



# General Assembly

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## Committee on Information

### Forty-third session

26 April–7 May 2021

Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

### Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General

## Activities of the Department of Global Communications: strategic communications services

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution [75/101 B](#), provides a summary of the key advances made by the Department of Global Communications, from July 2020 to January 2021, in promoting the work of the United Nations to the global audience through its strategic communications services.

The strategic communications services subprogramme, one of three subprogrammes of the Department, which is implemented by its Strategic Communications Division, develops and implements strategies for communicating United Nations messages on priority issues. The Division also manages the Department's network of field offices, the United Nations information centres. In addition, as the secretariat for the United Nations Communications Group and its task forces, the Division works to strengthen the coordination of communications throughout the United Nations system.

The activities under the other subprogrammes of the Department, namely, news services, and outreach and knowledge services, are described in separate reports of the Secretary-General ([A/AC.198/2021/3](#) and [A/AC.198/2021/4](#), respectively).

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\* [A/AC.198/2021/1](#).



## **I. Introduction**

1. In its resolution [75/101 B](#), the General Assembly took note of the reports of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Global Communications, submitted for consideration by the Committee on Information at its forty-second session ([A/AC.198/2020/2](#), [A/AC.198/2020/3](#) and [A/AC.198/2020/4](#)) and requested the Secretary-General to continue to report to the Committee on the activities of the Department.

2. The Department hereby submits the information requested on strategic communications services.

3. The Department's activities in the area of strategic communications services are described in the present report, which includes an overview of its communications campaigns on key issues as well as a review of the activities of the network of United Nations information centres, including activities to mark the seventh-fifth anniversary of the Organization. The report also showcases how the Strategic Communications Division adapted its work, adopting creative approaches in order to advance work on its priorities in the challenging operating environment resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

4. In line with the new global communications strategy for the United Nations, the Division focused its strategic campaign work on leading the narrative, inspiring people to care and mobilizing them to act. Those objectives gained increased importance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategic planning and coordination became particularly crucial, with the Department taking a lead role in crisis communications and efforts, both at Headquarters and at the country level, to combat misinformation and disinformation.

## **II. Responding to the pandemic**

### **A. Crisis communications coordination at Headquarters and in the field**

5. The Department coordinated the communications response of the United Nations system through the United Nations Communications Group Crisis Team, which it co-chaired with the World Health Organization (WHO). All United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are members of the Crisis Team. The Department met on a weekly basis, and it sent out a daily email on the COVID-19 communications response across the United Nations system, a weekly key messaging document and forward planning grids. Those efforts helped the entities of the United Nations system to align their messaging and activities related to the pandemic. The Department also launched a dedicated website with pertinent information on COVID-19 from across the United Nations system. It was the communications lead, together with WHO, for advising the United Nations crisis management team at the level of principals, and it regularly briefed United Nations information centres and communications staff in resident coordinator offices.

6. United Nations information centres played an integral role in developing crisis communications strategies in relation to COVID-19, working closely with resident coordinator offices, WHO and other agencies in United Nations country teams. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for strengthening collaboration between field offices, which resulted in coordinated, localized messaging that underpinned United Nations efforts to meet country needs. While country-level communications were coordinated through United Nations communications groups, United Nations

information centres played a central role, as they chaired more than 400 United Nations communications group meetings during the year, developed crisis management strategies based on standard operating procedures and provided daily media monitoring and situation reports.

7. In addressing the pandemic, United Nations information centres worked with United Nations country teams to organize a range of activities to engage the public through diverse communications platforms, including both social media and traditional media.

8. The United Nations information centre in Bogotá, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization, participated in a weekly radio programme, *Voces Unidas* (United Voices), broadcast by Radio Nacional to its 54 stations covering 80 per cent of Colombia. The programme, which shared information on COVID-19 prevention, was also shared online and with 330 community, university and religious radio stations.

9. A virtual concert organized by the United Nations information centre in Harare and the resident coordinator office in Zimbabwe brought together musicians to reiterate COVID-19 prevention measures such as practising social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands. Other topics addressed included the Sustainable Development Goals, climate action and human rights. The concert was streamed live on popular Zimbabwean online platforms, as well as the country team's Facebook page, and was watched by 1 million people.

10. The United Nations information centre in Port of Spain initiated the *Build Back Better Caribbean* podcast series on the response of Caribbean non-governmental organizations to the pandemic, with a new episode each week covering a different angle. For example, in one interview, the founder of a social enterprise platform in Trinidad and Tobago talked about waste management during the pandemic, including sanitization methods and the need to safely dispose of materials used in the treatment of patients. The podcast was shared on Facebook and YouTube.

11. The ability of United Nations country teams to provide coordinated messaging through digital channels, especially in relation to COVID-19 and other crises, was facilitated by the migration of United Nations information centre websites to the United Nations country team web platform, as well as the transfer and consolidation of social media accounts under the country team. While the Department's field offices still manage such sites and platforms, country teams benefit from the expertise available in the information centres, clearer messaging and the elimination of duplication.

## **B. Building trust and combating misinformation through the “Verified” campaign**

12. During the reporting period, the Department continued to promote and amplify the “Verified” campaign, which forms the centrepiece of the Secretariat's broader COVID-19 communications response initiative. The Verified campaign, which has reached a total of more than 1 billion people worldwide, provides life-saving public health information and guidance while combating misinformation.

13. By early January 2021, more than 125,000 people around the world had signed up to be “information volunteers” and were receiving daily content on the COVID-19 crisis to share with their peers, friends and networks. Through the Verified campaign, more than 1,000 pieces of multilingual, locally relevant digital content have been created, in at least 50 languages. Videos produced under the initiative have received 660 million online views globally and have reached 25 million people directly on

their phones, either by text message or through WhatsApp. The United Nations has also collaborated with more than 40 media organizations on the initiative.

14. The Department is engaged in a cross-departmental effort to implement the Verified campaign, with the global network of United Nations information centres playing a particularly important role. The information centres tracked local and regional misinformation trends and provided biweekly reports on how the Organization's work on the pandemic was perceived locally and what specific kinds of misinformation were circulating in their host countries. The reports provided valuable information to the Verified campaign team, which was then better able to produce fit-for-purpose content in multiple languages.

