



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9090th meeting
Tuesday, 12 July 2022, 10 a.m.
New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. França/Mr. Costa Filho	(Brazil)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Hoxha
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Ms. Botchwey
	India	Mr. Kumar
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

United Nations peacekeeping operations

The key role of strategic communications for efficient peacekeeping

Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/539)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

United Nations peacekeeping operations

The key role of strategic communications for efficient peacekeeping

Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/539)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Guatemala, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Lithuania, Malta, Morocco, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand and Uruguay to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa, Force Commander, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Jenna Russo, Director of Research, International Peace Institute.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/539, which contains the text of a letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I would like to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other high-level representatives present today. Their presence underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Government of Brazil for organizing this discussion and I commend your vision and foresight, Mr. President, in choosing this topic. For the first time the Council is devoting a high-level debate to the critical role of strategic communications in peacekeeping operations, which is helping to highlight a fundamental point. Communications are not a side issue or an afterthought. More than ever, strategic communications are central to the success of all our work. As I said when I was sworn in as Secretary-General in 2016, we must be able to communicate better about what we do in ways that everybody understands. We need a substantial reform of our communications strategy, upgrading our tools and platforms to reach people around the world.

In the years since, we have embarked on an ambitious global communications strategy to do just that, and we are determined to do more. Our communications work, after all, is designed not just to inform but to engage audiences in support of the vital mission of the United Nations. Strategic communications in peacekeeping illustrate precisely why that is so crucial. The landscape in which our peacekeepers operate is more hazardous today than at any time in recent memory. Geopolitical tensions at the global level reverberate locally. Conflicts are more complex and multilayered. International discord often translates into heightened tensions on the ground, with warring parties disincentivized from making the necessary concessions for peace.

Peacekeepers are facing terrorists, criminals and armed groups and their allies, many of whom have access to powerful modern weapons and a vested interest in perpetuating the chaos in which they thrive. The weapons they wield are not just guns and explosives. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are increasingly being used as weapons of war. The aim is clear. It is to dehumanize the so-called other, threaten vulnerable communities — as well as peacekeepers themselves — and even give open licence to commit atrocities.

For all those reasons, strategic communications are critical across the spectrum of our peacekeeping mandate and crucial to achieving our mission to protect civilians and prevent violence; secure ceasefires and safeguard political settlements; investigate and report on human rights abuses and violations; advance the women and peace and security agenda and promote the

role of women as peacekeepers, peacemakers and peace leaders; and all the while ensure the safety and security of our peacekeepers and the communities they serve. That is why strategic communications are a top priority within the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative.

We know that disinformation is not just misleading. It is dangerous and potentially deadly. It fuels open violence against our personnel and partners. It transforms our blue flag from a symbol of security into a target for attack. A recent survey found that nearly half of all peacekeepers consider that misinformation and disinformation can severely affect mandate implementation and threaten their safety and security. We see more and more instances where fake news spreads like wildfire, hindering our missions in carrying out their life-saving and life-changing work. To give just one example, in Mali, a fake letter alleging that our peacekeepers were collaborating with armed groups was posted on Facebook. It went viral on WhatsApp and was picked up by the national media. That fake letter stirred up hostility and resentment towards our peacekeepers, making their vital task of protecting civilians that much harder. Strategic communications that are credible, accurate and human-centred are one of our best and most cost-effective instruments to counter that threat.

More than just defusing harmful lies, engaging in tailored two-way communication itself builds trust as well as political and public support. It strengthens understanding among the local populations of our missions and mandates, and in return strengthens our peacekeepers' understanding of the local populations' concerns, grievances, expectations and hopes. It can create a safe space for reconciliation and peacebuilding to work and provide women, young people and civil society with greater access to peace processes. But to be effective it must be grounded in evidence, based on verified data, open to dialogue, rooted in storytelling and delivered by credible messengers. I would now like to briefly outline six concrete actions that we are taking to improve strategic communications in peacekeeping.

First, we are adopting a whole-of-mission approach across uniformed and civilian components to foster a networked communication in the field. To that end, we are looking for military and police officers skilled in strategic communications. I encourage all contributing countries to provide personnel with these kinds of skill sets, because any effective strategic communications

strategy requires communications teams properly staffed and equipped to implement it.

Secondly, we are holding mission leaders accountable to own and lead strategic communications and ensure their full integration into all aspects of mission planning and decision-making.

Thirdly, we are providing guidance and training to missions, including collecting and sharing best practices.

Fourthly, we are working with partners, including technology and media companies and Member States, to identify and deploy the best tools to better detect and counter misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

Fifthly, we are continually monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of our information campaigns to ensure that we adjust as necessary, adapting our strategy to the tactical necessities of the specific contexts we operate in. While we live in an increasingly digital world, direct person-to-person communication often remains the most powerful way to build trust and counter false narratives. That is why our missions continue to conduct town hall-style gatherings in local communities with village elders, young people, women's groups and others to listen and learn.

Sixthly, we are deploying strategic communications to strengthen accountability and support efforts to end misconduct by personnel and partners, including combating sexual exploitation and abuse.

(spoke in French)

United Nations peacekeeping represents a remarkable enterprise of multilateralism and international solidarity. But for it to succeed amid new threats and mounting challenges, we must all play our part. All aspects of our operations must be adapted to respond to new realities. The field of communications is becoming more important every day. The United Nations must take a deliberate stand as an information actor in conflict environments. We must be seen as a trusted source of information by providing engaging, factual content, facilitating inclusive dialogue, demanding the removal of harmful speech, calling leaders to account and promoting peace and unity. Member States, especially those present on the ground alongside our peacekeepers, are crucial partners in that vital effort. Access to information is a human right, and in the places where our peacekeepers operate,

it can be a matter of life and death or the difference between peace and war. I look forward to working with the Security Council to strengthen our peacekeeping operations through improved strategic communications and to pursue our shared goal of peace.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Lieutenant General Affonso Da Costa.

Lieutenant General Affonso Da Costa: I am honoured to brief the Council at this high-level debate on strategic communications from the perspective of a Force Commander of a Chapter VII Mission working in a complex and rapidly changing environment such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). As we have been deepening our response to the security challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have identified several key areas that should be enhanced, one of which is communications. Now more than ever, an effective force depends on a strong communications strategy.

We operate in a country where successive surveys showed an overall poor perception among the population about the relevance of MONUSCO in improving its security. An anti-Mission sentiment prevails in certain parts of the country, which even prevents some of our deployments. Unfair speeches by several actors against the Mission put the safety of our peacekeepers at risk. The extensive use of social media by armed groups and other spoilers undermines the confidence in the United Nations. In respect to those militias, although asymmetric in nature, they use regular information warfare techniques. Fake news, diffused through messaging and social media, are difficult to distinguish from reality and will soon be virtually undetectable. Such emerging technologies are driving a fundamental change in the character of the war, and peace operations are already being affected.

The United Nations force should therefore evolve and adapt. One important part of our strategy is to communicate in person with stakeholders, from the village chief to the media and up to the national and regional armed forces leadership. Those voices play a crucial role in countering the criticism, explaining the aim and the limits of our mandate and acknowledging the validity of the United Nations Due Diligence Policy on Human Rights. We have some other good

practices to share — the use of language assistants during our patrols, the provision of French classes at the battalion level, the intensification of the use of official social media, radio broadcasting and regular meetings between the civilian and military branches to coordinate communication activities.

The other important step was the new force memorandum on the adoption of the StratCom concept. It led to the full inclusion of the information warfare perspective in all our military operations. To sum up, we will gain the narrative in support of our operations.

Although proud of our work, we know that more must be done. I mention the insufficient strength of female translators to our female engagement teams, the need for better predeployment training of our units on communication skills and the need for more and best qualified public-information and information-operation staff officers. Substantively, to counter the menace of fake news, the United Nations force should be a step ahead in that domain. It will seek new capabilities, such as those provided by a specialized military psychological operation unit.

But means and resources are not the sole response. Internally, it is to consider that the military campaign plan must adhere to the Mission's strategic communication plan. So, synergy is the word. The alignment inside the Mission and up to United Nations Headquarters is vital. Only by defining the selected messages and indicators to be conveyed are we going to be able to influence and, ultimately, change the behaviour of the audiences. For that reason, strategic communication is not an ordinary staff responsibility, but a command duty and a mission's leadership endeavour.

On behalf of the more than 13,000 peacekeepers in the service of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I thank you again, Mr. President, for this opportunity.

The President: I thank Lieutenant General Affonso Da Costa for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Russo.

Ms. Russo: On behalf of the International Peace Institute, I am honoured to be here today to brief the Security Council on the role of strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping. Over the past several years, the United Nations has made some important strides in its focus on strategic communications, and I want to echo the words of the Secretary-General as to

the centrality of strategic communications across the whole-of-mission work.

Despite some improvements, strategic communications are still too often understood as a unidirectional flow of information, most often centred around managing expectations or communicating the parameters of the mandate. While such efforts are no doubt important, I want to challenge us to imagine a more dynamic two-way flow of information that includes more listening and the use of storytelling and narratives that transform both the work of the mission and the context in which it operates. While the United Nations can, and should, relay messages that seek to build trust and protect the reputation of the mission, that is only one part of communicating, which also requires listening to, and learning from, the people whom the mission is there to serve.

I would like to use my time here today to touch briefly upon three points: the role of strategic communications in enhancing the protection of civilians; how to ensure that communication is not only gender sensitive, but also gender transformative; and the importance of active listening to centre the experiences of communities in peacekeeping.

Communicating with community members, belligerents and national and local leaders is central to planning and implementing protection-of-civilians mandates. That includes not only managing expectations by communicating the limitations of the mission's protection work, but also messaging on how populations can better access the protection interventions that are available, for example, mechanisms for reporting risks of violence or the presence of peacekeeper patrols protecting routes to gather water, firewood and other supplies, as well as community-based support from local partners, who play a critical role in providing sustainable protection.

Strategic communication can also be used to counter hate speech and misinformation or disinformation that is used to incite violence, inflame identity-based cleavages or mobilize individuals into armed groups. Mission radio programmes and local-level workshops can be an important tool in combating the effects of hate speech. Missions can also train journalists in conflict-sensitive journalism, as has been done in South Sudan, for example, where hate speech has been described as nearly as dangerous as the proliferation of weapons.

In addition to relaying information, the effective protection of civilians also requires active listening. Community members are the ones who are best positioned to understand the risks that they face and how to respond to those risks. Failing to listen to communities when planning the protection of civilians prevents the mission from building upon self-protection efforts that are already taking place, and even risks putting mission efforts at cross purposes with other protection actors, including community members themselves.

The second point that I want to touch on is engaging in strategic communications that are both gender sensitive and gender transformative. Gender-sensitive communications require tailoring messages to the needs and concerns of women, as well as men, and considering potential barriers to women's access to information, including access to radios or cell phones, literacy levels or whether the venues chosen for in-person convenings are considered safe or accessible. Improving women's access to information and addressing their specific concerns related to the mission mandate and the broader peace process are central to achieving the full and equal participation of women and the fulfilment of the women and peace and security agenda.

While such efforts should be considered a minimum standard in a mission's approach to strategic communications, missions can go beyond being gender sensitive to also being gender transformative. Gender-transformative communications use narratives and storytelling to promote gender equality and combat harmful stereotypes and behaviours, for example, by highlighting stories and images that expand traditional understandings of gender roles, address harmful gender practices and use information to increase women's access to power and resources.

Finally, strategic communications in peacekeeping should move beyond a unidirectional flow of relaying information to a dynamic dialogue between missions and communities. Communication is not only about informing; it is about being informed. Every element of a mission's mandate requires an awareness of the context in which the mission is operating. Those contexts are complex, and each individual region and village has a unique story to tell.

