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Agenda item 10

Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session

Draft report

Rapporteur: Oleg Nikolenko (Ukraine)

Chapter III General debate

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the representatives of the State of Palestine (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Japan, Bangladesh, Algeria, the Philippines, Lebanon, China, Portugal, Nepal, Egypt, Argentina, Cuba, Jamaica, India, Uruguay, Pakistan, Brazil, the Republic of Korea, Spain, the United States of America, Israel, the Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as by the observers for the European Union, the Plurinational State of Bolivia on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish, Cabo Verde on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the League of Arab States and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

2. The general debate was preceded by a statement by the Chair of the Committee, Omar Hilale (Morocco). The Chair said that today, more than ever, it is imperative that the Organization disseminate reliable, credible and objective information. The Chair welcomed the reform efforts undertaken by the Department of Global Communications, and noted that the close cooperation with the resident coordinators would provide a new dimension to the work of the United Nations information centres and the Department. The Chair also made note of the Department's efforts at youth outreach, to engage young people as important stakeholders and galvanize them to action on the many issues that affect their lives. The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, Alison Smale, also made a statement and responded to questions and comments of Member States.

3. In addressing the substantive issues before the Committee, multiple speakers expressed support for the reforms the Department has undertaken, including the new name, the Department of Global Communications. Representatives noted that the United Nations is being asked to respond to global challenges, and the Department of



Global Communications must bear the responsibility of communicating this story to the world; the name change reflects the scope and importance of this work. Many delegations remarked that the reforms, which stress leadership and vision, strategic thinking and planning, and agility and operational efficiencies, would put the Department in a stronger position to better tell the United Nations story and engage with audiences. One representative, speaking on behalf of a large group, also stressed the importance of strengthening organizational branding to create a more harmonious and coherent visual identity across the system and better utilize the “United Nations blue” brand. The speaker also called on Member States, in their national capacities, to help to amplify the work of the Department of Global Communications through their own communications channels. Several speakers urged the Department to continue its close collaboration with Member States and to maintain regular briefings and exchanges as it continues its reform work. One representative also asked the Department to measure the impact of its work when possible to assess the effectiveness of its activities.

4. A majority of representatives stressed the importance of multilingualism and language parity, not only to meet the mandates of the Department but also to advance the values of the Organization, including inclusiveness, transparency and accountability. Several speakers noted that it is important to disseminate information about the Organization’s work and the challenges facing humanity in as many languages as possible to reach as many people as possible and engage them in the work of the Organization. In addition to promoting inclusion and transparency, speakers noted that multilingualism helps to promote, preserve and protect linguistic and cultural diversity. Several delegations noted the recent observance of the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace and in this context they highlighted the role multilingualism plays in promoting an international, multilateral system based on international cooperation, partnership and inclusion.

5. Recognition and praise for the United Nations information centres was a consistent theme in many interventions. Speakers noted that the centres are an integral part of the Department, intended to reach people around the world in as many languages as possible, advance inclusion and empower people on the local level to address global issues. The centres help to reach people in nearly 100 languages, including Braille, and representatives called on the Department to continue efforts to strengthen their technical capacity. A number of delegations expressed optimism that the United Nations development system reform and closer cooperation between the centres and resident coordinators would strengthen coherent and strategic communications at the local level.

6. Several speakers expressed appreciation for the work of the Department in highlighting the important role of journalists and press freedom, including the observance of World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Speakers noted that attacks on the media are attacks on the cornerstones of our societies and target human rights and the fundamental freedoms that are at the heart of the Organization: solidarity, freedom, including freedom of expression, opinion and belief, pluralism, democracy, tolerance and human dignity. Freedom of the press safeguards our democracies and promotes tolerance, dialogue, peace and coexistence.

7. Several interventions touched on the growing issue of the misuse of communications technologies to spread misinformation, disinformation and fake news, and the need for the United Nations to serve as a source of factual, unbiased, dependable information for the world. One speaker noted that anyone with a mobile telephone and internet connection can make a positive impact by sharing factual information and empowering people, or wreak havoc by spreading misinformation. In this media landscape, the role of the Department of Global Communications is

critical, not only to counterbalance the misinformation and show how the United Nations responds to challenges faced by the international community, but also to act as a direct link between the Organization and people around the world. It was also noted that in order to tackle the challenges emanating from misinformation and fake news a global and systematic approach is required.

8. Many representatives noted with appreciation the continued work the Department has done to widely disseminate information on, and raise awareness about, the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in dozens of languages and using multimedia content.

