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Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 23 October 2014, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 59: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*Territories not included under other agenda items*) (continued) (A/C.4/69/L.5)

Draft decision A/C.4/69/L.5: Question of Gibraltar

1. **The Chair** said that the draft decision had no programme budget implications.

2. *Draft decision A/C.4/69/L.5 was adopted.*

Agenda item 49: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space (continued) (A/C.4/69/L.2/Rev.1)

Draft resolution A/C.4/69/L.2/Rev.1: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space

3. **Mr. Mebarki** (Algeria), speaking as the representative of the Chair of the Committee's Working Group of the Whole on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, said that the Working Group had met three times to discuss the draft resolution and had agreed to the revised version contained in document A/C.4/69/L.2/Rev.1, which was being submitted for adoption by the Committee.

4. **The Chair** said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

5. *Draft resolution A/C.4/69/L.2/Rev.1 was adopted.*

Agenda item 54: Questions relating to information (continued) (A/69/21 and A/69/310)

6. **Ms. Rengifo** (Colombia) said that, while the role of new technologies had been fundamental in facilitating dissemination of the Organization's message among demographic groups that had embraced their use, access to such technologies was limited or non-existent for a large percentage of the population in developing countries. It was therefore vital to continue to strengthen traditional media in order for information to reach the largest audience.

7. Since information and communication technology (ICT) played an important role in development, cooperation mechanisms should be promoted in relation to such technology so as to reduce the disparities between developed and developing countries. The United Nations Information Centre in Bogotá would continue its communication strategy

which had provided services and information to millions of people. It was important to highlight and strengthen the work of all such centres in order to achieve sustainable results.

8. Multilingualism was of particular importance as a guiding principle of the Organization's work, and efforts to achieve parity among the six official languages must continue, as for example in the issuance of press releases, which often appeared in one language only and were therefore less accessible to those who spoke other languages. The Department of Public Information should make further efforts to devise creative solutions, in a cost-neutral manner, as requested by the General Assembly. The achievement of effective results required innovative strategies for working with the academic and volunteer sectors, among others, while using existing capacities based on the equitable distribution of resources.

9. She was pleased to note that Spanish remained the second most frequently used language on United Nations websites. Nevertheless, Spanish-language materials were still more limited than those in English, and the relevant offices must work together with the Department to adjust the content of the United Nations website and other information resources accordingly. Furthermore, it was essential to reintroduce the practice of citing up-to-date disaggregated statistical data in reports; such data should be taken into account in decisions regarding the Organization's dissemination of information. The Department must also ensure that its initiatives, and in particular the partnerships it developed, were coordinated with those of other United Nations agencies, so as to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that the processes followed were in line with the Organization's objectives.

10. **Mr. Guibila** (Burkina Faso) said that his delegation welcomed the Department's use of modern communication tools, which allowed the United Nations to retain and expand its audience. However, it was concerned about the global disparities in access to information and urged the United Nations to work together with Member States to reduce the digital divide through increased assistance to developing countries such as Burkina Faso, which was currently in the process of migrating to terrestrial digital television.

11. Convinced of the impact of traditional media, which were still widely used in developing countries, his delegation urged the Department to continue

promoting those tools in conjunction with new technologies, and to ensure the accurate, impartial, balanced and timely handling of information produced by the Organization, including by strengthening the activity of the United Nations information centres, which provided numerous services to the populations of the countries they covered. The United Nations Information Centre in Ouagadougou, for example, which was responsible for Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger, raised awareness on concerns specific to those countries, including poverty reduction, food insecurity, natural disasters, and terrorism and violent extremism. Despite the difficulties they faced, African Governments sought to support the United Nations information centres based in their region.

12. His delegation condemned all forms of violence against journalists, who were unable to exercise their profession objectively in some countries, and called for strengthened protection mechanisms in that regard. He urged the Department to continue its efforts to enhance multilingualism within the United Nations system and take all necessary steps to ensure respect for the principle of parity of all official languages, especially on the Organization's website.

13. **Mr. Maope** (Lesotho) said that, while his delegation welcomed the growing use of ICT in all areas of life, ICT development remained highly uneven among countries and additional efforts were needed to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. It was equally important to ensure that international management of ICT, including the Internet, was multilateral, transparent and democratic, guaranteeing equitable distribution of resources and facilitating access for all.

14. His delegation commended the Department of Public Information for its recent outreach and communication campaigns and noted that, in order for the Department to perform its mandate effectively, it must have adequate resources.