Community engagement is now a regular part of peacekeeping mandates. Yet, in my own research with civil society organizations, I often hear that peacekeepers are perceived as maintaining a "power

over” relationship with community members, rather than a “power with” relationship. There is a sense among some people that peacekeepers feel that they have only knowledge to give, rather than knowledge to gain, with an attitude of certainty rather than curiosity.

I would like to suggest that, as the United Nations continues to grow and develop its work in this area, that it focus as much on the listening aspect of communicating as on the speaking aspect, centring the stories of individuals and acts of everyday peace. Storytelling is the oldest art form of communication. Stories make us think, make us feel. They take us to a place where facts and figures are denied access. Data and analytics may persuade people, but they rarely inspire them to act for the sake of peace against all odds. Let us therefore not lose the power of the individual story and the role that it can play in informing and inspiring our work around the world.

The President: I thank Ms. Russo for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for External Relations of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

I am greatly thankful to Secretary-General António Guterres, Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa, Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Ms. Jenna Russo, from the International Peace Institute, for their invaluable and insightful briefings.

Peacekeeping has proven time and again to be one of the most effective tools available to the United Nations for the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. Practitioners and academics alike agree that peacekeeping operations are instrumental to containing conflict, protecting civilians and rebuilding State institutions. The Council must continue to enhance peacekeeping while guaranteeing the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Brazil is a traditional contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Since 1956, when it first sent troops to a peacekeeping mission, the First United Nations Emergency Force, Brazil has participated in 41 peacekeeping operations, deploying approximately 55,000 military and police personnel to serve under the United Nations flag around the globe.

Over those years, our practical experience confirmed that efficient peacekeeping is about not

only resources and mandates, but also communication. Effectively communicating a peacekeeping mission’s objectives and means has a strong impact on its success. In simple terms, more dialogue is needed between peacekeepers and leadership, Government authorities, relevant stakeholders and local communities.

Brazil has a long and recognized history of applying strategic communications in peacekeeping missions, particularly in the case of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. Our military and police personnel — dedicated men and women — have consistently cultivated and built dialogue and trust. Those are two essential — but rather rare, these days — elements to achieving international peace and security.

We therefore decided to organize this high-level open debate on peacekeeping operations, with a focus on strategic communications. This issue has never before been specifically discussed by the Council. It is high time we prioritize strategic communications in the context of peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeepers nowadays operate in ever more volatile security environments and are tasked with extraordinarily complex mandates. Be it in Mali, Lebanon or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, strategic communications have an enabler and multiplier effect across all areas of peacekeeping operations. They are critical to securing the political and public support that peacekeeping missions need to effectively implement their mandates. They are essential to the protection of civilians and to the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda. They are a great tool to draw attention and collect feedback from local communities. They also help to promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law; combat misinformation, xenophobia, racism and discrimination; and prevent and fight sexual and gender-based violence. Ultimately, they help create a safe environment for peacekeepers. For those reasons, we firmly believe that strategic communications must be a pivotal element for United Nations peacekeeping.

Our briefers gave us a comprehensive assessment of what has been done so far. I note with great appreciation the efforts undertaken by Secretary-General Guterres and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix to mobilize stakeholders in support of more effective United Nations peacekeeping. The Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its implementation strategy made strategic

communications a top priority, which we welcome. The field initiatives in that regard, as described by the Force Commander of MONUSCO, are also highly encouraging. However, we need further improvement.

In that regard, I would like to highlight four pressing needs.

First, there must be a clear strategy on communications in peacekeeping operations. In that connection, the Council should encourage the United Nations Secretariat to continue to develop a strategy, as well as related policies and guidelines. They should be implemented at all levels and across all components of peacekeeping operations.

Secondly, we must improve our capabilities. The Security Council, the General Assembly and troop and police contributors should seek further improvements in the communication capabilities of both United Nations Headquarters and the missions. Strategic communications and public information teams in missions can be strengthened through better recruitment and the allocation of adequate resources. Relevant new technologies should be used to their full potential.

Thirdly, we must ensure adequate training. Effective strategic communications rely heavily on the training of all peacekeepers across components. Predeployment training on strategic communications for all civilian, military and police officers would have a significant impact on engagement with local stakeholders.

Last, but not least, there must be a cultural shift promoted by leaders. Mission leadership must spearhead a move to institutionalize a culture of strategic communications across components in peacekeeping operations. It is up to mission leaders to integrate strategic communications into planning, decision-making and the implementation of daily activities.

Let me say it again — strategic communications are essential for a successful peacekeeping operation. It is an operational necessity and a core capability for peacekeeping operations. We hope that the strategic review of strategic communications to be requested by the Council will provide an accurate assessment of existing capabilities and gaps and put forward concrete proposals to address persistent challenges. The Security Council must act upon the conclusions of the review and prioritize strategic communications when negotiating peacekeeping mandates.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana.

Ms. Botchwey (Ghana): I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this high-level open debate on strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. The choice of topic reflects Brazil's commitment and continuing contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his statement, as well as the Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the perspectives they have brought to the debate through their briefings. Last, but by no means least, I thank Jenna Russo, Director of Research at the International Peace Institute for her additional perspective, which also brings in a gender dimension.

Today, more than at any other time, peacekeeping is being called upon to deliver outcomes in conflict situations that are ever more complex. Those situations include settings where the parties to the conflict either are unwilling to reach a political settlement or have no clarity on their political objectives. In addition, peacekeeping has to contend with a growing host of asymmetric and irregular forces whose methods are hate, division, terror and violence.

In such a challenging context, United Nations peacekeeping operations have been caught in the crosshairs of the disinformation propaganda of conflicting parties, in the misinformation efforts of local stakeholders and in the instrumentalization of hate speech to create distrust among local populations and undermine or complicate the efforts to protect civilian populations. The use of digital technologies has amplified the scope of such negative actions, which impede peace operations and peace support operations.

In too many instances, civilian populations have been attacked because hate speech has been enabled, cooperation required from local communities to protect them has been withheld as a result of disinformation and misinformation campaigns that have removed the pillars of trust between peacekeeping missions and such communities, and the safety and security

of peacekeeping personnel have been compromised through disinformation, as segments of the population are radicalized against the very troops deployed to ensure the safety of their communities.

Ghana is therefore deeply concerned about the significant increase in misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) activity in peacekeeping settings, especially on the African continent, where 6 of the 12 peacekeeping missions are hosted. The scale of systematic, synchronized and orchestrated acts has reached levels that negatively affect the efforts of the United Nations, shape the conflict environment and influence public opinion against United Nations peacekeeping operations.

It is in this context, and mindful of the indispensable stabilizing role of United Nations peacekeeping operations, that Ghana, a pioneering and major police- and troop-contributing country, supports all efforts to turbocharge strategic communications as an important enabler and multiplier for the reduction of violence and the sustenance of peace. In view of the emerging challenges and the pressing need to build upon the progress since the Brahimi report of the early 2000s (S/2000/809) and the 2015 outcomes of the Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) as well as the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, Ghana would like to make four points in support of further deepening and embedding strategic communications in peacekeeping missions.

First, strategic communication is a strategic necessity and should continue to remain an integral and core part of peacekeeping. It needs to be reinforced through strong mission leadership as a whole-of-mission approach that cuts across the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of mandate delivery in all missions. Ghana would therefore support new and additional efforts that will help the United Nations system to review existing policies and adapt innovative approaches in order to reinforce and mainstream strategic-communications activities into mandated missions.

Secondly, in the light of the digital scope and reach of MDH and its growing adverse impact on peacekeeping operations, it is necessary to support and encourage the further deployment of capacity and digital assets for strategic communications that have a direct impact on the protection of civilians and the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda. We

therefore urge continued support for the efforts of the Department of Global Communications to embed capacity in peacekeeping missions, for the effective support of their strategic-communication function.

Thirdly, effective strategic communications entail two-way traffic. In addition to the combined use of a wide variety of communication methods, including traditional media, digital platforms and social media, we support the institutionalization of outreach engagements with local communities in mandated missions to sensitize them on the relevant mission's mandate. Such outreach overcomes any digital divide and facilitates engagement with community leaders, civil society actors and local authorities. It also enables key stakeholders and constituents to appreciate mandates.

Fourthly, Ghana believes that, considering the desperate situation in many peacekeeping contexts, quick-impact projects offer some of the best opportunities for United Nations peacekeeping missions to convey their commitment to the safety and welfare of the civilian populations they serve. Additional efforts and resources to support such projects should therefore be made in support of the strategic-communication functions that are required in peacekeeping missions.

In conclusion, my delegation commends the proactive efforts of the Security Council to find ways to ensure effective communication strategies and appropriate technologies in support of peacekeeping operations. I reiterate Ghana's unflinching support for any initiative that will enable United Nations peacekeeping missions and police- and troop-contributing countries to establish appropriate frameworks and policy guidelines for strategic communication in peacekeeping. How successful we are in addressing the issue of anti-United Nations propaganda that encourages attacks against peacekeepers and United Nations personnel in the field would influence, to a large extent, the continuing battle to uphold the authority of the United Nations and the enduring values of multilateralism and our Charter.

Mr. Kumar (India): Let me begin by congratulating Brazil for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also convey our appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Carlos Alberto Franco França, Foreign Minister of Brazil, for presiding over today's open debate on the important and pertinent issue of strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. I thank Secretary-General

António Guterres for his valuable remarks. I also thank the Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa, and the Director of Research, International Peace Institute, Ms. Jenna Russo, for their respective briefings.

On behalf of my delegation, I offer tribute to all the men and women in United Nations peacekeeping operations who continue to defend peace through their professionalism, dedication and courage and to those who have made the supreme sacrifice in serving the cause of peace.

India has been a pioneer in United Nations peacekeeping since its inception, having deployed more than a quarter of a million troops, in as many as 49 United Nations peacekeeping missions. In keeping with this tradition, we have today more than 5,500 personnel deployed across nine missions. Serving under the blue flag, 175 gallant Indian soldiers have made the supreme sacrifice, the largest number among troop-contributing countries.

United Nations peacekeeping operations have, over the years, evolved to become multidimensional missions, operating in difficult security environments, particularly in Africa. Peacekeeping operations are increasingly called upon not only to maintain peace and security but also to facilitate political processes, protect civilians, disarm combatants, support elections, protect and promote human rights and restore the rule of law. The expansion of terrorist groups in Africa has added another challenging dimension to the already complex peacekeeping matrix.

In recent years, peacekeeping has been facing another new challenge mounted by inimical forces and terrorist groups, which are increasingly using information technology to target blue helmets. There have been growing misinformation and disinformation campaigns adversely affecting the activities of missions and putting lives of peacekeepers in danger.

There are also misplaced expectations among local communities about peacekeepers and regarding the mandate to protect civilians. Such misunderstandings are further aggravated by the use of ambiguous terminology such as “robust mandate”, “robust posture” or even “offensive posture” in the peacekeeping mandate resolutions of the Security Council, creating

room for speculative and arbitrary interpretations of those mandates.

Besides, missions with so-called robust mandates have become the targets of terrorist and armed groups. The empirical data shows that while the situation pertaining to the protection of civilians in conflict zones has not improved, attacks on peacekeepers have increased manifold, leading to an exponential growth in fatalities. Indeed, one third of all malicious activities against peacekeepers have taken place in the past decade alone.

It is therefore inevitable that peacekeeping missions should address those issues by engaging local communities, building trust and helping them understand what peacekeepers can do for them and what they cannot, including explaining the responsibilities that primarily lie with the host State. We believe that a flow of authentic information is crucial to addressing misinformation. Communication through the right messengers is also critical. Since disinformation comes in multiple shades, targeted strategies for preparedness and response pertaining to various forms of disinformation need to be developed. Therefore, an effective communication strategy aimed at achieving those goals is sine qua non for peace operations.

In that regard, allow me to submit the following eight observations.

First, the starting step of an effective strategic communication of peace operations begins in the Security Council, with the drafting of comprehensible and implementable mandates. A mandate that lucidly delineates intent, minimizes ambiguity and correlates tasks and resources will go a long way towards clarifying mission purpose. The Council needs to avoid terminologies and formulations while crafting mission mandates that generate false hopes and expectations.