15. Through regular global and regional webinars, United Nations information centres were kept abreast of developments with regard to the Verified campaign and discussed its localization with the campaign's team. Information centres reached out to local media, government, civil society and private sector stakeholders to amplify the campaign across their regions.

16. Verified campaign content was shared, amplified and translated by United Nations information centres, which also created region- and country-specific multilingual messaging, GIFs and videos featuring local influencers and worked with media partners to maximize outreach. The information centre in Mexico City, for example, had local celebrities deliver compelling messages of the Verified campaign, which were disseminated to more than 26 radio stations and three television channels, in collaboration with the public broadcasting system in Mexico. The information centre also secured advertising space in subway stations in Mexico City, with a potential daily audience of 4 million.

17. A key component of the Verified campaign is the Pledge to Pause campaign, which promotes behavioural change in connection with how people share information online. The campaign, which was implemented in collaboration with social media platforms, garnered more than 400 million video views from 32 million unique viewers. The campaign has been most successful in countries in the Middle East and North Africa but has also performed particularly well in Brazil.

18. United Nations information centres were instrumental in supporting the Pledge to Pause campaign, with its premise that pausing before sharing social media posts significantly lowers the likelihood of sharing false information. The information centre in Rio de Janeiro arranged to have the campaign featured during a Brasileirão league soccer game and broadcast live on SporTV, the biggest sports cable network in Brazil. Content from its Portuguese-language *Prometo Pausar* campaign received more than 15.3 million views on TikTok, and the number of followers on that platform increased by 400 per cent.

19. The United Nations information centre in Dakar produced public service announcements on misinformation, the proper use of masks and other health advice related to COVID-19 in French and several local languages. The announcements were shared on the social media platforms of the United Nations Communications Group and peacekeeping missions in 22 countries. They were also shared by civil society organizations such as Save the Children and Médecins sans frontières.

20. The United Nations information centre in Cairo, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, WHO and the American University in Cairo, organized a series of media webinars in the Arab States region to tackle disinformation and misinformation related to COVID-19.

21. Many United Nations information centres translated campaign content, thereby strengthening the Organization's multilingualism efforts and ensuring greater reach and impact in respect of local audiences worldwide. The information centre in

Moscow provided numerous translations into Russian, for example, while the information centre in Vienna translated the Verified campaign website into German. To respond directly to misinformation circulating on social media, the information centre in Beirut created an original series of Verified campaign-branded posts for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in both Arabic and English. The materials were distributed on the information centre's social media platforms and through the local United Nations communications group.

### III. Communications campaigns

#### A. Sustainable development

22. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change constitute the Department's framework for recovering better from the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be at the core of United Nations global communications.

##### **Sustainable Development Goals**

23. In July, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, supported by a media outreach strategy implemented by the Department at the global and local levels, generated more than 3,200 media articles in 118 countries, in 28 languages. Coverage was highest in countries presenting voluntary national reviews or with high-level representation at the forum, such as Argentina, India, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia and Spain. The annual *Sustainable Development Goals Report* issued at the beginning of the forum was mentioned in at least 300 articles, with coverage in 61 countries in 13 languages. The first-ever virtual Sustainable Development Goals media zone organized by the Department, in collaboration with the PVBLIC Foundation, was held during the forum. It featured expert voices and included a prime-time television broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation network featuring the Deputy Secretary-General and Sustainable Development Goals Advocates Erna Solberg and Dia Mirza.

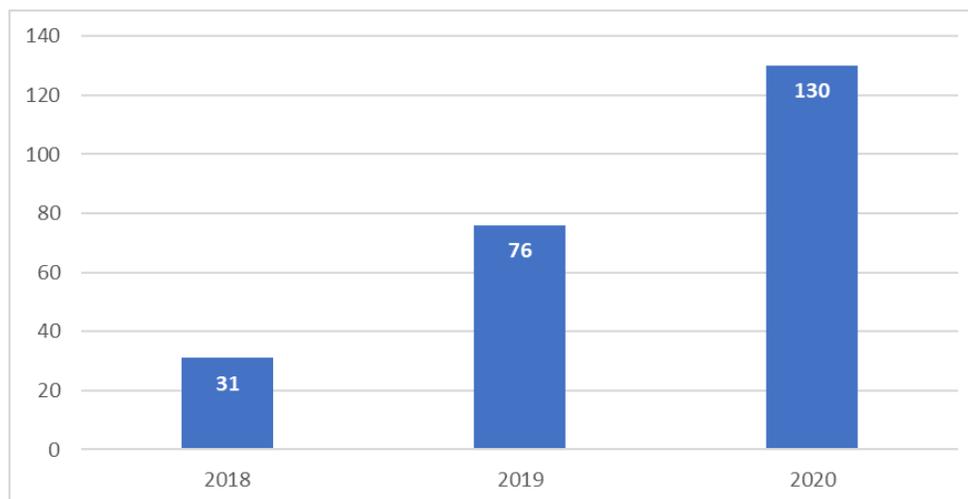
24. Advance planning for the General Assembly, the production of multimedia content and coordinated outreach to partners yielded strong results. In September, the first Sustainable Development Goals Moment of the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals saw strong social media take-up; it was the second most tweeted-about event of the General Assembly, after the high-level meeting to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. Some 20 Sustainable Development Goals Media Compact members, including Sky News (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Channels Television (Nigeria) and Asahi Satellite Broadcasting (Japan), aired the documentary *Nations United*, amplifying key United Nations messages related to the fifth anniversary of the Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals media zone held during the General Assembly reached more people than ever, with 165,000 video views and a potential broadcast audience of up to 300 million households, thanks to partnerships with media organizations Al-Jazeera English, TVC (Nigeria), Phoenix TV (China) and Canal Catorce (Mexico).