15. More than ever, the United Nations had to be close to the people it served. To that end, in 1994 his Government had constructed an office complex to house the United Nations country programmes and agencies as well as the United Nations Information Centre in Maseru. Since its establishment in 1979, that Centre had played a pivotal role in promoting greater public understanding and support of the aims and activities of the United Nations. Sadly, the recent

reduction in its staff had made it less effective in reaching local people. He called for the Centre to be strengthened so that it could better engage with all segments of society.

16. The configuration and staffing of United Nations information centres must not be altered without a decision of the General Assembly and consultation with host countries. It was important to respect Member States and actively engage with them on such issues. United Nations information centres in small countries must be preserved and provided with sufficient financial resources and capacity-building.

17. **Mr. Mana** (Cameroon) said that Cameroon remained deeply committed to freedom of information and access to knowledge and training, all of which favoured peace and development. It had promoted broader access to ICTs by creating tax exemptions for sector inputs, establishing a special telecommunications fund and the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies, and adopting its first national development strategy for ICTs in 2008. It had also undertaken a large-scale project to build multipurpose community telecentres that sought to improve Internet access in rural areas and support organizations working to reduce the country's digital divide. To that end, his Government was in the process of rolling out a 5,600 km-long national fibre optic network and had set up websites to provide access to government information. While urban areas remained better equipped than rural areas, efforts were being made to close the gap, including by establishing community telecentres in rural areas. A telemedicine centre, Genesis Telecare, had been set up in 2009.

18. His delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to achieve an inclusive information society and to ensure that the information it disseminated to the public was as impartial as possible. Nevertheless, it was convinced that the impact of the actions of the United Nations would be optimized by putting the same information at everyone's disposal, in real time. In that regard, more should be done to ensure the equal treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations. Online information services should be made available in all six official languages without a significant lag between their publication in one language and their translation into the others. However, it should also be recalled that, for a large part of the population, who lacked access to the Internet, paper publications remained the only way to obtain credible,

objective and detailed information on the United Nations and other important aspects of international life.

19. The valuable work carried out by the United Nations information centres was to be commended. The United Nations Information Centre in Yaoundé provided a broad range of individuals with access to reliable and up-to-date information and had an undeniably positive impact among local populations, which still had a critical need for information on issues such as peacekeeping and sustainable development. He therefore called for that Centre to be revitalized through the allocation of adequate financial and human resources.

20. **Mr. Prasad** (India) said that his delegation fully supported the work of the Department of Public Information in promoting and advancing the goals of the United Nations through continued campaigns on many issues of importance to the international community. In that regard, it endorsed the United Nations Academic Impact initiative and its focus on fostering academic work throughout the world with a view to contributing to overall development. India also recognized the significance of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme as an educational initiative intended to prevent future genocides. It appreciated the Department's initiative in organizing a discussion on the publication of the records of the United Nations War Crimes Commission; its activities in connection with the annual observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade; and its "Music for Peace" initiative. Furthermore, it commended the Department's close cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office in promoting the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and providing communications support to the Task Force and its working groups.

21. His delegation appreciated the weekly United Nations radio programmes in Hindi and Urdu. A greater focus in those programmes on the Organization's involvement in development in South Asia and on peacekeeping activities, given South Asia's significant contribution to peacekeeping efforts, would be welcome. More generally, the Departments of Public Information, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support should work more closely together in order to highlight United Nations peacekeeping success stories

and provide accurate, impartial and timely information on the activities of United Nations peacekeepers.

22. His delegation noted the Department's efforts in making full use of the Internet and social media to publicize the role of the United Nations. In view of the rapidly growing pool of Internet and social media users in South Asia, greater engagement of local expertise in the production of programmes and content for the region would help to increase the reach of the Department's initiatives. Lastly, his delegation commended the work of the United Nations information centres and urged the Department to work more closely with host countries with a view to strengthening the centres and providing them with adequate budgetary resources, especially in the developing world.

23. **Mr. Lasso Mendoza** (Ecuador) said that it was the constitutional duty of all States to facilitate universal access to ICTs, especially for persons or groups with limited or no access. In that regard, Ecuador had traced out a path for reducing the digital divide within society.

24. The United Nations, as a universal body, must aim to disseminate information on its activities as widely as possible, since the international community had a right to be informed and needed to understand the scope and meaning of the Organization's activities. It must therefore disseminate its information products in a timely, transparent and non-discriminatory manner, in all six official languages, based on the principles of multilingualism and parity of official languages. The Department still had many resources to draw upon in order to ensure that the Organization's information was no longer produced in just two languages. Budgetary restrictions must not be an excuse for inertia, but rather, should drive creativity and action.