Second, the goals and objectives of missions’ strategic communications should clearly be defined in line with the mandate of peacekeeping missions. Extra-mandated communications can lead to confusion and friction with host State authorities. Further, the main objective of strategic communication should be to improve the understanding of mandates among local populations and enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Third, strategic communication should be uniform and harmonious across all platforms of communication

as well as within all organs of the peacekeeping mission. A harmonious and coherent mission communication strategy helps peace operations to not only convey their message clearly but receive feedback from the population they serve and further improve mandate implementation.

Fourth, the principles of peacekeeping, particularly the consent of the host State, should be fully respected. No strategic communication in any manner should try to encroach upon the sovereignty of the host State or undermine its interests. Trust and coordination between the mission and the host State is essential for success.

Fifth, strategic communication should also sensitize the local population to the need for the safety of peacekeepers as well as accountability for crimes committed against them. At the mission level, concrete steps should be taken to ensure the safety and security of mission personnel, camps and infrastructures.

Sixth, situational awareness empowers strategic communication. Platforms such as UNITE Aware, which our delegation assisted the United Nations in implementing last year, are key enablers for strategic communication. That helps in the prioritization of needs and the direction of efforts. In 2021, India contributed \$1.6 million towards the rolling out of the UNITE Aware platform as pilot projects across four peacekeeping missions.

Seventh, the role of women peacekeepers cannot be overemphasized in the effective implementation of strategic communication. India takes pride in the fact that the first-ever all-women peacekeeping contingent was from India and stationed in Liberia and is remembered even to this day in that country. Women peacekeepers have been instrumental in enhancing the impact of peacekeeping, be it in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Eighth, the need to address the insecurity of local populations caused by terrorist groups cannot be ignored. It is important that mission strategic communication be supplemented by measures aimed at improving the capacities of the security forces of a host State by providing them with adequate training and logistical support as well as building the resilience of the local population through peacebuilding efforts to improve their livelihoods and provide for their basic needs.

I would like to conclude by saying that the safety and security of peacekeepers should be an utmost priority for all of us. When the Council crafts peacekeeping mandates, we need to keep that cardinal principle in our minds. We cannot let the bearers of the blue flag be put in harm's way without providing them the resources necessary to tackle such threats. With that belief, in 2022 we have provided support of \$310,000 for a strategic communication project aimed at enhancing the role of women in peace and political processes. Several quick-impact projects in southern Lebanon were funded by India and executed by the Indian battalion in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in areas such as health, education, waste disposal and electricity. We also deployed veterinary officers in UNMISS, over and above our commitment in Mission areas where pastoral communities and livestock form the major basis of the community's economic activities.

India, as one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries, remains committed to supporting all efforts to enhance strategic communications in peacekeeping.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I would like to thank Brazil for having organized this open debate on such an important and innovative topic as well as your personal championship of this issue, Mr. President. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for sharing the efforts of the United Nations to integrate strategic communications into all areas of its work. I would also like to thank the excellent briefers today, Lieutenant General Marcos de Sá Affonso da Costa, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Force Commander, and Ms. Jenna Russo, Director of Research at the International Peace Institute, for their comprehensive briefings.

Strategic communications are undeniably a key component of peacekeeping, as we have heard today.

When skilfully used, they are a powerful tool that helps to connect peacekeeping operations with all stakeholders, amplify constructive messages, address misinformation and disinformation and contribute to the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

Effective strategic communications can also enhance information-sharing, which in turn improves the implementation of the mandate. But perhaps the most meaningful impact of strategic communications is that they provide an opportunity for local communities

to directly engage with peacekeeping missions, thereby strengthening local ownership of peace efforts and as a result their sustainability.

In those critical ways, strategic communications can maximize the impact of peacekeeping. We must therefore keep in mind that developing effective strategic communications in peacekeeping actually begins with the Security Council. As Council members, we have the responsibility to ensure that all mission mandates outline clear objectives and provide missions with the assets needed to develop effective strategic communications.

In that regard, the United Arab Emirates would like to highlight the following elements.

First, the Council must treat strategic communications as an element that is central not only to the planning of peacekeeping operations but also to the Council's own work. Efforts to adapt Council messaging to local contexts and ensure that it is understood clearly can significantly improve its ability to bring about positive change with regard to the issues on the agenda. In addition, press statements and Council outcomes, in particular those responding to local dynamics, should be systematically translated into local languages.

Secondly, the Council and the United Nations should address the pernicious effects of disinformation and misinformation campaigns against peace operations. The targeting of United Nations peacekeepers does not happen in a vacuum and is not just the result of the actions of terrorist groups. It is often the direct result of a hostile environment that spreads misinformation and disinformation about peacekeeping missions. Troop- and police-contributing countries are making important sacrifices to deliver on our mandates. Our responsibility is to ensure their protection.

Thirdly, peacekeeping requires strong collaboration with the communities they serve to achieve effective outcomes. Two-way communication is indeed essential to ensure that missions are not simply sharing information with local communities but also being informed by them. To that end, the Council must ensure that peacekeeping personnel regularly engage with host Governments, local partners and civil society at large in order to better understand and tailor peacekeeping approaches to local dynamics and different audiences.

In addition, the leadership of peacekeeping missions must integrate strategic communications in

their work on mandated tasks, such as the protection of civilians, strategies for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, support for the women and peace and security agenda, and responses to sexual and gender-based violence. That includes ensuring that accountability is established for acts of sexual exploitation and abuse and that peacekeepers are held to the highest standards of accountability by the United Nations.

We welcome the fact that those links are increasingly being established in United Nations policies and guidance for peacekeeping operations and encourage further efforts on that front. In doing so, peacekeeping missions also need to ensure that there is a gender-responsive approach to all strategic communications or — to use Ms. Russo's terminology — to employ a gender-transformative approach through narratives and context-relevant storytelling.

From inception to conclusion, strategic communications can help create conditions for the more efficient implementation of peacekeeping mandates. They can also contribute to a successful transition by minimizing the impact of a mission's withdrawal. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that when correctly leveraged, strategic communications can act as an enabler for peace.

We thank Brazil once again for highlighting this important topic.

Ms. Juul (Norway): Let me also start by thanking Brazil for convening the first-ever debate on this important topic. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his important remarks and the two other briefers for their very informative statements.

Norway is deeply worried that armed groups and other spoilers seem to be increasing the use of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech directed at United Nations peacekeeping operations. That undermines the ability of operations to fulfil their mandates and endangers the safety and security of peacekeepers. The Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative has identified strategic communications as a priority. The situation just described therefore demonstrates the merits of that focus. We must help missions manage their risks, using targeted messaging, dialogue with local communities and host-Governments, and increased digital presence and communications expertise.

This issue also highlights the importance of general messaging by missions about their mandates. Missions must be able to successfully reach local populations and manage expectations about what they can and cannot do, at least with regard to the protection of civilians. We therefore need to invest in increasing the capabilities of strategic communications within missions, based on a whole-of-mission approach and grounded in the mission's political objectives.

There is also an opportunity for using strategic communications to advance the women and peace and security agenda. Through gender-specific engagement with local communities and women's groups, peacekeepers can help promote women's meaningful participation in political processes. That is vital. Without their inclusion, those processes are more likely to fail.

Norway looks forward to the finalization of the communications strategy, as well as the policy guidelines, tools and training for addressing misinformation and disinformation, that are currently being developed by the Department of Peace Operations. Norway also supports the proposal for a review of strategic communications across United Nations peacekeeping operations in order to identify gaps and challenges, as well as measures to address them.

Lastly, we once again reiterate the importance of today's discussion. It is the responsibility of this organ to strengthen the focus on strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. The safety and security of peacekeepers and the people they are there to help protect depend on it.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Brazil for convening this meeting and the briefers for their presentations.

Strategic communications for peacekeeping operations must be used for the protection of civilians and the implementation of their mandates. They can ensure that real-time information is provided to populations on their security environment. They must contribute to the effective functioning of early-warning and early-response networks. In taking advantage of the potential of digital technology, strategic communications can help combat hate speech, the incitement to violence and attempts at misinformation and disinformation.

With respect to the host State, strategic communications must nurture mutual trust and

regular dialogue in order to ensure the effectiveness and acceptance of the peacekeeping operation. Information-sharing with regard to the situation on the ground and stakeholders' expectations contributes to the implementation of mandates. The work of listening to and educating local authorities and communities must be pursued in order to strengthen partnerships and protect civilians. In that regard, I commend the exemplary role in providing reliable information to the population played by Radio Okapi within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mikado FM in Mali.

Peacekeeping operations are facing increasingly hostile environments and are directly targeted, including in the area of communications. Massive misinformation and disinformation campaigns are being conducted in the Central African Republic and Mali. The campaigns carried out in social network campaigns are intended to undermine the credibility and reputation of the Blue Helmets. They make the operational environment more complex.

Measures have been taken to strengthen the security of the Blue Helmets and improve their image on the ground. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan has developed a WhatsApp group with influencers to respond to misinformation and disinformation concerning its work. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali trains journalists in fact-checking and broadcasts messages in local languages to prevent attempts at misinformation and disinformation. Such initiatives must be increased. To strengthen them, France is counting on the implementation of the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping. It will enable capacity-building within operations aimed at detecting, analysing and responding to potential disinformation elements.

Lastly, the United Nations must have adequate means to develop strategic communications. We should prioritize an integrated approach to communications, mission by mission, at every level, structured around shared messages, especially in promoting the women and peace and security and youth and peace and security agendas. An integrated approach will also help to strengthen coordination between the military, police and civilian components of operations. That approach should extend to all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes when a peace operation is in transition or in a drawdown phase.

Peace operations must be provided with the necessary means. Mastering information and communications technology is essential, especially if we are to reach the youngest members of populations. The Secretary-General can count on France's support in that regard. We provided nearly \$700,000 in 2021 and 2022 for digital peacekeeping communications. But it is the women and men on the ground who are the faces and voices of peace operations above all. Their communications must be proactive, adapted to the environment and in the local language. It is essential to train personnel for that, and that work is primarily the responsibility of troop-contributing countries. France will continue to support multilingualism in peace operations, in particular through the training of instructors for French-speaking contingents in partnership with the International Organization of la Francophonie.

There is still much to be done. France will continue to support the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, including by harnessing the potential of strategic communications for peace.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for Brazil's leadership on this topic. I also thank our briefers today. I would like to join others in paying tribute to all peacekeepers, especially those who have lost their lives in the service of peace.

Today's debate underlines the fact that effective strategic communications are essential enablers of mandate delivery. They help to build trust and amplify the voices of those building and sustaining peace. They are also vital to the safety and security of peacekeepers. As we heard from the Secretary-General, almost half of peacekeepers have said that disinformation hinders mandate delivery and threatens their safety and security. I would like to make three points in that regard.

First, strategic communications should be a whole-of-mission activity, integrated into planning and mandate implementation and measured by the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System. They should leverage digital technologies to keep pace with changing communication landscapes. We support efforts to that end under the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative and the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping.

Secondly, all actors should refrain from anti-United Nations misinformation and disinformation, which undermine mandate delivery and the safety and

security of peacekeepers, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Mali. Since the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group deployed in Mali, we have seen a significant increase in the volume of dangerous lies being spread about the mandate and activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). That puts peacekeepers' lives at increased risk in an already volatile environment. It sows distrust, which discourages local communities from sharing information with MINUSMA, and that hinders the Mission's ability to prevent attacks on civilians and peacekeepers alike. The continued spread of disinformation and misinformation will lead to more lives lost. There is no excuse for such activities.

Thirdly, I would like to underline the importance of strategic communications in supporting the women and peace and security agenda. I am proud of the efforts that British peacekeepers and their German counterparts have been making in MINUSMA in that regard. They have met with local women's associations and helped local radio stations reach out to female audiences. That has helped build mutual understanding and given Malian women platforms for their peace advocacy.