25. An online media kit providing key messages and facts and figures on all high-level events of the General Assembly was produced by the Department and widely distributed to international media, United Nations system partners and non-governmental organizations, and it garnered close to 27,000 views during the General Assembly period. The Sustainable Development Goals website continued to be one of the most visited United Nations websites, with 15 million page views in the second half of 2020 across the six official languages.

26. The Sustainable Development Goals Media Compact grew to include more than 120 media and entertainment companies, with the recent addition of the Standard Group (Kenya), MultiChoice (South Africa), Morocco World News, GMA Network (Philippines), BuzzFeed (Japan) and Scoop (New Zealand) (see figure I).

Figure I

**Number of Sustainable Development Goals Media Compact members**



27. United Nations information centres were active in promoting the Goals. For example, the information centre in Windhoek and the United Nations country team in Namibia are leading a partnership with the private sector, government actors, the media and others to promote a campaign aimed at supporting the Namibian economy by asking the public to shop locally and support Namibian-owned businesses. The information centre in Lusaka is using sport to reach 6,000 young people with awareness messages related to the Goals by distributing Sustainable Development Goals soccer balls to 100 schools, including those with children with disabilities, in order to inspire pupils to undertake individual actions such as tree planting, advocating for gender equality or protecting the environment. The information centre in Rio de Janeiro and the 27th World Congress of Architects launched a virtual exhibition on the Goals, and the information centre in Moscow, in partnership with government offices and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, supported an online meeting of the National Youth Council of Russia on the theme “Sustainable Development Goals youth Ambassadors in Commonwealth of Independent States member States: time for mobilization and action”, in order to bring together Sustainable Development Goals Youth Ambassadors and national programme coordinators from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation.

**Climate action**

28. Climate action has been a strong driver of media coverage throughout the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, in both traditional and social media. This was a result in particular of the Secretary-General’s high-level round table on climate action and the summit on biodiversity, as well as climate commitments made by Member States, notably the pledge of China to reach carbon neutrality by 2060. Subsequent pledges by Japan and the Republic of Korea to reach net zero emissions by 2050 further boosted momentum and media coverage. The promotion of the Secretary-General’s speeches in China, India and Japan and of his remarks to the European Council on Foreign Relations between July and November generated strong

media coverage concerning the urgency of climate action across those countries and regions.

29. The Department's promotion of major reports by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization highlighting the scientific basis for urgent action also received significant attention. For example, the "United in Science 2020" report issued in September, the production of which had been coordinated by the World Meteorological Organization, was covered by wire services, the BBC, *El País*, Al-Jazeera and others, as well as on social media by climate scientists and influencers, Member States and non-governmental organizations.

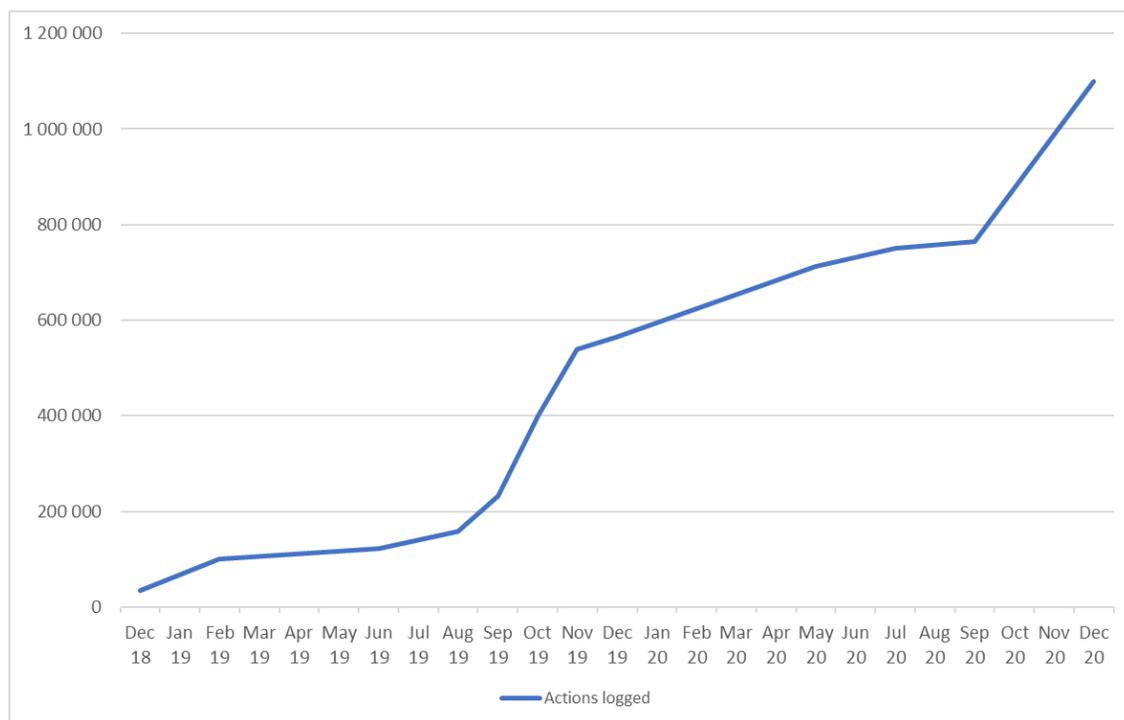
30. In December, the Secretary-General's speech on the state of the planet, delivered at Columbia University in New York and streamed live on United Nations Web TV and other platforms, was covered widely by global media and amplified through interviews with media outlets and a BBC special segment with Sir David Attenborough broadcast the same day.

31. The Climate Ambition Summit, co-convened by the Secretary-General, the United Kingdom, France, Chile and Italy on a virtual platform on 12 December, marked the five-year anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement and galvanized ambitious commitments by Member States as well as non-State actors, generating strong media and social media coverage leading into 2021. The Department produced web and social media content, including quote cards, announcement cards and GIFs. The Department also worked with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General on messaging, wrote and disseminated the closing press release and organized background briefings for field offices and the press.

32. A revamped climate action website in the six official languages was launched just before the Secretary-General's round table in September and attracted more than 55,000 page views during the high-level week and general debate of the General Assembly. Strengthened capacity for visual storytelling and content production to amplify the Secretary-General's voice and promote science and solutions allowed the website to become a solid content hub for United Nations climate communications.

