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FOURTH COMMITTEE COMMENDS PUBLIC INFORMATION DEPARTMENT FOR RISING TO FORMIDABLE COMMUNICATIONS DEMANDS, SENDING TWO DRAFT RESOLUTIONS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Sweeping Text Notes Multilingual Development of Website, Urges Press Releases In Six Official UN Languages ‘through Creative Schemes, in Cost-Neutral Manner’

Information was power, and the United Nations Department of Public Information was rising to the formidable communications demands of a complex world, delegates in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) said today as they concluded their consideration of questions relating to information, with the approval of two draft resolutions.

The first, draft resolution B, on the Organization’s public information policies and activities contains sections on the Department’s general activities; multilingualism and public information; bridging the digital divide; United Nations Information Centres; Strategic Communications Services; Promotional Campaigns; Role of the Department in United Nations peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding and in strengthening dialogue among civilizations; New services; traditional communications means; website; Library and Outreach services.

Among the many provisions of that wide-ranging text, the General Assembly would welcome the Department’s ongoing efforts to enhance multilingualism in all its activities and stress the importance of ensuring that the texts of all new public United Nations documents in all six official languages, information materials and all older United Nations documents were made available through the website without delay.

Also according to the text, the Assembly would note that the multilingual development and enrichment of the United Nations website had improved, and request the Department, starting with the sixty-eighth session, to provide — on the United Nations website in all official languages — live webcasts and video archives of its open, formal meetings as well as those of the Security Council with interpretation services.

In a related provision, the Assembly would reiterate its request of the Department to design a strategy, in close collaboration with other departments, to deliver daily Press Releases in all six official languages “through creative schemes, in a cost-neutral manner and in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions”, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its thirty-sixth session.

Further terms of the text would have the Assembly express concern that the gap in information and communications technology between the developed and the developing countries had continued to widen and that vast segments of the population in developing countries were not benefiting from the information and communications technologies that were currently available.

In related terms, the Assembly would emphasize that the Department should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and that its activities should contribute to bridging the existing gap between developing and developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications.

Among its provisions on the United Nations Information Centres, was a request that the General Assembly emphasize the importance of their network in disseminating United Nations messages to local populations, especially in developing countries, bearing in mind that information in local languages had the strongest impact on local populations.

On peacekeeping, the draft resolution would have the Assembly welcome efforts by the Department of Public Information, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support to develop and implement a comprehensive communications strategy on current challenges facing United Nations peacekeeping.

By further terms of the text, the Assembly would underline the critical need to address violations of the relevant international rules and regulations that govern the area of broadcasting, including television, radio and satellite broadcasting, in the most appropriate manner.

According to "Draft A", on information in the service of humanity, the Assembly, recognizing the call for "a new world information and communication order," would urge all countries and organizations of the United Nations system to enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communications capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communications technology in the developing countries.

Prior to taking action, delegates concluded their general debate on information with resounding support for the use of traditional media to reach those populations that did not have access to new media. While millions were connected by "digital bridges", millions more found themselves separated by "digital gaps", the representative of the Philippines stated. He asked the Department to support United Nations Radio as its audience reach was widespread.

Even if it was true that everyone had access to the Internet, the representative of Cuba pointed out, that access would be pointless for the 774 million adults who could not read or write. A small portion of the colossal resources used for arms could overcome the digital divide, she added.

The Russian Federation, said its representative, similarly noted that, while the new technologies were of vital importance, people in many countries lacked broad Internet access. His country was pleased that United Nations web portal was developing in all six official languages and grateful for the swift posting of messages on the Organization's Russian-language Twitter account. He also commended the educational role played by the Information Centres, particularly in Moscow, and the live broadcast of General Assembly and Security Council meetings in the six official languages, plus the original language of the speaker.

In closing remarks, Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information, thanked the Committee for the many positive comments and encouraging statements. Taking note of the questions and comments, in particular, concerning parity of all six official languages, especially relating to Press Releases, he said that his Department was collaborating with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management to find a "creative way forward". A complete report, including a strategy on multilingual press releases, would be presented at the next session of the Committee on Information.