In conclusion, I would like to welcome the six actions the Secretary-General set out and stress that the United Kingdom will continue to offer its full support to United Nations peacekeeping, including in mainstreaming an innovative, modern and integrated approach to strategic communications.

Mrs. Ngyema Ndong (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Brazilian presidency for taking the initiative to convene today's high-level public debate. It is particularly important to my country, Gabon, which has been involved in peacekeeping efforts in the Central African subregion for several years. This meeting is of particular interest because it provides us with an opportunity to address strategic communications, one of the seven priority areas of the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative. I welcome the Secretary-General's advocacy. He has always advocated diplomacy for peace while making reviews of peacekeeping operations one of the pillars of United Nations reform. We also thank today's briefers for their excellent and informative briefings.

More than 60 years after the deployment of the first generation of Blue Helmets, there can be no doubt that over the years, peacekeeping operations have

become an essential tool in United Nations efforts to maintain peace and security throughout the world. They play a crucial role in a global context that is more than ever marked by numerous crises and new threats to international peace and security. The increasingly complex and changing environment requires the United Nations to continually reinvent itself in order to provide responses that are commensurate with the security challenges it faces. Opting for solid, effective strategic communications that are adapted to the situation on the ground therefore becomes a necessity. It is essential to ensure that such communications take into account the environment in which peacekeeping missions operate so as to help start a constructive dialogue with the host country and build the trust needed for the effective implementation of peacekeeping mandates.

Effective peacekeeping operations cannot be achieved without the buy-in and support of local populations and communities. They must be assured and convinced of the relevance of peacekeeping mandates. The support of local populations increases the likelihood of countering asymmetric threats as effectively as possible while fostering civilians' unwillingness to provide support to armed groups. Such communication efforts must be combined with other outreach activities to create a positive perception of United Nations forces and ensure better protection for peacekeeping personnel. Community support networks are therefore major assets in optimizing actions on the ground and enhancing the effectiveness of mandates.

Peacekeeping operations now rely more than ever before on a solid ecosystem of technology and innovation that not only strengthens tools for conflict management and prevention but also enhances situational awareness, improves support provided to missions and facilitates a more robust implementation of United Nations peacekeeping mandates, often in complex environments.

It is clear that the world is at a tipping point towards the robotization or digitization of our societies and governance, both nationally and globally, in particular with respect to our rights and obligations. Unfortunately, that technological evolution is not exclusively beneficial — it brings with it consequences and sources of concern, like any knowledge that is not subject to the guidance of the conscience.

Often considered a catalyst or force multiplier, technology can become a factor that exacerbates

global conflicts, such as in the form of hate speech, radicalization and incitement to discrimination and violence in all forms, which are disseminated via the Internet and primarily target vulnerable women and young people. Such techniques are used today to spread terror and fear and perpetuate crises.

It is against that backdrop that we reiterate our support for the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. My country of course reaffirms its support for the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, which makes the accelerated implementation of the women and peace and security agenda a cross-cutting concern and includes the need to establish effective strategic communications among its priority areas.

We also call for the principle of multilingualism to be taken into account in peacekeeping operations, as it facilitates communication and builds trust between local populations and troops deployed on the ground, while facilitating peacebuilding actions.

In conclusion, Gabon welcomes the strengthening of cooperation between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations, particularly in the context of crisis resolution on the continent. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in the Sudan and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are excellent examples of that cooperation.

AMISOM's experience in particular shows that when backed by predictable funding and adequate logistical support, the African Union is capable of conducting peace operations under even the most difficult conditions. That example should serve the new African Transition Mission in Somalia, as well as the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and future missions under African leadership.

In a regional context increasingly dominated by the terrorist threat, a United Nations-AU partnership consolidated by appropriate funding is essential if the African Union's actions on the ground are to be effective and yield the expected results.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me start by thanking Brazil for organizing today's debate, the first-ever on strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. I also thank Lieutenant General Affonso Da Costa and Ms. Russo for their valuable information.

I would like to make five brief points.

First, every day we see the spread of misinformation and disinformation worldwide affecting our daily lives. Unfortunately, that scourge is also affecting the security sector, impacting civilians and United Nations troops on the ground as well. Albania fully endorses the Action for Peacekeeping Plus priority 6, on strategic communications, and believes that it helps to minimize disinformation and misinformation as obstacles to peace.

Misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, propaganda and conspiracy theories have disastrous consequences, as we have seen on more than one occasion. Disinformation undermines facts, hides crimes and distorts realities. Therefore, careful communication is key to properly and securely implementing the mandates of peacekeeping operations on the ground.

Secondly, the transparency of United Nations operations in every aspect of every field of activity, including peacekeeping operations, is crucial for maintaining and consolidating trust and support for the work of the Organization. We welcome every step taken to shed light on all cases of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Blue Helmets must fulfil their mission with due diligence in order to protect civilians and not take advantage of those that they should help and protect.

We commend the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and all United Nations missions that are prioritizing transparency in that regard, with concrete measures undertaken to ensure accountability.

That leads to my third point, which concerns support for the development of a strategy for digital transformation. We believe that there is room to improve communications by expanding it in the digital space, as well as for the United Nations as a whole. Enhancing the safety and security of peacekeepers with new means is much easier and can be implemented more swiftly with the proper use of digital technology.

Fourthly, the protection of civilians is the core task of each mission — it is a priority and a must. Therefore, it requires continued and improved communication to successfully challenge the prejudices that are detrimental to peace operations and win the trust of communities.

In that context, we highlight the importance of gender-sensitive communications and the women and peace and security agenda. We commend peacekeeping operations for supporting women's full, equal and meaningful participation in local conflict prevention and resolution and political transitions, promoting women's work and strengthening women's voices. Given the specifics of women and peace and security mandates for peacekeeping operations, it is of paramount importance to raise awareness among the general public about how essential the women and peace and security agenda is for peacekeeping operations.

My fifth and final point relates to communications between peacekeepers and local communities. Again, I refer to the case of MONUSCO, where the United Nations works with the security forces to warn local authorities and police of the slightest security threat.

Prevention saves lives and in order to ensure prevention good communication is instrumental. The use of technology for dialogue with communities should be encouraged as a best practice to maintain dialogue and should feed into the political process, wherever possible. Therefore, we support the call for the Secretary-General to provide a review of strategic communications across United Nations peacekeeping operations, including at the Headquarters level.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I want to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil to the Chamber today and thank Brazil for organizing this discussion. We certainly look forward to the adoption of a presidential statement later this morning. I would also like to thank our briefers this morning.

Ireland shares with Brazil and many others here today a deep and long-standing commitment to peacekeeping.

The Security Council deploys peacekeepers to the most difficult contexts. Too many of them have made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of peace. Therefore, we around this table have a real responsibility to ask what more we can do to ensure that peacekeepers come home safely. Effective strategic communications is an essential tool in that regard.

The deployment of a peacekeeping mission should send a clear message of hope to populations on the ground in conflict environments. That message should make it clear that the international community stands with them and that we are working to give them the

chance of a better life in their own countries. But for such missions to succeed, it is critical that they be able to communicate effectively and systematically with local communities, host countries and all parties to conflicts.

The importance of strategic communications is clearly reflected in the Secretary-General's own Action for Peacekeeping Plus implementation strategy. Peacekeeping operations are deployed to the most complex environments, often with competing narratives around conflict. Clearly explaining to populations on the ground — in particular those that are hard to reach or most at risk of harm — why peacekeepers are there and the role they can play, as well as managing expectations in that regard, is critical. That requires a concerted whole-of-United Nations approach, from the highest strategic levels to the operational and tactical levels.

We have learned through experience the hugely negative impact that misinformation, disinformation and hate speech can have on both peacekeepers and the civilians they are sent to protect. Put simply, effective strategic communications enhances force protection and can reduce violence and help sustain peace.

Irish troops serving in United Nations peacekeeping missions have always placed strong emphasis on outreach operations to ensure effective communications with the local authorities and populations. In the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, for example, that is done through key leader and community engagement, as well as through civil and military cooperation projects. In the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, it is done through quick-impact projects.

Strategic communications cannot take place in a knowledge vacuum. Peacekeeping intelligence should inform coherent strategic communications strategies. That, in turn, will help to enhance the safety and security of our peacekeepers, while also improving mandate implementation.

We see that as particularly important for the protection of civilians. We must take every opportunity to raise our voice in the name of those who cannot raise their own. We must oppose narratives of hate; we must refute misinformation and disinformation; and we must ensure a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. Creating protective environments requires engagement with local actors, including young people, as well as the promotion of

women's participation and leadership. We want to underline and commend the work being done in some of the most challenging contexts to promote women's role in peace and security.

We believe that strategic communications are particularly important during United Nations transitions. It is vital that transition planning incorporate the design of an effective communications strategy to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of a reconfigured United Nations presence are clearly understood by all, particularly the local population. It is vital that no group feel left behind and that we see engagement with civil society as key.

As I conclude, I also want to note that the digital revolution has fundamentally changed our world, of course, and, importantly, how audiences receive their information. Peacekeeping operations are no exception and must adapt to those new realities. The effective use of strategic communications can play a significant role in mandate implementation and in ensuring that our peacekeepers and those they are deployed to protect are safer. As a country with a long-standing record of contributing to peacekeeping, Ireland is fully committed to building strategic communications capacity in peacekeeping. We thank the Brazilian presidency again for raising that issue.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his remarks, as well as the Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lieutenant General Affonso da Costa, and Ms. Jenna Russo for their briefings.

As a troop- and police-contributing country for nearly five decades, Kenya appreciates the nature of the audience locally, regionally and internationally that strategic communication targets. Whenever possible, our personnel embrace communication with local communities and other critical stakeholders. We believe that most peacekeeping missions, with a change of approach and an injection of relevant expertise, can turn strategic communications into an even more potent tool for furthering their mandate implementation.

Allow me to make three recommendations, which, if acted on, would enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping.

First, and perhaps most important, missions must internalize the fact that operations are themselves forms of communication or miscommunication. The planning of every operation, ranging from the protection of civilians to offensive operations as part of peace enforcement, must have communications expertise involved from the start. The decision-making on the operation's aim and conduct and the attendant risks in terms of the message that reaches the relevant audiences must be informed by that prioritization of strategic communications.

Secondly, a mindset that prioritizes communications is especially relevant in operational areas that have Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) groups. Those groups are sophisticated in their use of communications. In fact, it can be argued that even their use of terrorism is itself a form of communication. They seek to control the perception and reaction of different audiences, ranging from the local population to national leadership and international audiences. They take constant aim at the continuity and legitimacy of Government, using cultural and religious texts deployed to achieve maximum effect at the local level. Their use of communications yields them recruits. It justifies their campaigns. It characterizes the State as unable to protect civilians and as an illegitimate actor pursuing aims that are antithetical to the values and interests of the populace. In time, it has the ability to turn large numbers of the population into active opponents of the State, even though the group's aim itself is ultimately sinister to the hopes of the people for peace and development.

While peacekeeping forces may not be mandated to undertake classic counter-terrorism operations, their mandates are often based on supporting effective governance and the Government's stability. It therefore stands to reason that peacekeeping missions cannot ignore the information operations of terrorist groups if they are to meaningfully implement their political stabilization mandates. That requires that the missions have the ability to understand the messaging that the terrorists are producing and the audiences being targeted for radicalization, recruitment and perception management. The missions must then design and deliver countermessages, with a similar, if not greater, level of ambition and sophistication, and support the Government's ability to do the same.

In areas with Al-Qaida- or ISIS-affiliated or copycat groups, that expertise should include a knowledge of

their ideology and how to counter it in the local and national contexts. It is also important that missions have the ability to counter and disinformation by negative actors in the relevant local languages and idioms.