33. The mobilization of individuals also gained momentum, with the Department's ActNow campaign reaching the milestone of 1 million climate actions logged through its platforms. From recycling more to driving less, turning off lights and using less water, people around the world are logging their actions through the chat bot and the new mobile application. The introduction of the application in September greatly boosted engagement; it gained 15,000 users and logged 120,000 actions in the first month alone, with especially strong participation from individuals in Brazil, Germany, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (see figure II).

Figure II  
**Actions logged through ActNow chatbot and mobile app**



34. In addition, a new partnership with an animation production company in the United States, Baobab Studios, brought ActNow to virtual reality film audiences around the world. A children’s version of ActNow, Climate Action Superheroes, was introduced in November to broaden the campaign’s reach to children under the age of 12 and their parents. ActNow is also a founding partner of Count Us In, the citizen action campaign of the high-level champions for climate action of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Count Us In was launched at the Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) Countdown event in October.

## B. Human rights

35. The Department continued to work closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other internal and external partners throughout the reporting period to promote respect for human rights as one of the core objectives of the United Nations and an essential tool for preventing conflict and advancing sustainable development.

36. The observance of Nelson Mandela International Day in 2020 included the awarding of the second United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize, with the Department providing full support for the nomination and selection processes. The laureates, Marianna Vardinoyannis, a Greek philanthropist and advocate for human rights and the protection of children’s health and welfare, and Morissanda Kouyaté of Guinea, an advocate for ending violence against women and girls across Africa, were recognized for their humanitarian work at the virtual General Assembly observance of the Day on 20 July. The event brought together diplomats, senior United Nations officials and civil society to celebrate the legacy of service to

humanity embodied by the former President of South Africa. Owing to the pandemic, an in-person award ceremony was postponed.

37. In the absence of the traditional Nelson Mandela International Day volunteer activities, the Department collaborated with Kahoot!, a game-based learning platform, to develop a quiz. The Department developed and designed the content of the quiz and ensured its prominent placement on the Kahoot! platform, thereby ensuring a high level of visibility and engagement. The quiz, which is available in English, Chinese, French and Spanish, has been played by 60,000 players, mostly young people. This highlights the potential of the platform to engage students on issues related to the United Nations in the future. The interest in the legacy of Nelson Mandela was further evidenced by high social media numbers: from 13 to 20 July, the “Mandela Day” hashtag (#MandelaDay) generated 337,400 mentions across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The Department also developed messages and social media cards for the Day. The Mandela Day hashtag was the Department’s second-ranked week trend for the month of July on Twitter.

38. To inform audiences about the International Day of Indigenous Peoples (9 August), the Department developed multilingual social media content focusing on the solutions that indigenous knowledge offers in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department, in collaboration with Department of Economic and Social Affairs, worked with Twitter to promote a dedicated emoji with the United Nations visual identity for hashtags in English, French and Spanish from 3 August to 11 September. Across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, 142,200 people engaged with the “We are indigenous” hashtag (#WeAreIndigenous). The Day also generated 2,000 media articles and 180,000 social media posts, including by the climate activist Greta Thunberg, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, and other influencers and politicians with large social media followings.

39. The Department promoted the International Decade for People of African Descent, including through virtual briefings for students and a virtual panel discussion on 5 October featuring speakers from the African Union and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, who discussed the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative to combat desertification, and the related issues of conflict and migration, in collaboration with the civil society organization Most Influential People of African Descent.

40. The Department further supported multilingual outreach and promotion of “Peace through music: a global event for social justice” organized by the United Nations Population Fund, which was held virtually on 1 and 10 December. This musical and artistic event was organized in support of the UN75 campaign and Human Rights Day and featured over 200 artists. It was streamed live and broadcast on major digital channels and inspired people to act for peace, justice, equality and an end to racism and discrimination, in particular against people of African descent.

41. To continue highlighting gender as a cross-cutting issue, the Department, in collaboration with OHCHR, reviewed, designed and produced an updated version of the booklet “Women and girls of African descent”, in English, French and Spanish.

42. While the 100 days of the annual Kwibuka commemoration ended on 4 July, the outreach programme on the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations continued to virtually engage educators, students and the public through webinars in the second half of 2020. These events included briefings to Model United Nations participants and civil society groups and a new live discussion series entitled “Beyond the long shadow: engaging with difficult histories”, developed with the Department’s Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme and the Remember Slavery Programme. The aim of the series is to develop a deeper understanding of the legacies of these painful histories and, by examining the past,

consider how to build a world where all can live in dignity and peace. Episodes during the reporting period were on the topics “Museums, memorials and memorialization after atrocity: communicating a form of ongoing justice?” (8 July), “Educating against racism” (29 October) and “Radio and reconstruction” (18 November).

43. As part of a suite of activities in support of the UN75 campaign, the Department continued its growing collaboration with Kahoot! to develop two quizzes, one for older students and one for young learners. The United Nations quizzes, which are on a prominent area on the Kahoot! website, have proven popular and have been played by more than 100,000 people.

44. The Department collaborated closely with OHCHR to observe Human Rights Day on 10 December. The theme for 2020 was “Recover better – stand up for human rights”. The focus was on the need to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that human rights are central to recovery efforts. In addition to virtual activities organized in New York and Geneva, 14 United Nations information centres – in Antananarivo; Bogotá; Brazzaville; Bujumbura, Burundi; Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania; Dhaka; Kathmandu; Lagos, Nigeria; La Paz; Lomé; Moscow; Port of Spain; Tehran; and Vienna – used seed funding provided by OHCHR to conduct activities to promote the Day.

45. The Department supported the observance of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of This Crime (9 December) through the development of multilingual social media materials promoted through the United Nations channels.

46. The Department continued to collaborate closely with the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to promote the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. As part of the inter-agency Working Group on Hate Speech, the Department works to mobilize action to achieve the Strategy’s goal of combating hate speech. Most recently, it worked on the preparation, translation and dissemination of the detailed guidance for United Nations field presences on the implementation of the Strategy and Plan of Action.