9. Numerous representatives noted with appreciation the multilingual and multimedia strategic communications campaigns undertaken by the Department, including the Service and Sacrifice Campaign and the climate change campaign, “A Race We Can Win, A Race We Must Win”, and the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Speakers noted that these campaigns, and others, help to highlight in tangible ways for a global audience the work of the Organization, the commitment of Member States and the sacrifices made by peacekeepers in service to humanity. They also help to underscore the urgency of major global agenda items such as climate change and humanitarian issues. Many speakers commended the Department on its special information programme on the question of Palestine, while some delegations expressed the view that it offered a biased and misleading narrative of the situation in the region. Several speakers noted with appreciation the Department’s training programme for Palestinian journalists. A number of speakers highlighted the Department’s Remember Slavery Programme, its Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, and activities for the International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda as important initiatives that help to teach tolerance, understanding and compassion. Several representatives thanked the Department for its continued support of other United Nations offices in strengthening their outreach and communications capacity, including the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Department of Peace Operations.

10. While delegations voiced strong support for the Department’s strengthening of its new and social media capacity, many representatives urged the Department to continue to devote resources to traditional media such as print, television and radio. Legacy media remain the predominant means of communication in many countries and are also relevant for communicating with people of different generations. In addition, the digital divide between countries persists, and technical capacity limitations and high costs remain barriers to accessing new media platforms for many people; thus speakers urged the Department to continue to be inclusive in its approach and use a mix of new and traditional media in disseminating the principles and activities of the United Nations to the global public.

11. Several representatives commended the Department on its activities around youth engagement and youth empowerment, pointing to the growing number of members in United Nations Academic Impact, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as that initiative’s launch of university Sustainable Development Goal hubs to advance awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals in academia and increase student involvement at the local level to achieve the Goals in their communities. Speakers also voiced support for the work of the Office of the Special Envoy on Youth, which launched Youth 2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy to empower young people as agents of change and to amplify their voices in global issues. Representatives expressed appreciation for the Department’s organization of the first Model United Nations Youth Summit, in which more than 400 students from 30 countries participated.

12. Remarking on the ongoing financial constraints faced by the Organization as a whole, many representatives noted the serious limitations this placed on the Department's ability to accomplish its mandated tasks, especially in the area of non-official languages. Speakers encouraged the Department to seek out innovative methods of resource mobilization to meet the growing communications demands faced by the Department, and recommended that the Department scale up its partnerships with academia, private sector stakeholders and foundations as possible sources of funding to bridge budget shortfalls and continue to deliver on its mandates. Representatives pointed to partnerships such as those with Sanrio on the Hello Kitty campaign to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, airlines that air United Nations News programmes as part of their in-flight offerings, and universities that provide translations and undertake research to help to advance the 2030 Agenda as examples of stakeholder engagement that could yield financial and in-kind support for the work of the Department.

13. Speakers recognized the Department's ongoing efforts to foster innovation in the Department, including with digital outreach using social media zones at high-level events, the use of artificial intelligence for its chat bot, ActNow.Bot, to spur action on the Sustainable Development Goals, innovative partnerships such as the global Media Compact and the use of technology for technical capacity-building in information centres and offices away from Headquarters.

14. Responding to comments and queries made by Member States, the Under-Secretary-General reiterated the Department's commitment to multilingualism, but noted that the Secretary-General's request in the 2018–2019 budget for 18 additional posts and associated non-post resources to enable the Department to expand output in meetings coverage press releases, United Nations webcasts, social media, and television documentary production in all six official languages was not approved by the General Assembly. This reduction in resources significantly constrains the Department's capacity to enhance its multilingual products. Nonetheless, the Department continues to identify creative ways to promote and expand multilingual products and services, including consolidating United Nations News outputs to one website per language; managing apps that enable mobile access to United Nations news and social media content in eight languages; establishing media accreditation websites and associated application systems in multiple languages; and exploring new partnership models to extend the multilingual range of television products. The Under-Secretary-General thanked delegations for their support of the Department's reform efforts, which are designed to create a more modern, agile, nimble global communications service that takes advantage of new technologies and new ways of connecting with people. She acknowledged the gains the Department has made in social and new media, growing audiences and connecting with young people, but she stressed that the Department's continued evolution in how it engages the global public is not at the expense of traditional media forms such as print, radio and television, but rather an approach that looks for complementary ways of reaching audiences. The Under-Secretary-General thanked Member States for their continued support and guidance during this period of rapid change and reform and asked for their assistance in resource mobilization, whether through funding, providing junior professional officers, offering in-kind support or introducing the Department to potential partners in their countries; the Department is counting on Member States to help it to accelerate its modernization. In summary, she said that, at a time when multilateralism, the very foundation of the United Nations, is being questioned, the Organization wants and needs to be understood. For the United Nations communications to succeed, they must be clear and they must engage audiences in ways they understand, on platforms they use and in languages they comprehend. The Department will relentlessly pursue these goals and is relying on Member States for their support.