Thirdly, it is crucial that, in renewing or designing new mandates, the Security Council give strategic communication a core role, which should then be reflected in the mission's resourcing. Part of that resourcing is for the United Nations to identify, and prepare for recruitment, the relevant strategic communications expertise, particularly with regard to hate speech, disinformation and the ideological messaging of Al-Qaida and ISIS groups. Such capabilities must cross over into the digital realm, which is a major destination for misinformation, disinformation and other information operations by those hostile actors.

In that regard, United Nations missions would be well advised to collaborate with local experts and civil society to deliver peace and mission-positive strategic communications.

Our overall contention is that United Nations peacekeeping is at the start of a potential transformation in the way in which it employs strategic communications. We welcome all efforts to advance that important pillar of expertise, and look forward to its full deployment in all areas of operation. In time, enabling host Governments and security forces to also achieve such competences is a key deliverable in supporting the longer-term aims of conflict-resolution, reconciliation and the strengthening of the social contract.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome your personal participation, Mr. Minister, in today's meeting. We highly appreciate your country's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. We are grateful that such an important issue as strategic communications in peacekeeping has been brought before the Security Council for discussion. We supported the initiative to prepare a relevant document. We appreciate the work done by your country's delegation. We also associate ourselves with the statement to be made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers. We thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their briefings.

The Blue Helmets carry out their noble duty in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, risking

their lives every day. We would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all peacekeepers who honourably carry out their service, as well as to express our condolences to the States and families of those who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Strategic communications are designed to facilitate the fulfilment of the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions, contribute to the protection of the Blue Helmets themselves from malicious information and provocation and increase the level of trust in their activities among the warring parties and the local population.

Undoubtedly, the key task is to establish effective work within the missions themselves. Modern peacekeeping operations are complex and multifaceted. Their tasks range from purely military, in some cases even offensive, to bordering on replacing certain State functions, such as protecting human rights and strengthening the rule of law, as well as working with children and young people. In some cases, when a mission has been in a country for years and sometimes decades, it integrates into the domestic political process. Whether that is good or bad is a rhetorical question, but it is important to understand that in such circumstances it is impossible to imagine a situation in which a mission cannot be subject to criticism.

We are confident that all those functions, which the Security Council entrusts to operations, should be clear and serve one goal — to achieve a political settlement, establish peace and stabilize host countries. Mission leadership plays a key role in that regard.

Secondly, and perhaps an even more important part of strategic communication, is building constructive cooperation with the host country and cultivating reliable contacts, primarily with the Government and the local population. Peacekeeping missions should be perceived as partners — not through their words, but through their actions — in achieving the common goals of the State and its people and as impartial assistance for solving the problems of the most vulnerable countries. It is unacceptable for missions to serve as political controllers overseeing sovereign Governments or introducing imperatives formulated across oceans to new ground. It is of the utmost importance that all components of the operation act coherently, only within the framework of the mandate, and do not contradict each other. We are confident that sooner or later we will have to revive the discussion about what exactly impartiality,

lack of bias and objectivity of the United Nations means in the context of changing circumstances — and to do so in a way that cannot imply inaction.

The third issue we would like to address in today's debate is the operationalization of steps to improve strategic communication. In fact, the issue of criticism of peacekeeping operations is not new. We saw this many years ago in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti, and now in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Mali. Some missions have been more successful in meeting these challenges by explaining their mandate, working with the local population through radio and television and implementing various local projects — others less so. But in most cases, quick-impact projects have proven helpful as they are not very costly, make it possible to establish contacts and bring practical benefits to vulnerable segments of the population. This approach was highly valued in Haiti, where it was, incidentally, actively promoted by the delegation of Brazil, as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In our age of new technologies, clearly social networks and other methods of social outreach play a significant role, but we must not forget that actions speak louder than words. We urge the Secretariat, which will prepare the relevant report, to pay special attention to this.

The concept note prepared by the Brazilian delegation (see S/2022/539, annex) and negotiations on the presidential statement focused significant attention to the safety of peacekeepers. In that regard, we would like to emphasize that this issue has always been a priority for the Russian Federation. Recently, we, like many other troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, lost a peacekeeper in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We therefore take this topic very seriously and call for a comprehensive and substantive discussion on the matter.

It is no secret, and it has been confirmed by the reports of the Secretary-General, including for the General Assembly Special Committee — peacekeepers primarily suffer from asymmetric attacks, the actions of armed groups, improvised explosive devices, the overstretching of peacekeeping forces and a lack of necessary equipment and evacuation means. Recently, the coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters have become a significant problem for the Blue Helmets.

These are the main enemies of peacekeepers and must be addressed as a matter of priority.

As for the spread of false information and disinformation, there is no doubt that this phenomenon, unfortunately, is gathering momentum around the world and should be denounced. Regrettably, the ubiquitous fundamental norms and principles of ensuring the freedom of expression and access to information and protecting the rights of journalists have been eroded at an unprecedented scale. We are facing a deliberate infodemic that has captured the leading global media, serving the interests of a narrow group of countries. There is censorship of the information space by online platforms, primarily the information technology giants that have a monopoly on social networks and video hosting platforms.

It is important that both the United Nations Headquarters and missions themselves be fully aware of these processes. After all, it is most dangerous when unreliable information is used to achieve military and political advantages on the ground. It is vital to have early detection and prevention of disinformation campaigns in order to neutralize and minimize their ramifications. Even here in the Council, blurry photographs from social networks and media publications have been presented as irrefutable evidence of unlawful acts. Even today, we were unable to dodge politicized propaganda from some colleagues. Attempts to instrumentalize the topic of the safety of peacekeepers in order to achieve narrow political goals that have nothing to do with the protection of Blue Helmets and the stabilization of countries in conflict are dangerous.

We urge the United Nations not to neglect cooperation with the law enforcement agencies of host countries because, under international law, they bear the primary responsibility for the safety of peacekeepers. Any threats to the life and health of Blue Helmets, let alone any attacks on them, should be investigated in accordance with national legislation. As for critical publications or even protests, as we said earlier, it is vital to have painstaking explanations of each mandate in order for the local population to have realistic expectations. Nothing can enhance the image of peacekeepers like the effective discharge of their mandate, including with regard to the protection of civilians.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes you, Mr. President, to New York to preside

over this meeting. China commends and supports Brazil's initiative to hold this meeting on strategic communications and adopt a presidential statement. We believe that this meeting will make a major contribution to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping operations.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres, Lieutenant General Da Costa and Ms. Russo for their briefings.

China aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all Blue Helmets committed to peacekeeping under the banner of the United Nations. Strategic communications can help the world know more about peacekeeping and help peacekeeping better serve the world. The Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative includes strategic communications in the peacekeeping operation toolbox, as it is an important measure to enhance safety and security for peacekeepers and improve the performance of peacekeeping operations.

China believes that to enhance strategic communications, we need to work on the following four areas.

First, we must create stronger partnerships. A peacekeeping operation can be compared to a concerto performed by stakeholders. The United Nations should enhance communication with the host country, troop- and police-contributing countries and regional organizations in order to share information, align goals and coordinate activities.

The host country is the most important of all stakeholders. The deployment of a peacekeeping operation requires consent from the host country. The security of personnel needs to be ensured by the host country, and the implementation of its mandate requires cooperation from the host country. The United Nations should therefore continue to improve communication with host countries, listen to their opinions, attach importance to their concerns and seek their support.

The monitoring of ceasefires, among other things, is traditionally a core part of the mandate for peacekeeping operations, and it has stood the test of history. At present, the mandates of some missions keep expanding in a mindless way. They try to cover all

aspects but fail to yield intended the intended results. The Council should create a mandate in a reasonable manner based on the needs of the host country. Missions should also improve their communication with local communities to facilitate the public's understanding and support of their mandates and their means to fulfil these mandates.

Secondly, on better protecting the safety and security of peacekeepers, these days, peacekeepers are faced with increasingly serious safety and security challenges. Last October, in Abyei, because of the lack of communication and mutual trust between the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and local tribes, a medical evacuation was delayed, leading to the death of a peacekeeper. Strategic communications could help reduce such heart-wrenching losses of life and property.

There is a need to enhance security-information exchanges between missions and host Governments and improve the situational awareness and risk-prevention capacities of missions. In areas where many forces conduct operations, host Governments could consider creating an information-sharing mechanism to avoid misunderstanding or misjudgement. Missions, host countries and the Secretariat should work together to prevent the emergence of any misinformation on peacekeepers and create safe and favourable public opinion environments for them in order to facilitate effective mandate implementation in peacekeeping operations.

Thirdly, with regard to promoting the effective discharge of the mandates of peacekeeping operations, restoring peace in the host country is a primary responsibility for peacekeeping operations. A mission should, based on thorough communication with the countries concerned and relevant regional organizations, promote the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and communication. Military means alone cannot fulfil the mandate to protect civilians. Missions should improve communication with local communities so as to be able to detect and address security risks as soon as possible, to effectively prevent conflicts and better protect the safety of civilians.

When reporting on a human rights situation, a mission should check facts with host countries. While investigating human rights violations, missions need to get the consent of host countries.

Fourthly, with regard to improving strategic-communications capacity-building, the Secretariat will soon update the strategic-communications and public-information policy. We hope that the Secretariat will take this opportunity to integrate strategic communications into all components and units of peacekeeping operations and, in the process, keep close communication with stakeholders, including TCCs.

The Secretariat should include strategic communications in trainings for peacekeepers, so that they will have a deeper understanding of local cultures and the situations of host countries in order to more closely facilitate the implementation of the priority national policies of these countries. The communication capacity of a mission's management is of critical importance. During the appointment process, the Secretariat should fully consider equitable geographic distribution and, in particular, ensure that middle and senior managers in a force have a good grasp of the realities on the ground.

As the second-largest contributor to the peacekeeping budget and a major TCC, China has always been committed to peace through concrete actions. We have included strategic communications in our training system, which has provided peacekeepers from dozens of TCCs with targeted training, helping them to improve their communication capacity.

Peacekeepers from China have provided free medical services and built infrastructure in mission areas in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Lebanon, which has helped improve local communities' understanding and trust of peacekeeping operations and maintained the good image of the blue helmets. China will continue to work with peace-loving nations to contribute to the maintenance of world peace and security.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. Minister, for convening this discussion today. I also thank all the briefers for their insightful contributions. My delegation found the comments of Ms. Russo on gender and its value and use in strategic communications particularly thought-provoking, and so I thank her for those. The United States welcomes this forum as important for discussing such a timely and critical issue, and we thank Brazil for its leadership.

I begin by echoing what many have underscored today. Strategic communications are critical to ensuring effective implementation of peacekeeping mandates,

enhancing the safety and security of our peacekeepers, advancing a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians and the women and peace and security agenda, and to building trust among local communities, which is so important, as our briefers have emphasized. As the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative clearly outlines, peacekeeping missions can help improve relationships with local stakeholders by publicly promoting successes, managing the local population's expectations and addressing disinformation and misinformation that obstructs mandate implementation and ultimately threatens the safety and the security of peacekeepers. Fundamentally, any peacekeeping mission's ability to engage in effective strategic communications rests on that mission's ability to know what is happening on the ground and to produce timely and accurate reporting. This establishes United Nations missions' reputations as a credible and impartial source of information, and that reputation is essential for United Nations missions to achieve every other strategic-communications objective.

We welcome the ongoing efforts by the Secretary-General to bolster strategic-communications capacities both at United Nations headquarters and in the field, and in that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's proposals and recommendations this morning. This need is particularly pressing in the Central African Republic and Mali, where disinformation targeting the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali threatens peacekeeper safety and security and has undermined those missions' abilities to protect civilians, investigate human rights violations and abuses, and facilitate political dialogue.

In that regard, my delegation takes note of the comments of the United Kingdom delegation this morning, noting that this information, misinformation and disinformation has increased in both countries since the arrival of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group in both countries. Is it mere coincidence, or is there causal link? We will let each Council member and troop-contributing country make its own decision.