47. Human rights issues featured strongly in many of the UN75 campaign dialogues organized by the Department’s information centres. The centre in Beirut ran two virtual dialogues in coordination with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on the topic “Women and girls: gender inequality”, engaging 60 young Palestinian refugees, while the United Nations Office in Uzbekistan organized a two-day online event, the Samarkand Forum on Human Rights, focusing on the rights of young people, with 1,000 participants from around the world. The information centre in Rabat organized a dialogue on the role of the United Nations in the protection of human rights, in cooperation with the Policy Center for the New South.

### **C. Special information programme on the question of Palestine**

48. In fulfilling its mandate under General Assembly resolution [74/13](#) on its special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department delivered its activities, including a media seminar on peace in the Middle East and the annual training session for Palestinian journalists, on virtual platforms, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

49. Instead of holding an in-person training course at United Nations Headquarters, the Department worked with the Al-Jazeera Media Institute to organize a special virtual training programme for Palestinian journalists from 23 November to 3 December. The course focused on three themes: mobile journalism, data journalism

and news verification, and benefited 12 Palestinian journalists from Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the diaspora.

50. In lieu of its annual international media seminar on peace in the Middle East, the Department held a two-day virtual event on 8 and 9 December. Speakers from Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States and the State of Palestine discussed two themes: “The Israel-Palestine conflict and challenges of the new decade” and “A tale of two narratives: misinformation and disinformation”. The sessions were broadcast live via United Nations Web TV.

51. During the reporting period, the Department continued to work closely with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to promote three virtual activities organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, namely the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem, part I (28 July), the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem, part II (27 August) and an event on international parliamentarians and the Palestine question (12 November). All of these online events were broadcast live via United Nations Web TV.

52. The Department also provided communications support for the Committee’s observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (29 November). This included promoting the main virtual commemoration, which was held on 1 December and featured the official launch of a virtual exhibit focusing on the wall built in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. United Nations information centres around the globe organized various activities in commemoration of the Day.

53. During the reporting period, the Department translated and produced an online brochure to accompany the guided tour exhibit “The question of Palestine and the United Nations”, in all six official languages.

#### **D. Decolonization**

54. As the end of the Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2011–2020) neared, the Department disseminated new promotional materials on the issue of decolonization, such as the leaflet entitled “Ten frequently asked questions on the United Nations and decolonization” prepared in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, in all six official languages; an animated video entitled *United Nations and Decolonization: Past to Present*, produced by with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in English, with other languages to follow; and a one-minute video entitled *60 Years of Independence: A Wave of Independence Spread across Africa*, released in English, French and Kiswahili.

#### **E. New Partnership for Africa’s Development**

55. As part of the Organization’s coordinated efforts to mobilize support for economic development, peace and security in Africa, the Department promoted the aims, priorities and achievements of the African Union, the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa’s Development, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the Economic Commission for Africa through the Department’s online magazine *Africa Renewal*, published in English and French with select articles in Kiswahili and Chinese, and through its social media channels and a monthly curated electronic newsletter.

56. Articles published on the *Africa Renewal* website and amplified on social media raised awareness of the pandemic and its socioeconomic impact and promoted the

response efforts of the United Nations, the African Union and African countries. Interviews with experts on the pandemic response and economic development were disseminated. The experts included the former acting Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, who discussed the need for African companies to innovate to survive the pandemic; the Chief Executive Officer of the African Union Development Agency, on the coordination between the African Union, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the United Nations in tackling the virus and plans to recover better; the President of the General Assembly, on efforts to eradicate poverty, foster quality education and inclusion; the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, on the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations, the pandemic and women's empowerment; the Director of the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), on the impact of illicit financial flows on the ability of Africa to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; the Chair of the African Group of Negotiators, on climate change; and the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, on women's empowerment as the catalyst for development on the continent.

57. The Department also ran an online campaign to celebrate health-care workers on the front lines of efforts to combat COVID-19 in Africa ([www.un.org/africarenewal/section/healthcare](http://www.un.org/africarenewal/section/healthcare)). The 13 medical practitioners profiled were from different African countries, including Angola, Cameroon, Kenya, the Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Sudan. They shared stories of their experiences, response strategies and recommendations for authorities.

58. The Department publicized analytical articles and relevant interviews on many pandemic-related special reports, including "Responding to COVID-19 in Africa: using data to find a balance" by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, WHO and other leading institutions; "Tackling illicit financial flows for sustainable development in Africa" by UNCTAD; "COVID-19: the great lockdown and its impact on small business" by the International Trade Centre; and "Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plan for Africa" by the African Union Development Agency.

59. The Department took the opportunity offered by specific milestones to cover a wide range of issues, including those relating to African women and youth. To mark International Youth Day, the Department spotlighted the African Union Special Envoy on Youth, who discussed youth priorities, jobs and food security. In September, the Department highlighted the results of the global consultation launched by the United Nations on "The future we want, the United Nations we need". Stories produced in October to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations included one on the African countries that participated in the events in San Francisco in 1945 that led to the founding of the United Nations, and one on the few African women leaders who have addressed the General Assembly to date.

60. To mark the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, stories were published on topics such as how Namibia helped bring about the adoption of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security and how Africa can overcome twenty-first century challenges, such as increasing bias, to deliver on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. An interview with the Secretary-General of the Beijing Conference, Gertrude Mongella of the United Republic of Tanzania, on the impact of the Conference was also published.

61. During the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Department coordinated with Office of the Special Adviser on Africa to promote various activities pertaining to Africa. The webpage on Africa at the seventy-fifth session of the

Assembly ([www.un.org/africarenewal/africaga](http://www.un.org/africarenewal/africaga)) gave visibility to the participation of African representatives and their official statements.

