cameroon also promoted access. A national agency had been created for

information and communication technologies in 2007 and a national strategy adopted. Cameroon wished to stay abreast of technological developments and to keep pace with the information society.

In order to reduce the digital divide, he continued, access for all to the Internet was indispensable. His country had undertaken construction of 5,000 kilometres of fibre optic cable, connecting the country's main cities and subdivisions, thereby making it possible to increase Internet access. When it came to accessing governmental information, public administration had developed a number of Internet sites. Although the picture was positive as a whole, he conceded that urban areas were better equipped than rural regions, and, therefore, the digital divide persisted despite Government efforts. To bridge that divide, Cameroon had also set up a number of telemedicine and tele-health centres. Further, the presence of an Information Centre in Cameroon had enabled a large number of peoples, including in the media, as well as students and researchers, to have a reliable source of up-to-date information. A "healthy" information society brought people together in the quest for peace and progress.

NELSON MESSONE (Gabon), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, commended the Department for making the Organization more visible and understood by people around the world. He also praised it for its coverage of all meetings and other activities, both at the Headquarters and in field missions around the world. Its work in the United Nations Academic Impact had enhanced youth involvement on global issues, including development, in institutions of higher learning. Gabon supported the dissemination of the Organization's work in all six official languages, equally. That would help build trust and harmony with Member States, as well as with the people being served. He commended Argentina for the establishment of the Group of Friends of Spanish and voiced his readiness to work with them, as achieving language parity at the United Nations was important.

KIM JU SONG (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) stated that public information challenges were characterized by control of communications technology by a few countries. Certain countries were in pursuit of their hidden political interests, taking advantage of monopolized modern mass media. By imposing their "values" on developing countries, they were causing social disorder and chaos, even going as far as to create regime change. The United States and its followers were "adhering" to psychological warfare, using mass media, including Radio Free Asia, slandering "invidious" countries and aiming to bring those down through "internal disintegration".

He said that priority should be given to establishing a new international communication and information order, based on impartiality and objectivity, and respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. The high-handedness of specific countries that clamoured for free dissemination of public information while imposing their will on others should be brought to an end. It was also necessary to build capacity in developing countries for public information and communication. Measures should be taken to constrain developed countries from impeding access to communication technologies.

YUSSEF F. KANAAN, observer for the State of Palestine, associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed his appreciation for the work of the Department on the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which was instrumental in raising the international community's awareness of the issues, including efforts made for a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive solution to Palestine-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israel conflict, as a whole. He also reaffirmed the importance of the Department's training programme for Palestinian journalists from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He regretted, however, that the Israeli occupying forces had continued to "systematically and deliberately" target Palestinian journalists striving to convey the "grim reality" about Israeli illegal, aggressive and destructive policies and practices. He called on the Committee and relevant international organizations to step up their efforts to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists.

He said that the Palestinian leadership was convinced of the vital role of telecommunications and information technology in development. Despite Israeli control of the communications sector and the Palestinian frequency spectrum, it was working to build the communication networks so as to reach people everywhere in the State of Palestine and help them to overcome the geographical and physical impediments to normal life caused by the occupation. He expressed 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, including to self-determination and return, and to achieve the independence of their State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders.

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For information media • not an official record