But, for that reason, I am pleased to point to MINUSCA's weekly United Nations radio show as a best practice. As others have mentioned, this show provides a really useful platform for mission leadership, United Nations agencies, Central African authorities and locals to dispel rumours and counter disinformation

about MINUSCA's mandate and activities. However, the challenges in the Central African Republic remain considerable, and we must expand and amplify these efforts.

The United States firmly condemns disinformation campaigns and incitement to violence against peacekeepers, as they contribute to a climate of mistrust, impede mandate implementation and undermine the United Nations core mission of maintaining international peace and security. To mitigate these risks, effective communication strategies, as we have heard, must engage local media and other actors, proactively shape the mission's public messaging in ways that will resonate with the local population, and address disinformation and misinformation head on. The United Nations Secretariat and peacekeeping missions may benefit from efforts to monitor sources of disinformation and misinformation and analyse country-specific and regional trends. Gathering such information at the mission and headquarters levels would equip the United Nations to calibrate appropriate strategic-communications initiatives to address this kind of disinformation and misinformation.

In conclusion, once again we thank Brazil for its leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working closely with Brazil and other partners to ensure that the peacekeepers we send into harm's way are equipped with the needed strategic-communications tools to fulfil their missions.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My country welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil to the Security Council and thanks him for convening today's debate. I thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing, as well as Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa, Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Jenna Russo, Director of Research, International Peace Institute, for the timely reflections they shared with the Council.

There is no doubt whatsoever that strategic communications play an increasingly important role at all stages of peacekeeping, from the planning stages all the way to the assessment of the mission's work. The rigorous and sensitive use of communication tools, including digital technologies, is crucial in order to better understand the environment in which missions operate so as to raise awareness about their mandates

and create bonds of trust with the host societies and national authorities with which they interact.

I should like to highlight the importance of two of the many objectives that communications can achieve: first, in contributing to changing gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory practices, which can prevent sexual violence and the abuse of minors; and, secondly, in promoting the full, equal and significant participation of women and young people in the public and political life of host countries.

Strategic communications and the effective use of technologies are also key components of early-warning mechanisms, which can prevent humanitarian crises, mass atrocity crimes and other violations of human rights, leading to more effective protection of the civilian population, especially of traditionally disenfranchised groups.

Also, in peacekeeping operations' transition phase, it is vital to have an effective communication strategy in place to prevent the population from being abandoned and its trust from being eroded during the transfer of responsibilities from missions to United Nations country teams and national authorities.

Like other members of the Council, Mexico has observed with great concern the increasing use of disinformation campaigns aimed at creating a climate of animosity or distrust vis-à-vis United Nations peacekeeping missions. Such actions curtail the capacity for Security Council mandates to be fulfilled and jeopardize the safety of the personnel of peacekeeping operations.

In that regard, we reiterate the importance of strengthening communication tools geared to fighting disinformation and hate speech. That is particularly urgent in contexts that we all know well, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and the Central African Republic, to mention just a few examples of countries where explicit communication campaigns against United Nations peacekeeping missions have been detected.

In order to neutralize those campaigns, closer cooperation is required between missions and the United Nations country team in each country as well as with local communities, including civil-society organizations and especially women and young people.

While it is true that strategic communication will not in and of itself be able to resolve the various

challenges facing peacekeeping in the world, the instrumentalization of communication strategies, along with a truthful process of reflection on the various factors that have an impact on both the successes and failures of Council mandates, might be more appropriate than ever.

It is no coincidence that disinformation campaigns against United Nations missions are more effective precisely in those places where a perception exists of the limitation of some of those missions to break the cycles of violence that plague the local population. It is therefore very important that local populations understand not only the scope of peacekeeping missions but also their limitations.

The Security Council must also contribute to the effectiveness of such missions through better-crafted mandates based on realistic and relevant objectives, and, of course, it is also crucial to endow peacekeeping operations with the capacity and financing necessary for the full implementation of their mandate.

Along that line of ideas and actions, and as part of the strengthening of its participation in peacekeeping missions, Mexico is prepared to send a company of engineers with some 240 staff, including 67 women. My country believes that the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative is the appropriate context for enriching the discussion on the performance of peacekeeping operations, in which the United Nations system, actors on the ground, regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia should participate.

In sum, peacekeeping should be the responsibility of all without exception. That is a powerful strategic communication message that perhaps all of us States Members of the United Nations should develop jointly as a result of this debate.

The President: The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2022/5.

I have been asked to remind speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Nasir (Indonesia): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers.

We thank our co-Chair, Brazil, for hosting this timely open debate on the key role of strategic communication in peacekeeping operations. It is in line with the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, which emphasizes strategic communication as one of its priorities.

The Group of Friends remains deeply concerned at the persistently high number of attacks against United Nations peacekeepers that has recently been seen in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. We convey our deepest condolences to the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace.

We emphasize the direct link between strategic communication and the success of peacekeeping operations in implementing their mandate, including in ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers and the protection of civilians.

We are especially concerned at the proliferation of disinformation, misinformation and hate speech targeting United Nations peacekeeping operations or the civilian population.

The Group of Friends highlights the importance of effective communications between United Nations peacekeeping operations, host Governments and other relevant stakeholders to build trust and mutual understanding.

We call on the Secretariat to continue its efforts to develop communication strategies aimed at building trust and confidence between United Nations peacekeeping operations and key stakeholders, including the host Government. That could be done, among other ways, through the dissemination of accurate information by United Nations peacekeeping missions to help manage the expectations of local communities.

Peacekeeping missions need to be equipped with clear mandates and adequate resources to deliver on them. We also emphasize the importance of training and partnership, including strategic communication.

I would like to conclude by calling on all parties to strengthen our collective efforts to ensure the safety

and the security of all United Nations personnel in their noble endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Osuga (Japan) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on this increasingly important topic. Strategic communications are important in many ways with regard to the effective implementation of peacekeeping mandates, but I would emphasize their extremely important role in ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers, which is a prerequisite for carrying out any mission. Strategic communications for that purpose, as well as for the protection of civilians, must be practiced in concert with peacekeeping intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

The broader challenges related to strategic communications, including combating disinformation and misinformation, extend well beyond technical issues, which can be resolved by training peacekeepers and the mission leadership or by introducing advanced information technology. Overcoming such challenges involves ensuring freedom of expression and free access to information in the host State and is predicated on building the local populations', communities' and authorities' trust in peacekeepers in particular and the United Nations in general. A comprehensive approach that cuts across the development, humanitarian and peace nexus is therefore essential. I would like to elaborate on a couple of factors that are essential to effective strategic communications, which are based on Japan's own experience on the ground.

First, strengthening the communications capabilities of each peacekeeping mission requires a bottom-up approach adapted to its specific local context. As a long-standing contributor to peacekeeping training, we believe that capacity-building efforts must be tailor-made. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. We encourage the Secretariat to collect best practices and examples of successful strategic communications on the ground.

Secondly, Member States also have a critical role to play in improving strategic communications by providing support to host countries and communities. For example, in South Sudan between 2012 and 2018, Japan provided technical assistance to the South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation in conjunction with the activities of the United Nations Mission in South

Sudan and the Japan Self-Defence Forces. The Japan International Cooperation Agency provided technical assistance and training to the Broadcasting Corporation and its staff and helped disseminate a strategic vision for peace and stability. We encourage others to share good practices within the Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission in order to garner a better understanding of strategic communications, which is easier said than done. Japan stands ready to continue to play its part.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Chindawongse (Thailand): Thailand welcomes Brazil's timely initiative in this open debate of the Security Council to highlight the important role of strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. I would like to thank you, Sir, for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their contributions.

Thailand aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers. In addition, I want to underscore the following three points.

First, we need a strategy for communications in peacekeeping that is clear, comprehensive and implementable, while being adaptable to new situations. To that end, Thailand supports expanding consultations between the Security Council, host countries, troop- and police-contributing countries and other stakeholders on strategic communications in peacekeeping. That should cover not only mission planning, but also evaluations of the impact seen on mandate implementation and identifying key lessons learned. Thailand also supports cooperation on the issue under the auspices of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. That includes the enhancement of strategic communications capabilities at Headquarters and the relevant missions, which is in alignment with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative.

Secondly, communications related to peacekeeping operations must be clear, timely, consistent and where possible tailored to different groups of audiences. They should also aim to support future efforts in peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In that regard, Thailand emphasizes the importance of equipping peacekeepers with strategic communications skills and an enhanced understanding of local conditions, contexts

and cultures. That could be further strengthened through partnerships, including on increased use of relevant digital technologies and continuing engagement with the host country and relevant stakeholders.

That leads me to my third and final point, which is building the trust and confidence of the host Government and local actors. That is part and parcel of effective strategic communications in peacekeeping and perhaps at the heart of it. For its part, the Thai peacekeeping contingent in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan has helped build and repair more than 400 kilometres of road in South Sudan and has shared with the local communities Thailand's best practices in areas such as sustainable agriculture and water and land management. If done correctly, with foresight and consultations, such infrastructure and skills will far outlive the presence of peacekeepers and ensure sustainable peace and development. To that end, we must continue to ensure timely and adequate resources for community engagement by peacekeeping operations and peacekeepers, in particular activities that would support local development in line with host countries' national priorities. Their needs matter most. Thailand also stands ready to share its best practices in that regard, including our home-grown development approaches of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Denmark.

Mr. Hermann (Denmark): On behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Denmark — I want to thank Brazil for convening this timely meeting. I also wanted to thank today's briefers — Secretary-General António Guterres, Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa and Ms. Jenna Russo — for their insightful remarks and above all, their important work on addressing the key role of strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping.

The distribution of accurate content and the countering of misinformation and disinformation have taken on added importance in recent years. Malicious actors are exploiting the rapid advances in technology and the evolution of social media. In recent years, United Nations peacekeeping operations have become more frequent targets of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, posing new operational

and reputational risks for United Nations missions. Many examples could be cited. Let me mention just a few. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, false information is circulated on social media with the malicious intention of discrediting the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Simultaneously, there has been an escalation in hate speech and incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence that exacerbates mistrust among communities and fuels violent conflict. In Mali, influential militia and foreign mercenaries are leading disinformation campaigns against United Nations peacekeepers, falsely claiming that the United Nations creates terrorist organizations. That undermines the ability of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to support the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. And it puts the lives of civilians and peacekeepers at increased risk.

The Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative recognizes the enabler and multiplier effect of strategic communications through its focus on increasing confidence in peace processes, responding to public sentiment and building support for missions' mandate among local populations and other relevant stakeholders. Strategic communications are strong tools for countering emerging threats by addressing misinformation and disinformation, which if left unchallenged hold the potential to inflict long-term damage on the credibility of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions.

Despite considerable progress, more needs to be done, not just by the Secretariat and mission leadership but also by Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries, as well as by host nations. Let me outline a few actions.

First, we need to acknowledge that effective strategic communications can help improve the safety and security of our peacekeepers. When troops and police are unable to adequately protect themselves, they are unable to protect those they serve. A survey conducted by the Department of Peace Operations in March shows that 44 per cent of peacekeeping mission personnel indicate that misinformation and disinformation have a severe or critical impact on the work of missions. Therefore, as mission theatres become increasingly dangerous, effective communications become critical in securing the political and public support that United

Nations peacekeeping needs in order to create a safe operational environment.

As Member States, we have a shared responsibility to ensure that robust mandates and complex tasks are matched by the specialized skills and capabilities that they require. The use of emerging technologies is paramount in that regard. We, the Nordic countries, welcome the work on detecting, analysing and addressing misinformation and disinformation that has been initiated under the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping.

It is absolutely key that emerging technologies be accompanied by adequate staffing with trained and equipped personnel so as to proactively address misinformation and disinformation, as well as by sound policy and guidance that treat strategic communications as central to mission planning and decision-making.