62. The Department continued to support the “Silencing the Guns by 2020” campaign of the African Union in its communications activities, while also amplifying the Secretary-General’s appeal for a global ceasefire. Interviewees were invited to respond to the question of what silencing the guns meant for Africa and to send a special peace message to Africans. In addition, a joint op-ed by senior United Nations and African Union officials and the United Nations-African Union joint call for the surrender of illicit weapons was published and amplified across the platforms of *Africa Renewal*, including its website, social media accounts and electronic newsletter. Through these channels, the Department also promoted the extraordinary summits of the African Union Heads of State and Government in December 2020, which addressed matters related to Silencing the Guns by 2020 and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

63. Furthermore, ahead of the commencement of trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area in January 2021, the Department increased coverage of the trade pact, including by promoting the work of the secretariat of the Free Trade Area and amplifying the views of intra-African traders on their hopes and aspirations in the context of free trading.

64. The Department’s syndicated news features service of *Africa Renewal* continued to expand. A total of 134 articles were republished 1,003 times, in English, French and Kiswahili, by more than 145 media outlets in 29 countries, including Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Guinea, Italy, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States and Zimbabwe.

65. The Department also translated its articles into Kiswahili and collaborated with Shanghai International Studies University for Chinese translations. About 46,000 active users access the site’s content in Kiswahili and 15,000 access content in Chinese.

66. To increase the reach of *Africa Renewal* content, the Department continued to use dissemination platforms such as Apple iTunes and produced podcasts, audio stories and short videos that were featured on both the website and social media.

67. The Department’s redesigned *Africa Renewal* website experienced an increase in traffic, with 2 million visits in total and an average of 296,000 visits per month. Data indicate that there was a near equal number of male and female (54.2 per cent male and 45.8 per cent female) visitors. The highest proportion of visitors (42.1 per cent) were in Africa, followed by North America (24 per cent) and Europe (16.1 per cent). The site was most popular with people between the ages of 25 and 34 (30.6 per cent).

## **F. Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire**

68. Following the Secretary-General’s statement at the General Assembly, the Department launched a communications campaign, which ran from October to December, to promote his call for a global ceasefire in order to focus on defeating COVID-19. The Secretary-General’s call ranked among the most popular content of the year on the social media accounts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations. It was amplified by senior United Nations leadership at agencies through statements, speeches and multimedia content. Public service announcements were aired in countries where peacekeeping missions are located and a dedicated website ([www.un.org/globalceasefire](http://www.un.org/globalceasefire)) was created as a hub for content. The website has had more than 46,000 views in all six official languages since it was launched on

23 October 2020. In addition, an online appeal in support of the Secretary-General's call was promoted on the social media channels of the Organization, United Nations peace operations, United Nations country teams and United Nations information centres, garnering close to 2.4 million signatures.

### **G. Support for the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan**

69. The Department supported the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in setting up the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS), following its establishment by the Security Council in its resolution [2524 \(2020\)](#). The Department planned the Mission's Strategic Communications and Public Information Section and took part in the recruitment of staff. It developed a communication and outreach strategy, tailored to the context, to explain the mandate, manage expectations and build confidence in the peace process in the Sudan. Multilingualism was a key component of the strategy. The Department coordinated with the United Nations country team in the Sudan and the outgoing peacekeeping mission, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, to ensure an integrated approach and cooperation with stakeholders before, during and after the setting up of the mission. The Department also developed a public website for UNITAMS to disseminate information on the news, goals and activities of the new Mission and participated in the UNITAMS budget exercise for 2021.

### **H. Training programme on communicating about sexual exploitation and abuse, and the United Nations system-wide communications task force**

70. The Department, in collaboration with the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support, held the third training programme on communicating about sexual exploitation and abuse in December 2020. The programme, which was conducted virtually, consisted of briefings and discussions, followed by individual practical exercises for the 20 participants on communicating about the issue. The aim of the programme is to equip senior leaders from peace operations, agencies, funds, programmes and the African Union with the appropriate communication skills needed to effectively address sexual exploitation and abuse. It emphasizes using a sensitive, transparent and victim-centred approach, thereby contributing to the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy across the United Nations system. This initiative is in line with the Secretary-General's new approach to a system-wide strategy on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

71. The Department also set up, and is co-chairing, a communications task force under the umbrella of the United Nations system-wide working group on sexual exploitation and abuse. The task force is mandated to coordinate a cohesive communications response that fosters greater transparency on the issue, and serves as a forum for the discussion of lessons learned and best practices. It includes representatives of 16 United Nations entities from across the peace and security, development and humanitarian spheres.

## **IV. Information centres and information services**

### **A. Strengthening United Nations information centres and the global communications network**

72. To strengthen the capacity of its network of 59 United Nations information centres and support the application of the global communications strategy across the network of 129 resident coordinator offices, the Department collaborated with the Development Coordination Office to provide strategic and thematic guidance to their field communications staff and stimulate peer-to-peer exchange. To develop field office capacity to successfully execute the strategy, web training sessions were organized throughout the reporting period on copy editing, photojournalism, website design and video storytelling. These efforts resulted in more stories and material from the field for the Department's global platforms as well as those of the field offices.

73. In an immediate response to the COVID-19 outbreak, weekly and biweekly webinars were organized to provide field communications staff in United Nations information centres and resident coordinator offices with key messaging from WHO, the Secretariat and other entities. In addition to those regular sessions, webinars were held on specific programmatic priorities and administrative topics. In 2020, the Department held 69 webinars: 48 on programmatic topics, 7 on administrative topics and 14 for capacity-building purposes. The total number of participants increased by more than 400 per cent compared with the previous year.

74. The Department continues to review the structure of its field staff to better fit the needs of a global, modern communications network. Through a dedicated regional administrative support structure, the Department was able to further streamline workflows within its field offices. This, in turn, enabled a reclassification exercise to be conducted, which has led to increased communications capacity within each individual information centre.

75. In addition to the strategic communications role that they have in their countries, international staff of the Department's field offices have been providing support to countries without a United Nations information centre. This has been undertaken at both the subregional and regional levels. At the subregional level, 25 of the larger information centres have provided guidance, shared best practices, reviewed work and mentored communications staff in information centres and resident coordinator offices within their immediate region. For example, the information centre in Jakarta has established a support network covering United Nations communications colleagues in Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, as well as the information centre in Manila. At the regional level, communities of practice coordinated by the Department's field-based directors have been established for communications staff at information centres and resident coordinator offices. In Africa, the francophone network of information centres facilitates peer exchange, the dissemination of information and language support through the information centre in Dakar. Similar networks have been established in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa region and anglophone Africa, and there are plans to establish networks for the Commonwealth of Independent States and Asia and the Pacific regions in 2021.