25. There were not only legal but also statistical grounds for multilingualism: Spanish was the second most commonly used language on United Nations websites and social media. It was therefore regrettable that new United Nations products and websites were still not produced in all the official languages. When only one segment of the world's population received United Nations information in a complete and timely manner, underlying discrimination clearly existed against those who were excluded because of the failure to apply the principle of multilingualism. In that context, the Organization could and must play an

important role in correcting structural economic and social imbalances — which could be worsened by the digital divide — through timely, equitable and non-discriminatory information policies. The dissemination of information in just one language was inconsistent with the universal nature of the Organization. His delegation therefore urged the Department to continue working with Member States to find ways to overcome the obstacles to implementing the principle of multilingualism and to eliminate the current disparities in the use of the Organization's official languages.

26. Information analysis in international organizations should be based on trust and respect for international law. Extraterritorial surveillance, the interception of communications, and mass collection of data concerning people throughout the world was not only an infringement of human rights and a violation of countries' sovereignty but also led to instability in relations between States. The security of one country could not take precedence over international law, human rights or the security of other countries. Ecuador was ready to participate in an open dialogue on that subject, and supported efforts to establish an appropriate international legal framework on the inviolability of all electronic communications.

27. **Mr. Cabactulan** (Philippines) said that data and information played a vital role in understanding an increasingly complex world. While they were positive transformative tools that could empower individuals, communities and societies, they also had destructive potential, since they could be used to produce misinformation, generate divisions within a society, corrode relations between nations and foster hatred and animosity around the world. In that regard, credible institutions that helped manage, use and disseminate data and information, such as the Department of Public Information, had a critical role to play in drawing peoples closer together, building on knowledge bases, and innovating to benefit humankind. As well as fulfilling its mandate to make the United Nations more understandable to the world, the Department fed actively into a global information loop aimed at achieving a more peaceful, progressive and prosperous world, and had accomplished much despite facing real challenges.

28. Countless United Nations documents were now readily accessible through online and other media platforms, meetings were covered live via webcast, and

awareness on many key issues continued to be raised; however, some areas still required attention. Sustained efforts were needed to continue harnessing the power of the Internet and developing ICT to further broaden the Department's reach, safeguard United Nations websites and internal communication systems and strengthen the Organization from within. The Department should also continue to utilize traditional media channels in order to help bridge the global digital divide that, regrettably, still existed. While the Department's increasing social media presence offered new opportunities, United Nations system agencies that provided information to the global community must take care not to be manipulated into advancing certain political agendas, given the inherent dangers of posting incorrect information via social media.

29. As a troop- and police-contributing country, the Philippines welcomed the Department's efforts to bolster the communications and public information capacities of peacekeeping components, including to address such issues as sensationalized and inaccurate news reports. It also appreciated the Department's collaboration with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support in celebrating the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

30. The increased traffic to United Nations websites and press releases highlighted the growing interest in and usefulness of the Organization's news services, the accessibility of which could be further enhanced by making content available in all six official languages. His delegation encouraged collaboration with educational institutions to that end. The Department should also work closely with relevant agencies to improve global understanding of pressing issues, including pandemics such as the Ebola virus disease.

31. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that his delegation commended the Department for its constant efforts to evaluate and improve its performance so as to ensure that information on the goals, activities and achievements of the United Nations reached as wide an audience as possible. It particularly valued the Department's activities under the special information programme on the question of Palestine.

32. Among recent achievements, the Department had created a communications team to cover the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, coordinated with United Nations departments, delegations and information centres to organize

numerous commemorative events, and worked to raise awareness of the Organization's goals and activities using all available channels of communication. The Department, which functioned as the voice of the Organization on the world stage, was making use of new media such as social networks, while at the same time recognizing the importance of traditional media for developing countries, for example through the commemoration of World Radio Day.

33. Continued efforts must be made to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations information centres, which played an essential role in disseminating information on the goals of the Organization and thus helping to achieve them. The Department must also ensure parity among the Organization's six official languages in all its communications and endeavour to include other non-official languages wherever possible. International cooperation was necessary to develop communications infrastructure and build human capacity, particularly in developing countries, in order to reduce the digital divide and establish a new world information and communication order aimed at strengthening peace and mutual understanding.

34. **Mr. Htut** (Myanmar) said that the Department of Public Information and the Committee on Information played a vital role in disseminating accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information on the work of the United Nations. Improved information sharing between the Organization and Member States would help strengthen efforts to address global challenges, facilitate informed policy decision-making, and advance work on the post-2015 development agenda. Closer cooperation between the Department and client departments and field offices would also enable more effective targeted delivery of information. In addition, the United Nations information centres, which played an important role in disseminating real-time information on the United Nations in developing countries, should use information technology to extend their outreach to remote areas.