Secondly, United Nations peacekeeping operations should scale up the use of a whole-of-mission approach to strategic communications, which fosters local dialogue and engagement and creates a more protective environment for civilians. To that end, the Security Council, together with the United Nations and troop- and police-contributing countries, should ensure that United Nations peacekeeping operations are able to act as trusted sources of information.

Strategic communications can contribute to the protection of civilians objectives in several ways, such as by building trust; ensuring that mission strategies are informed by the priorities and concerns of local communities under threat; managing expectations by informing local communities about the mission's strategy and measures; clarifying and correcting misinformation; discouraging local populations from joining armed groups; and countering narratives that encourage and exacerbate violence.

It is therefore vital for United Nations peace operations to proactively monitor and combat instances of hate speech and incitement to violence. That requires an active engagement with local communities, whose voices also often have more resonance than those coming from United Nations officials.

Thirdly and finally, United Nations peacekeeping operations need to ensure the systematic use of gender-sensitive communications in order to advance the women and peace and security agenda as a tool for changing gender norms, addressing issues related

to gender-based violence and promoting women's participation in political or public life. Similarly, proactive and transparent communications with local actors to create a protective environment for civilians are critical for preventing conflict-related sexual violence in mission areas.

In conclusion, the importance of strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping is indisputable. It is a critical whole-of-mission responsibility. New technologies and communication platforms offer new capabilities for sharing information with the public and gathering public input to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping.

The Nordic countries remain steadfast in providing support for exploring the possibilities offered by new technologies, and we will continue to work to promote the key role of strategic communications in United Nations peace operations with all relevant stakeholders. In that regard, the Nordic countries welcome the initiative by the Secretariat to develop a new communications strategy that will provide the basis for much-needed training materials for civilian and uniformed peacekeepers.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Ms. Rizk (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Sir, as President of the Security Council and congratulate Brazil on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of July. We wish Brazil every success in this task. I also thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important meeting.

I would like to pay well-deserved tribute to our martyr peacekeepers who sacrificed their lives in the service of peace.

Egypt believes in the pivotal role played by United Nations peacekeeping operations throughout the world, which is evident in its support and its active and extensive participation as a troop- and police-contributing country in those operations. Egypt is now the sixth-largest troop-contributor in the world. Egypt was also one of the first countries to support the Action for Peacekeeping initiative. We launched the Cairo Road Map for Enhancing Peacekeeping Performance, which seeks to translate the political commitments agreed upon by Member States into practical and balanced

measures that will help to reform the peacekeeping system and increase its effectiveness.

Against that backdrop, Egypt is well aware of the importance of strategic communications as an enabler of United Nations peacekeeping operations that ensures their smooth implementation in a safe and supportive environment. In that context, I would like to share with the Council the following points.

First, United Nations peacekeeping operations are currently conducted in extremely difficult and complex environments and are at times subjected to misinformation and smear campaigns, as well as hate speech. That calls for developing communication strategies that take into account specific operational environments and the challenges faced by such operations, as well as harnessing modern technology to achieve that goal.

Secondly, effective strategic communications help increase peacekeepers' situational awareness and knowledge of the environments in which they operate. They also provide an outlet for receiving intelligence, which plays a pivotal role in assisting peacekeepers in effectively carrying out their duties, in particular the protection of civilians, as well as in promoting the security and safety of peacekeepers by avoiding potential risks.

Thirdly, peacekeeping operations must intensify their efforts to communicate with the authorities of host countries and local communities in order to explain the nature of their mandates, manage expectations and build mutual trust, which facilitates the work of peacekeepers. One clear example of operations where such communication is needed is the peacekeeping operation in Mali, which is one of the most dangerous operations, as it acts in an asymmetric environment marked by activities carried out by armed groups, despite the fact that peacekeeping operations do not have counter-terrorism mandates due to the nature of their duties, composition, equipment and the main principles governing their work.

Fourthly, we underscore the fact that it is a key responsibility of the Security Council to adopt clear and realistic mandates for peacekeeping operations and to avoid polarization, ambiguity and different interpretations that undermine the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and make it difficult for them to communicate with the authorities and local communities in host countries.

Fifthly, we must provide adequate human and financial resources for peacekeeping operations in order to guarantee effective communication strategies using local languages.

Sixthly, peacekeeping operations must coordinate and cooperate well with host countries in order to ensure integrated efforts and unified messages when communicating with local communities, while taking into consideration the mutual commitments between the United Nations and host countries, based on status-of-forces agreements.

Last but not least, the Secretariat must develop integrated training material to assist in training and rehabilitating peacekeepers during the predeployment phase, while using communication strategies and tools and enhancing their effectiveness.

In conclusion, I would like to stress Egypt's support for promoting strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping operations. I thank you again, Mr. President, for convening and presiding over today's important meeting.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (spoke in French): At the outset, I want to express my warmest thanks to Brazil for convening this important meeting and for devoting this open debate to a topic as crucial as the role of strategic communications in peacekeeping operations. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and commend him for his ongoing efforts to enhance peacekeeping and strengthen its effectiveness and efficiency. We are encouraged by the work of the Secretariat, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to bolster momentum to achieve further progress, as well as by the tangible improvements and positive developments that have already been made. I want to reiterate to the Secretary-General that he can count on my country's full support for the ongoing reforms that he continues to lead. The Kingdom of Morocco will always be by his side in that noble undertaking.

Peacekeeping remains the most effective and profitable way to provide the necessary practical support in reaching lasting political solutions to crises and conflicts. Unfortunately, the reality is that such efforts have been obstructed in the past two years by disinformation campaigns targeting peacekeeping

operations through the media and across social networks. In his report entitled *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982), the Secretary-General rightly underscored that disinformation poses an existential risk to humankind. That only further emphasizes the crucial importance of facilitating access for all to reliable information and verified facts. In order to do that, in the specific context of peacekeeping operations, we need to mobilize globally to implement concrete action, and that could include strengthened partnerships between the United Nations and host countries in their various capacities in order to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Among other things, the success of peacekeeping operations depends on a properly planned and carefully developed mandate based on national ownership and the support of the international community, as well as the consent and support of the parties concerned, along with adequate funding.

First, the deployment of a peacekeeping operation should be accompanied by an appropriate communications strategy that helps to manage the expectations of the civilian population well and that clearly and transparently defines its responsibilities, its scope and its operational limits. The role of the media is crucial in that regard, because media attention enables us to shed light not only on the mandates, objectives and successes of peacekeeping operations but also on the problems they encounter.

Secondly, inter-United Nations coordination is crucial to implementing awareness-raising strategies aimed at eradicating stereotypes that could contribute to negative views of peacekeeping operations. In that connection, we welcome the existing coordination between the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Global Communications, as well as the joint activities undertaken to build the capacity of missions on the ground, including in the field of strategic communications. We are particularly encouraged by efforts to train personnel dedicated to the detection and surveillance of disinformation and to develop innovative, situation-specific communications strategies that seek to raise awareness among the general public of the work done by peacekeepers and the challenges they face in an often increasingly unstable operating environment.

Thirdly, new technologies must be integrated into peacekeeping operations, as their use is becoming more and more essential — indeed, it is now imperative in complementing existing efforts aimed at improving

early-warning capacity and providing additional tools in terms of follow-up and conflict analysis. The inclusion of such elements among the objectives of the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping is all the more welcome because it will contribute to strengthening the safety and security of Blue Helmets and other United Nations mission personnel at a time when they are more and more frequent targets of violent attacks and disinformation campaigns.

Through their commitment and their sacrifice, Blue Helmets have become true symbols of the United Nations, making it recognizable around the world to all. By communicating effectively in ways that are as well adapted as possible to specific peacekeeping missions and their objectives, we will be able to promote the role of the Blue Helmets, provide them with the most relevant and effective tools at the disposal of the international community and of course the United Nations, guarantee their safety and security and strengthen the reputation they have built over more than 70 years.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to pay heartfelt tribute to all civilian and uniform personnel who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the name of the noble cause of peace under the United Nations flag.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Amorín (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank the Permanent Mission of Brazil for convening this open debate and the Secretary-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Mr. Carlos França, for their presence here this morning. I also thank Lieutenant General Marcos de Sá Affonso Da Costa and Ms. Jenna Russo for their briefings and contributions today, particularly in the current context, in which the escalation of situations of armed conflict poses a threat to international peace and security and especially to the safety of peacekeepers and their fulfilment of their mandates.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers, and we would like to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

Uruguay believes that peacekeeping operations continue to be one of the most important instruments

at the disposal of the United Nations in its efforts to maintain international peace and security. We recognize the importance of strategic communications as a key tool to improve the fulfilment of mandates, as well as to ensure the security of peacekeeping personnel and strengthen the protection of civilians. Nor should we fail to mention that strategic communications must be aligned with both the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its Action for Peacekeeping Plus implementation strategy. In that regard, we acknowledge the efforts of the Department of Peace Operations in developing policy guidelines, tools and training to address misinformation, promote a positive narrative and encourage support for United Nations peacekeeping.

Strategic communications should also align with the women and peace and security agenda. In that regard, I would like to highlight not only the importance of women's participation at all stages and at all levels, but also in this case the key role that women play in communicating with local communities, particularly in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and as a channel of communication with victims and survivors. In general terms, increasing the presence of women personnel in peace operations is a high priority for my country.

Peacekeeping operations are dealing with a growing risk from disinformation campaigns that can undermine missions' reputations and harm their ability to implement mandates, which is a threat to the security of peacekeepers themselves. Such campaigns can also erode the confidence of local populations. That is why we must work to ensure that peacekeeping operations build trust with host Governments and countries, as well as with local actors, by providing transparent information about their activities. To that end, missions must be adequately trained to act proactively in order to combat the problem of disinformation.

Strategic communications are a vital necessity in peacekeeping operations, and the Security Council, the General Assembly and troop-contributing countries must therefore work together to improve strategic communications capabilities, both at United Nations Headquarters and at the level of individual peacekeeping missions. That is why we offer our full support in pursuing those objectives within the framework of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and by fully promoting the use of the technologies envisaged in the Strategy for the Digital Transformation

of United Nations Peacekeeping. In addition to the matter of the overall framework of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, in such cases we must also take into account the specific mandate of the respective peacekeeping forces.

Finally, we cannot forget the fundamental role of community liaison assistants in the dialogue and communication between the missions and the local communities, and I would like to express our interest in being able to count on their participation in future open debates of the Security Council or briefings to the membership, in particular to troop- and police-contributing countries.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Ms. Baptista Grade Zacarias (Portugal): Portugal aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the representative of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of United Nations Peacekeepers, and would like to add the following points in its national capacity.

First of all, I would like to thank Brazil for underlining, with this debate, the key importance of strategic communications in peacekeeping. Ensuring that peacekeeping missions properly communicate with local communities, host Governments and other stakeholders is crucial to fulfilling their mandates, protecting civilians and promoting the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Designing a communication strategy is a task that should not wait until after a mission has started. A public information assessment must be carried out prior to the launch of any mission to identify the most effective ways of reaching the local population. That is in line with the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines and resolution 2594 (2021).

Portugal participates in several United Nations peacekeeping missions, and it is clear that we are facing growing challenges related to misinformation and disinformation. That can have effects on the credibility and the perceptions regarding the efficacy and legitimacy of missions. It can also directly affect the safety and security of peacekeepers and the communities that they serve.

We need to step up efforts to counter disinformation, misinformation and hate speech targeted at missions and peacekeepers. Human resources, adequate technology, tools, training and financing are key, as are good practices, such as the one in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan's establishment of a WhatsApp group, with hundreds of influencers who help to cut misinformation and tell compelling stories about the Mission's mandate, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic's distribution of tens of thousands of solar-powered radios to local communities, facilitating their access to information.