76. Senior field officers of the Department also supported resident coordinators in addressing crises. For example, the Directors of the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe and United Nations Information Service in Vienna provided strategic and crisis communications guidance to resident coordinators in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, while guiding the Department's

field offices in Baku, Minsk and Yerevan on how best to communicate on the specific situations in their countries.

## B. Multilingualism

77. Given the importance of providing information on COVID-19 prevention measures to audiences in their local languages and the need to reach the most vulnerable populations, the work of the United Nations information centres has proven essential during this reporting period. The information centre in Bogotá, for example, produced and broadcast radio messages and published videos related to COVID-19 in 14 indigenous languages, potentially reaching 700,000 people. The information centre in Dakar produced videos on COVID-19 in Bambara, Lingala and Wolof, while the information centre in Port of Spain produced similar videos in Creole. The information centre in Pretoria established a partnership with a translation service to translate United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) social media content on parenting during the pandemic into five local languages. United Nations information centres used various means to reach audiences in remote areas with limited Internet coverage, including traditional media, text messaging and even, in Bogotá, megaphones attached to motorbikes.

78. United Nations information centres have published and translated information into 123 languages,<sup>1</sup> as well as Braille, Nepali sign language and Hindi sign language. They have also created versions of the Sustainable Development Goals icons in 106 languages, most recently Gaelic and Greenlandic. This multilingual content is shared digitally across websites and social media platforms, with 35 of the 58 information centre websites posting content in local languages and an additional 24 languages being used locally across various social media platforms such as Aparat, Flickr, Flipboard, LinkedIn, Livestream, Periscope, Pinterest, SlideShare, Snapchat, Telegram, TikTok, Tumblr, Vimeo, Vine and VK.

79. Information centres not only communicate directly with audiences in local languages but also localize global campaign messaging and the messaging of senior officials by translating key materials. They helped to place these materials in local media during the reporting period, including 277 print placements in 42 countries, and in 18 languages, of op-eds by the Secretary-General and other senior officials. Information centres produced the majority of the more than 60 translations of the UN75 campaign surveys, supported the promotion of the Secretary-General's COVID-19 policy briefs through the translation of key messages and extended the reach of initiatives such as the Verified campaign to wider audiences. This process has been facilitated by the designation of specific information centres as language coordinators, which collaborate with others to share the work of translation and dissemination. This process, as well as the establishment of regional networks of field

<sup>1</sup> Afrikaans, Akuapem Twi, Armenian, Asante Twi, Awá, Azerbaijani, Bahasa Indonesia, Bafut, Bambara, Bangla/Bengali, Bangwa, Bari, Basaa, Belarusian, Bemba, Bhojpuri, Burmese, Chakma, Chechen, Czech, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangbe, Danish, Dioula, Dutch, Emberá, Ewe, Ewondo, Fante, Filipino, Finnish, Frisian (Frysk), Ffulde, Ga, Georgian, German, Gonja, Greek, Guahibo, Guarani, Gujarati, Gulmacema, Hausa, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hitnü, Hungarian, Icelandic, Idoma, Igbo, Ijaw, Ika, Inga, Italian, Japanese, Kanuri, Kaonde, Kazakh, Kikuyu, Kiswahili, Kituba, Korewahe, Lenje, Lingala, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Maithili, Malagasy, Marathi, Mari, Misak, Moore, Muyscubun, Nasa Yuwe, Ndebele, Nepali, Newari, Norwegian, Nyanja/Chinyanja, Nzema, Pede, Persian, Pidgin English, Polish, Portuguese, Quechua, Sáliba, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Shona, Shupamum, Sikuani, Sinhala, Siswati, Slovak, Slovene, Swedish, Tamang, Tamazight, Tamil, Telugu, Tharu, Ticuna, Tiv, Tonga, Tsonga, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Uzbek, Venda, Wayuunaiki, Wolof, Xhosa, Yakut, Yoruba, Yukpa, Zenú and Zulu.

office communications officers who focus on the language of the region, have strengthened the Department's multilingual capacity.

### **C. Creative outreach**

80. In accordance with the main objectives of global communications strategy – leading the narrative, inspiring people to care and mobilizing action – the field offices turned their attention to bringing solutions-oriented, positive storytelling to their audiences. During the reporting period, dozens of kindness and solidarity stories were produced by United Nations information centres around the world and shared on local, regional and global websites, including the Department's COVID-19 portal. All stories were published in English, with many also in Arabic, French, Spanish and other official languages of the United Nations. The two most viewed stories on the COVID-19 portal included one from the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe highlighting the benefit of transparent masks for people with hearing impairments, and one from the information centre in Tokyo about Japanese Olympians encouraging healthy living through physical activity.

### **D. United Nations Day and seventy-fifth anniversary commemorations, including outreach to youth**

81. Despite the pandemic, United Nations information centres and country teams celebrated United Nations Day in creative ways. The United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, with support from the United Nations offices in Geneva, Vienna, Prague and Sarajevo, helped arrange for nearly 400 European landmarks in over 220 cities in 22 countries to be lit in blue. The information centre in Cairo supported the initiative to illuminate the pyramids, the Sphinx, the Cairo Tower and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building. The vivid images were widely promoted on the participants' social media channels and Flickr, and by a dedicated slideshow aired on United Nations Web TV.

82. The United Nations information centre in Buenos Aires, working with the largest television broadcaster in Argentina, Telefe, produced the documentary *Que no quede nadie atrás (No One Left Behind)*, which was watched by more than 500,000 people on United Nations Day. The information centre in Moscow, in a joint effort with Project Everyone and TV BRICS, aired the *Nations United* documentary to 27 million Russian-speaking viewers, while the information centre in Windhoek and the country team in Namibia released a video, *A Day in the Life of a Namibian Child*, highlighting inequalities and calling for equal access to education.