Also speaking during today's debate were the representatives of Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Iran, Jamaica, Oman, South Africa, and Venezuela.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 22 October, to begin its consideration of the peaceful uses of outer space.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this morning to conclude its consideration of questions relating to information, for which it was expected to take action on Action on draft resolutions A and B contained in document [A/68/21](#).

Statements

GERARDO DIAZ BARTOLOME ([Argentina](#)), associating himself with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Group of 77, and the Group of Friends of the Spanish (GAE), stressed the importance of talking to people in their own language. He actively supported and encouraged multilingualism, noting that that had motivated Argentina to promote the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations, in order to facilitate the use of Spanish as a working language of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and Security Council. Argentina, however, was seriously concerned that the Secretary-General's report did not include detailed information on multilingualism, including disaggregated statistics on the use of languages in the Public Information Department's various products and services, especially after having admitted that the goal of parity among the six official languages was a pending task. At the same time, his country was pleased that the Department had extended the use of social media in all official languages and supported the use of that valuable resource and its contribution to multilingualism.

Argentina, he said, remained concerned at the lack of progress in the issuance of daily Press Releases in all official languages, as they were still being produced in only two, with "no mandate restricting the principle of parity in that sense". The criterion for allocating resources for that purpose "on an equitable basis" had now been duly established in several instruments, and Argentina called on the Department to be "creative" and adapt existing mechanisms, editorial criteria and length of current releases so as to open the way for coverage in the remaining official languages.

DER KOGDA ([Burkina Faso](#)), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, stated that the technology revolution had made the world a global village. His country welcomed the role played by the Department of Public Information to promote new technologies, but asked it to bear in mind the still low access to them. Also important was to guarantee the impartial dissemination of information and raise awareness on the work of the United Nations. The United Nations Information Centre in Burkina Faso was responsible for providing news about the Sahel and was carrying out great work in doing so in areas concerning natural disasters, food crises, droughts, and refugees. The Centre was also making available United Nations documents in local languages and was working closely with the country's Ministry of Defence to prepare those involved in peacekeeping operations. He paid homage to those working in the media who toiled daily to make the voice of the Organization heard all over the world.

ROBERT E. A. BORJE ([Philippines](#)), aligning himself with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Group of 77 and China, stated that "information is power" and access to accurate and timely information was empowering. Noting the accomplishments of the Department of Public Information, he said nevertheless that the challenges were daunting. The communications demands of a complex world were formidable. It was a paradox that while millions were connected by "digital bridges", millions more found themselves separated by "digital gaps". That sobering reality underscored the importance of traditional media. Radio, in particular, was the preferred means in terms of audience reach, and United Nations Radio should be supported accordingly. Budgetary support for the United Nations Information Centres also was vital, and access to online content would be enhanced if it was available in the Organization's six official languages. Access by persons with disabilities also was important. That improved accessibility, however, must not compromise integrity, and care must also be taken to ensure the security of United Nations websites and other information sources.

YOUSSEFOU BAMBA ([Côte d'Ivoire](#)), associating with the Group of 77 and China, commended the Department for its work, despite ongoing challenges, and stressed the need to promote multilingualism, which was at the heart of the concerns of most of the Member States. He also called for efforts to address the issue of digital divide between the developed and the developing countries, while noting that the use of the traditional media should be maintained to meet the needs of those in regions where the new media were not easily accessible. He added that his country welcomed the excellent support it received from the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and through its radio station, which broadcast programmes that promoted reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in the country. Also commendable was the Department's partnership

with local media. At the same time, he called for the establishment of a new global information order to meet the present challenges. His Government, he noted, was strengthening the capacity of journalists in communication technologies and their own safety.

JOAN THOMAS EDWARDS (Jamaica), associating with the Group of 77, CELAC and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that Jamaica supported the United Nations for utilizing affordable emerging technologies to facilitate information sharing, collaboration and internal communication. Social media was a cost-effective tool for expanding the reach of the Secretariat to millions of people and in all the official United Nations languages. However, there were disparities among Member States with regard to reliable access to modern and updated programmes, which could impede their ability to access the information. She, therefore, stressed the need for balance between the use of modern technology and traditional means of communication. On the Permanent Memorial for Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Jamaica was pleased with the activities staged by the Department in promoting the initiative, and other activities organized to mark the sixth annual observance of the International day of the Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and Transatlantic Slave Trade.