35. His Government had been undertaking a series of far-reaching political, social and economic reforms since 2011 and was presently focusing on using information technology to improve the efficiency of its institutions and public services. It had also abolished media censorship, liberalized the telecommunications sector and formed an interim press council. Myanmar's progress in the area of democracy and media freedom

had been praised by a report published in December 2013 by the United Nations Development Programme.

36. In addressing the remaining challenges in its transition to democracy and seeking to promote economic and social development, his Government attached great importance to cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies, which also had a key role to play in narrowing the digital divide. Member States must continue to work closely with the Department of Public Information, which carried out vital work in raising awareness of the Organization's activities.

37. **Mr. Mebarki** (Algeria) said that the United Nations must continue its important work to disseminate balanced and objective information through all available channels, while new media should complement, not replace, traditional media. The Department of Public Information should enhance its communications campaigns on all priority issues for the Organization, focusing in particular on those most relevant for developing countries, including sustainable development, decolonization, disarmament and counter-terrorism efforts. It should also continue its activities under the special information programme on the question of Palestine and support efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in conformity with international law and United Nations resolutions. United Nations information centres must be given adequate resources to enable them to function more effectively and any efforts to reorganize the centres should take into account the wishes of the relevant host countries.

38. While his delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to achieve parity between the six official languages of the Organization, much remained to be done; the Arabic language services, in particular, required additional financial and human resources.

39. **Ms. Al-Hajri** (Oman), commending the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information to use communications media to maximize the Organization's impact, said that the King of Oman attached great importance to the media. Intellectual and cultural diversity was inherent to the United Nations and must be respected. New ICTs helped the Organization not only to carry out its activities in a more effective and environmentally friendly manner but also to reach new audiences, including young people.

40. Despite efforts to promote technological advancement in developing countries, there remained a deep digital divide between developed and less developed countries. Her delegation therefore urged the Department to step up efforts to provide appropriate assistance to both State-owned and private media institutions in developing countries.

41. **Mr. Zamora Rivas** (El Salvador) said that measures must be introduced to ensure that ICTs were used in a reliable, safe and orderly manner, so as not to undermine the purposes of their use or their governing principles. Those measures must be taken within a clearly defined operating framework with the necessary evaluation mechanisms, based on such principles as respect for international law, peaceful conflict resolution, the right to self-determination, respect for territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

42. Information in the service of humanity was of strategic importance for global decision-making. His delegation fully supported the Department's efforts to promote the work of the United Nations through relevant public information campaigns and highlighted the importance of information for media coverage of outstanding political issues such as the question of Palestine, disarmament, and appropriate use of the Internet and conventional communication media, as well as in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

43. His delegation joined the regional consensus on the importance of the Committee on Information in promoting the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding. It called on all Member States to acknowledge the fundamental role of the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information as the public voice of the Organization on the international stage.

44. El Salvador firmly supported all initiatives based on the use of information and the promotion of multilingualism. Creative solutions should be found to achieve more with the same resources while respecting the principle of equitable distribution of resources across all of the Department's activities, based on the programme budget of the Organization.

45. **Mr. Bosah** (Nigeria) said that Nigeria applauded the Department's work in support of peacekeeping and special political missions in developing communication

and information policies to promote a culture of peace. His delegation also commended the Department's efforts to tackle the challenge of reaching out to a global audience with different languages and world views through modern information systems and innovative use of social media and other forms of information technology. However, as the technological advances that had provided new avenues for disseminating information and raising awareness of the Organization's activities were not widely available in developing countries, there was still a need for continued utilization of traditional media platforms, particularly in Africa. Countries with advanced communication technology should therefore provide assistance to developing countries to help them bridge the wide digital divide and build the necessary capacity to develop their information and communication systems.

46. In order to ensure balanced reporting, United Nations journals, publications and press releases should be produced in the six official languages of the Organization. A system should also be developed to disseminate information on the work of the United Nations in local languages. Appreciation of the invaluable work of the United Nations was best achieved by providing accurate and impartial information; the Department's efforts to meet that goal must therefore be consistently evaluated. Due consideration should also be given to the expediency of disseminating information that promoted the value of dialogue, in line with relevant General Assembly resolutions, including paragraphs 54 and 55 of draft resolution B contained in A/69/21.

47. **Mr. Nasser** (Acting Head of the Department of Public Information) said that the Department would continue to seek creative solutions to overcome existing challenges and was looking forward to celebrating the many achievements of the Organization on the occasion of its approaching seventieth anniversary.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.