83. The United Nations office in Kyiv, in partnership with the Odessa National Orchestra, organized a virtual concert for peace and solidarity, which reached more than 5,000 views on YouTube. The information centre in Lusaka produced a song for United Nations Day with 30 young singers and musicians, and an audience of some 1,500 joined in virtually.

84. Most United Nations information centres and country teams celebrated United Nations Day virtually. The information centre in Manila streamed its programme live on Facebook, reaching over 30,000 people, and also facilitated some hybrid events. The information centre in Colombo hosted a limited number of guests for its United Nations Day celebrations, which were broadcast live and were viewed 80,000 times on Facebook. The information centre in Lusaka live-streamed a UN75 Dialogue with 30 young participants, including representatives from the deaf and blind communities, to 1,600 viewers. A select few United Nations information centres, such as those in Canberra, Tbilisi and Yaoundé, organized in-person events with participants from the

Government, the diplomatic community, civil society, educational institutions and international organizations, while ensuring adherence to the COVID-19 protocols of their host countries.

85. The Department's field offices played a critical part in promoting global consultations to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations through surveys and dialogues. The majority of the UN75 dialogues took place in countries with United Nations information centres, and they were a driving force in ensuring wide distribution of the survey. The centres organized online dialogues reaching diverse audiences: refugees and migrants convened by the information centre in Buenos Aires in collaboration with a national media outlet; girls from the Sisters in Success association invited by the information centre in Bujumbura; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community invited by the information centre in Yangon, Myanmar; and the youth audience reached on radio by the United Nations office in Baku. The information centre in Pretoria connected with local communities through the National Community Radio Forum, and the information centre in Bogotá ran a series of dialogues called "Coffee with the United Nations" that were open to all.

86. The United Nations information centres celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary in creative ways. The information centre in Rio de Janeiro partnered with a Peruvian artist to create a Sustainable Development Goals poster entitled "Florescer 17", which was produced in Portuguese, English and Spanish. The United Nations office and the country team in Uzbekistan, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, produced a song entitled *Human*, with lyrics in Arabic, English, Italian, Kazakh, Russian, Tajik, Turkish and Uzbek. It received over 2,500 views and aired on 7 national and 12 regional television channels. The United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, in partnership with the Portuguese Mint, produced a commemorative €2 coin and had 500,000 of them circulated in 19 eurozone countries. The information centres in New Delhi and Yangon facilitated the publication of commemorative stamps.

87. The information centre in Jakarta and the country team in Indonesia joined forces with the news wire agency Antara to place a UN75 video strategically in 78 train stations and government buildings, attracting 2 million daily viewers. The information centre in Canberra organized a campaign to publicize the UN75 survey on 250 buses and a national community radio campaign that reached an estimated 1.7 million listeners.

88. In Morocco, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the country's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping. The information centre in Rabat partnered with the Royal Armed Forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Morocco to organize a poster exhibition highlighting the country's efforts over the past 60 years to support United Nations peacekeeping, in particular, and United Nations action in general on such issues as climate change mitigation, migration and combating terrorism and violent extremism. The ceremony, which was shared on several platforms, provided a high-profile opportunity for senior officials to reaffirm the country's commitment to, and engagement with, the United Nations.

89. In promoting the UN75 campaign and engaging with youth audiences, a variety of mediums were used to reach different audiences. For example, the information centre in Bogotá and SOLE Colombia produced a radio programme about visions for the future, which was then broadcast on Radio Nacional and 320 community radio stations covering 90 per cent of the country. The information centre in Dakar helped to organize a competition for 39,000 students of the Virtual University of Senegal, in which the participants created one-minute videos related to the theme of UN75. As part of the Take a Step campaign, the information centre in Beirut, focusing on communities without Internet access, used noticeboards to collect written statements

from residents on their aspirations for a better future and then created a moving video to share those aspirations on television and social media channels.

## **E. Measuring impact**

90. United Nations information centres monitored the global impact of the Department's communications and provided information about social and traditional media coverage in local languages. For example, during the high-level week and general debate of the General Assembly, information centres reported on coverage in more than 50 countries. As a result of the pandemic, many regular outreach activities led by information centres, such as briefing programmes, film screenings and exhibits, were curtailed and shifted almost entirely to online platforms, resulting in a significant reduction of opportunities to engage with audiences in person and collect surveys from them directly. Information centres made extensive efforts to generate responses to the UN75 survey, and more than 1.2 million responses have been received.

## **V. Conclusions**

91. The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a stress test for the Department with regard to adapting its work. It also underscored the value of the new global communications strategy and the importance of the ongoing reforms aimed at achieving a more agile and fit-for-purpose communications entity.

92. The Department worked to shift its campaign-related work to align with the communications needs triggered by the mobilization of the whole United Nations system in response to the pandemic. On behalf of the Department, and through the United Nations Communications Group, the Strategic Communications Division played an instrumental role in crisis communications planning and message coordination. Leading the narrative gained added importance, as providing factual, science-based information to a wide public to counter misinformation and disinformation became imperative.

93. United Nations information centres played a crucial role in working, together with resident coordinator offices and United Nations country teams, to reach audiences through their preferred platforms and in their languages and context. By leveraging the benefits of the global communications network created as part of the reform of the United Nations development system and stepping up their efforts to tell stories from the field, United Nations information centres generated compassion and fostered solidarity with their audiences.

94. The Department pivoted to greater digital outreach to help the United Nations reach a global audience in relation to key priorities, including the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action, and engaged with local audiences in numerous creative ways to promote UN75 and observe United Nations Day. The Department continued to prioritize multilingualism and, especially through the work of United Nations information centres, strengthened its capacity to contextualize information as well as to create original content in local languages.

95. Looking ahead, the Department will continue to align its strategic communications activities, as well as the structure and work of its field offices, to further operationalize the global communications strategy, with its focus on key United Nations priorities. In doing so, it will build on the creative approaches introduced during the reporting period in response to the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.