FAISAL EBRAHIM AL ZAYANI (Bahrain) said that the World Press Freedom Day was an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of that fundamental principle. Bahrain had marked the Day's twentieth anniversary in collaboration with the United Nations Information Centre in Manama and alongside 300 members of journalists' associations in Bahrain. The Information Centres were crucial sources of information, enabling the public to learn about the range of work of the United Nations. In order for the Organization to fully play its important role, however, the digital divide must be overcome. Information and communications technologies structures in developing countries must be enabled to make more progress, while keeping in mind that radio and television were still important means of communication in many countries.

LILIANNE SANCHEZ RODRIGUEZ (Cuba), associating herself with the Group of 77, the "GAE" and CELAC, encouraged the Department to intensify its efforts with regard to questions relating to Palestine and decolonization. Global espionage ran counter to human and privacy rights, and violated the principle of State sovereignty. That must be denounced and the United Nations General Assembly must play a key role in that discussion. The Department should create greater awareness about the final documents of the World Summit on Information Societies.

She said that the benefits of information and communications technology, but not universal. In 2012, only 35.7 per cent of the world population had access to the Internet, and that digital gap was increasing. Even if it was true that everyone had access to the Internet, what would be the point for the 774 million adults who could not read or write, or the benefit to the 200 million people living in extreme poverty, she asked. A small portion of the colossal resources used for arms could overcome that divide. Cuba also asked the Department to work harder to issue daily Press Release in the six official languages. Concluding, she said that the United States' Government continued its aggressive media policy against Cuba. By the end of the last year, there had been 2,074 hours of subversive transmission via television and illegal radio, disseminating false information and interrupting the normal functioning of radio services in Cuba, in violation of international law and the United Nations Charter.

ALFREDO TORO-CARNEVALI (Venezuela), associating with the Group of 77, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and the Group of Friends of the Spanish, said that his country viewed access to information as a human right. Venezuela had made "democratic" the use of information and communications and believed that all countries must have equal access to technology, without discrimination. His country had recently designed a law establish principles governing technology use for the purpose of improving public services and promoting transparency in the public sector.

He said that only independent media would lead to transparency and social responsibility. The case of Syria was telling. It was harmful for a democracy to have a small group control its media. In Venezuela, commercial television had been operated by two families until two years ago, which had compromised press freedom. The Government had formulated a policy aimed at developing independent alternative media and establishing a direct link with people. As a result, more than 500 alternative media organizations and community information outlets were functioning in the country. The establishment of the "GAE" would strengthen the quest for language parity in all United Nations products. The growing privatization of technology exchanges and concentration of "information power" in a few groups was worrying, and he asked the Committee to look into that.

MOHAMED SELIM (Egypt), associating with the Group of 77 and China, called on the Secretary-General to continue to enhance the work of the Department due to its importance in the dissemination of information about the Organization's activities and the need to meet emerging challenges in the discharge of its duties. Egypt supported the work of the Information Centre in the Middle East, which he said was making remarkable efforts to enlighten people on developments in the region and for promoting peace, and he called for more resources to enable it to carry out its work effectively. On multilingualism, he stressed the need for all six official languages to be used in United Nations products, to facilitate language parity and enable the world population to access information. He commended the Department on the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine and for raising awareness about the suffering of Palestinians, including human rights abuses and other violations.

ALEXEY ZAYTSEV (Russian Federation) said that his country was pleased United Nations web portal was developing in all six official languages and was grateful for the swift posting of messages on the Organization's Russian-language Twitter account. Social media was a very useful way to introduce the United Nations to the wider public. He also commended the educational role played by the Information Centres, particularly in Moscow. His country also appreciated the live broadcast of General Assembly and Security Council meetings in high definition in the six official languages, plus the original language of the speaker. While the international community must recognize the vital importance of new technologies, it should also realize that in many countries, people did not have wide access to the Internet. He expressed full support for the draft resolution to be adopted.