Better communication strategies may also provide better information about the level of protection that missions can provide to civilians. At the same time, the prevention of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls will benefit from a stronger investment in the protection of human rights and in human rights education and communication, as well as in women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership.

Missions should differentiate target audiences and address certain communications specifically to women. Gender gaps in access to digital technologies should be considered. Messages must represent women and men equally and avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes, which are among the root causes of some ethnic conflicts. Ensuring gender parity among communications personnel, we believe, would make all the above much easier.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to wish you, Mr. President, every success in your presidency of the Security Council. Switzerland thanks you for organizing this open debate, the first of its kind, and the briefers for their valuable contributions.

The Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) initiative emphasizes that strategic communication can promote success, manage expectations and help to address disinformation and hate speech. We commend the Secretariat for prioritizing this topic in the follow-up to A4P+, and would like to highlight the following.

First, in several peacekeeping operations we observe a mismatch between the mandate and capabilities, on

the one hand, and the expectations of local populations, on the other hand. Peacekeepers are often perceived by the population as the main guarantor of their protection, whereas they are deployed only in support of the Government of the host State. Peacekeeping operations face the challenge of explaining their mandate and the limits of their action. They should understand local concerns, particularly those of women, and respond appropriately in order to prevent additional risks to peacekeepers. That is particularly the case during the transition from a peacekeeping operation to another United Nations presence.

Secondly, strategic communication must advance key United Nations agendas and use modern channels. The emphasis on diversity within missions underscores the importance of the equal role that women should play in peace processes. Communication channels should also be tailored to target groups, including young people — for example, through community liaison teams or social media.

Thirdly, action speaks louder than words. A United Nations mission that performs effectively and efficiently contributes to the implementation of its mandate and the safety and security of its staff, but it also communicates its capacity to act. Peacekeeping operations must become even more effective, particularly through training and the implementation of the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System, which allows for the visibility and communication of results.

Finally, effective strategic communication requires an enabling framework for its implementation. That framework must advance coordination among the various pillars of peacekeeping operations. We welcome the Secretariat's efforts to develop a general policy in that area. That should emphasize the need to integrate communication into strategic planning with the aim of achieving a proactive and anticipatory communication that contributes to the success of peacekeeping operations.

Communication is also important for the Security Council. The inclusion of perspectives from Member States, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the voices of women and civil society, makes the Council's communication transparent and credible, and therefore more effective. As a future member of the Security Council, Switzerland will work towards that goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Bae (Republic of Korea): Let me begin by commending your leadership, Mr. President, in convening today's open debate on this critical issue.

As technologies have become more prevalent and more sophisticated, we are seeing armed groups exploiting such technologies to influence public perceptions and political discourse. In the context of United Nations peacekeeping, that alarming trend undermines public trust and confidence in missions, thereby threatening the safety and security of United Nations personnel, as well as the delivery of mandates. As such, strategic communications, as one of the seven priorities in the Action for Peacekeeping Plus plan, has become increasingly important. In that vein, I would like to emphasize the following two points.

First, the United Nations should take an integrated approach to supporting field missions in responding to disinformation, misinformation and hate speech. To tackle such elements, the United Nations must provide peacekeeping operation missions with the proper guidance and tools to improve monitoring, detection, analysis and response capabilities.

In that regard, Korea welcomes the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping, which seeks to help missions harness the potential of digital technologies and mitigate their risks. Korea has already contributed to the development of the strategy and will continue to work closely with the United Nations to support its implementation, especially on the project on countering misinformation and disinformation.

Secondly, Member States need to focus on building trust with host and local Governments. When a mission's reputation is tarnished by the spread of misinformation, mandate implementation can be more challenging as well. Without proper communication with local authorities, there can be restrictions on peacekeepers' movement or delays in resupply. That, in turn, can threaten the lives of Blue Helmets, as well as the civilians they are mandated to protect.

We should therefore consider engaging more actively with local communities through civilian and military coordination activities. The experience of Korean peacekeepers, currently deployed to South Sudan and Lebanon, shows us that such engagement

not only improves the safety and security of our peacekeepers, but also facilitates the implementation of their mandates. The United Nations Engagement Platoon is another good example in that regard.

The Republic of Korea takes this opportunity to reaffirm its concrete commitment to supporting peacekeeping operations by promoting effective and strategic communications.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Ms. Leendertse (Germany): I too thank the Brazilian presidency and, especially, Minister Franco França for organizing an open debate on this important topic. I also thank the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their valuable insights today.

Let me start by expressing our deep gratitude to all United Nations peacekeepers. They contribute to establishing stability, engage in mediation efforts, help deter violence and offer support for elections. All of those efforts deserve our full respect and support.

However, local populations tend to overestimate the ability of peacekeeping operations to achieve immediate positive impact. Those populations are likely to become frustrated when security and development problems persist longer than they had expected and hoped for.

As we heard today, that is further aggravated by political actors trying to blame the United Nations for bad governance. Recent smear campaigns on social media and the increase of deliberate misinformation have made peace operations more difficult. That development results in acute and immediate danger for peacekeepers, and clear communication of the objectives and limitations of peacekeeping missions is crucial.

Together we need to echo a shared message — United Nations peacekeeping is always the common effort of all States Members of the United Nations to achieve a peaceful resolution of violent conflict. United Nations peacekeeping is based on a clear mandate by the Security Council. We must stand united against verbal — or worse — physical attacks on peacekeepers, as they challenge the United Nations at its very core.

Yet, whenever peacekeepers are able to take decisive action, their popularity increases significantly. Accordingly, peacekeeping needs to better communicate existing efforts on the output level — let

us say, the daily patrols. More efforts could be invested in impact assessment, which, among other things, could yield plausible claims about what peacekeepers could have prevented.

As political actors, peacekeeping operations have to take part — to a certain extent — in public discourse and proactively shape ongoing discussions. I would like to encourage peacekeeping operations to become as operational as possible when it comes to strategic communications in the field.

In order to be successful, peacekeepers need to understand the local context and the evolving security situation by listening to the population. That requires more resources and special language training, as well as specific tools and enablers, such as Community Liaison Assistants and engagement teams.

We know that the Department of Peace Operations is working to address those challenges, specifically with an important new project on countering misinformation and disinformation. As one of the largest contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping budget, alongside considerable extra-budgetary funding, Germany is proud to continue to support these efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Benard Estrada (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks the Federative Republic of Brazil, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of July 2022, for convening this open debate on the key role of strategic communications for effective United Nations peacekeeping.

As a troop-contributing country with a protection-of-civilians mandate, Guatemala recognizes that strategic communications are critical to peace operations. It is important to strengthen the communication strategy to inform the local, national and international public about the important work of peacekeepers in preventing threats to civilians.

Guatemala recognizes that strategic communications must be at the forefront in order to promote the safety and security of peacekeepers operating in dangerous environments, while at the same time preserving the basic principles of peacekeeping, in particular the principle of the consent of the parties.

The evolution and dynamics of strategic communications can offer peace operations new

capabilities to share information with various relevant stakeholders. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations noted that “United Nations peace operations often struggle to communicate their messages to the local population and the broader global community” (*S/2015/446, para. 306*).

Today peacekeeping operations can improve their strategic communications so that what is being done on the ground is truthfully reported. The leadership of peacekeeping missions needs to use central communication tools for planning and decision-making. Most missions lack strategic communications staff with the necessary specialized skills. There is also a tendency to use strategic communications in a reactive way.

Guatemala believes that missions should take into account all audiences and constituencies — at the national, regional and international levels — and tailor their messages to each, in line with the principle of the consent of the parties and respecting the political independence and sovereignty of host and neighbouring countries.

The experience of different peace missions of the Organization has shown that the use of strategic communications is not only a crucial element for the full implementation of mandates, but is also an operational necessity. Therefore, in order to strengthen and improve the use of strategic communication, a cultural change is needed in the work with peacekeeping mission personnel in order to recognize that effective strategic communication is not only the responsibility of leadership, but of the entire mission as a whole. In addition, it is important that information be shared quickly and effectively with troop- and police-contributing countries and peacekeepers.

In conclusion, Guatemala believes that adopting guidelines to develop and coordinate strategic communications plans will allow for greater coherence for all actors involved in the mandates derived from the Security Council. In addition, through efficient communication, the local population can be made aware of the work that peacekeeping operations carry out for the benefit of the populations where they are deployed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog: I would like to thank Brazil for convening, for the first time at the Security Council,

a discussion on such a topical subject. I would also like to thank the briefers for their insightful remarks earlier today and, in the presence of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to pass on to all the women and men who represent the United Nations in various peacekeeping operations around the world our great admiration and respect for that very difficult and important work.

The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina align themselves with this statement.

Strategic communications, whether through traditional media or new technologies, play an increasingly important role in peacekeeping mandate implementation. It is an essential tool in protecting civilians and promoting the safety and security of peacekeepers. We very much welcome the 2021 Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping and the Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative, in which strategic communications is one of the priorities. We would also like to take this opportunity to honour those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit of peace.

The European Union (EU) closely works on the ground with United Nations peacekeeping operations, and it is ready to provide further support to the United Nations in this area. Close coordination among local and international partners, together with enhanced strategic communications vis-à-vis the local population and media, is essential in particular to exposing and denouncing infringements of international norms by other actors.

While unintentional misinformation poses a challenge, intentional targeting through information manipulation, including disinformation by malign actors, is particularly worrisome. With various levels of sophistication, information manipulation actions can be directed either against the host country in broad terms, at the missions in general or more specifically at the missions’ and operations’ operational effectiveness, with a view to undermining them by, for instance, hindering their freedom of movement or targeting individual staff members.

Unfortunately, over the last few years, there has been a significant increase in disinformation campaigns,

using social media or other platforms to target United Nations peacekeeping operations. In Mali, in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this trend is particularly worrying, as described in the Secretary-General's reports related to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Not only do these campaigns, which often seek to incite hatred and violence, have an impact on peacekeepers' security and safety, but they also complicate their task of protecting civilians. Furthermore, they exacerbate tensions and foster instability in the concerned country and region.

We welcome the Department of Peace Operations' increased engagement in countering disinformation, along with the commitment of the Secretary-General and the Department of Global Communications to countering disinformation in other areas. Sufficient staff and resources should be allocated to these critical activities, especially on the ground, close to the missions. It requires staff who have a good knowledge and understanding of the national and regional dynamics at play and are able to engage with local populations at all levels, as well as with the media.

Rapidly evolving digital technologies make the scope and potential impact of the threat even greater, which is why it is key to increase investment and capabilities to protect United Nations peacekeeping operations, their staff and the host country from the devastating and undermining impact of information manipulation. This should be done through proactive actions fighting misinformation and through fact-based and targeted United Nations strategic communication, using all media relevant to the theatre, including digital technologies, but also radio and television when most adapted to the context, as well as through addressing gender disparities in access to information.

The EU is engaged in peace and security in much the same volatile environments as the United Nations. Like the United Nations, the EU has also become a disinformation target. In order to counter such activities, we have stepped up preparedness to protect our institutions and operational capacities. On 5 December 2018, the EU adopted an Action Plan against Disinformation with specific proposals for a coordinated EU response to tackle disinformation. The Action Plan builds on four pillars: first, to improve our ability to detect, analyse and expose disinformation; secondly, to strengthen coordinated and joint responses by member States and EU institutions; thirdly, to mobilize the private sector, including online platforms, to tackle disinformation; and, fourthly, to raise awareness and improve societal resilience to disinformation.

In addition, and in line with the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, we are currently developing an EU toolbox to address and counter foreign information manipulation and interference, including in our Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations. This will contribute to an enhanced EU engagement on disinformation, also within the United Nations, as well as to strengthening our preparedness for cooperation on the ground.

I want to thank the presidency again for taking the initiative of convening today's discussion and express the willingness of the European Union to continue exchanging lessons learned and good practices with a view to improving the United Nations response to the new challenges concerning strategic communications and peacekeeping.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.05 p.m.