LYUTHA AL-MUGHAIRY (Oman), associating herself with the Group of 77 and China, said that the news and media division would be more useful if there was a clear and strategic sense of what must be communicated. For one, there should be greater accessibility to the products and services of the Department. Recalling a youth essay contest on global citizenship, she said the Organization must do more to see to it that its ideals were explained by those who "seek to serve", rather than solely by the Organization itself. In that regard, enhanced cooperation between the Department and other United Nations entities was imperative. The most immediate and visible instances of such cooperation could be at the field level, particularly through the dynamic network of United Nations Information Centres, which "remain the eye, ear and voice", not only of the Department, but also of the Organization itself. Robust and strategic communications groups could serve as key interlocutors with host Governments in defining and disseminating messages that served the common purpose of the Organization. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library must keep pace with the times, both in technological and content dissemination terms, and the Department should promote peace and security through conversation.

MLUNGISI MBALATI (South Africa), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the Department's efforts in establishing Information Centres and encouraged it to work closely with the Angolan Government to operationalize the Centre in Luanda to service the Lusophone countries in Africa. He commended the Department for disseminating information through effective partnership with other Agencies and welcomed efforts by the News Centre and United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) for highlighting the plight of Palestine refugees affected by the Syrian conflict. He commended the Department for raising awareness of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. He encouraged it to disseminate information through the Internet, new media and social networks, but said it should remain mindful of the wide gap between the North and South and continue to focus on traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, which had remained the main platform of communication in many developing countries. He commended the Department's work in organizing events to mark the International Day of the Commemoration in memory of the victims of Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Rwandan genocide and Nelson Mandela Day.

SERGIO RODRIGUES DOS SANTOS (Brazil), associating with the Group of 77 and CELAC, said the creation of the Public Information Department as early as 1946 showed how essential Member States viewed the dissemination of information. While the Department had shown efficient use of new media, the fundamental importance of traditional media should not be ignored. Approximately 60 per cent of the global population, or roughly 4 billion people, did not have Internet access, and he thus highlighted the importance of United Nations Radio, particularly in peacekeeping operations. The number of languages in which the Organization's message was conveyed must be "multiplied". He expressed support for the Information Centre in his country, and highlighted the important work being done by all around the globe. Thus, providing them with proper budgetary support was crucial. Despite human and financial resources constraints on the Portuguese Unit of United Nations Radio, he voiced appreciation for its work. Information and communications technologies should

strengthen peace and international understanding, but they had been used for purposes contrary to the Charter. Member States must prevent the use of cyberspace as a weapon of war.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI ([Iran](#)), associating himself with the Group of 77 and China, said that with the “dramatic increase” in acts of intolerance, extremism, intimidation, violence and terrorism, the Department should play a crucial role in promoting Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani’s call for a World against Violence and Extremism (WAVE). The speaker also stressed the urgent need to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries in the field of public information and communication and strongly advocated for a new and just order based on a free and balanced flow of information to the world’s people in a transparent manner. The United Nations should play a proactive role by creating an indispensable environment for universal access to information and communication technologies for all nations. Iran condemned the unjustifiable move by certain Western countries to impose a ban on the broadcast of several Iranian satellite television and radio channels. That was a gross violation of international law and regulations, and a flagrant contradiction to claims about defending freedom of speech and press. All relevant United Nations organs, especially the Public Information Department, should play their role in promoting and protecting freedom of expression.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN ([Bangladesh](#)) said his country took pride in the fact that 112 Bangladeshi peacekeepers had made supreme sacrifices while working under the United Nations flag, and he urged the Department to produce a publication or documentary that highlighted such sacrifices. The heroic contributions of peacekeepers from all countries should be recorded for today’s youth and tomorrow’s leaders. He also proposed the construction of a wall inside the United Nations commemorating the names and countries of each of their heroes who had sacrificed their lives for global peace and stability. He also called for greater international cooperation to support developing countries in addressing the impacts of climate change, and stressed the need for the Department to apprise the international community of the impending dangers of massive migration as a result of climate change and the need to work together to face the challenge. International Mother Language Day, observed on 21 February every year, was an opportunity to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, and multilingualism, especially as some small languages were under threat of annihilation due to globalization.

Action

At the conclusion of its general debate on information, the Committee approved, without a vote, draft resolution A, entitled “Information in the service of humanity”, and draft resolution B, entitled “United Nations public information policies and activities” (document [A/68/21](#)).

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