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**Statement by the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications at the
opening of the Thirty-ninth session of the Committee on Information**

24 April 2017

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Jan Kickert,

Dear members of the Bureau of the Committee on Information,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Committee on Information begins deliberating on “Questions relating to information”, it is my honour to address you as Acting Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications and Head of the Department of Public Information (DPI). The Secretary-General of the United Nations has called for a reform of our communications strategy, upgrading our tools and platforms to reach people around the globe. We in DPI are already implementing changes to ensure that UN communications today are relevant, strategic and accessible, in languages that people can understand and on platforms they can reach, so that the work and goals of the UN are better understood.

I would like to acknowledge the fine leadership and steadfast support of the outgoing Chairman, Ambassador Kaha Imnadze, and his Bureau; and I look forward to the Committee’s continued support of DPI as the public voice of the UN.

I would also like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to Under-Secretary-General Cristina Gallach for both her able stewardship of DPI and the passion and energy she brought to the role.

The General Assembly, in its resolution A/RES/71/101, requested that the Secretary-General report to the Committee at its thirty-ninth session on the activities of DPI and on the implementation of its recommendations on questions relating to public information.

The three reports submitted in response to that request provide a summary of the Department’s activities in regard to strategic communications services, news services and

outreach services, respectively. I would like to add to the information contained in those reports, focusing especially on new initiatives along with current and future challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department is taking active steps to harness all of its tools and assets, including its multilingual news platforms, its global network of UN information centres (UNICs) and its array of outreach partners, in support of achieving our mandates. We are striving to adapt to new technologies and transformations in the ways that the public consumes and relates to information and news, and to modernize how we work.

To that end, DPI is making sure that more and visual content is available on tablets, mobile and social platforms where we know people are increasingly spending their time. At the beginning of the year, our social media team worked closely with the Secretary-General to launch his Twitter account – the first such account for a Secretary-General.

More broadly, we are strengthening the strategic direction of our multilingual social media capacity so as to better engage and impact global audiences. We are doing this through more and better planning of multilingual content linked to strategic and communications priorities.

Our accounts have been expanding exponentially in all six UN official languages as well as in Kiswahili and Portuguese. Over the past 12 months, for example, the number of views on the UN's flagship Russian YouTube channel increased by 275 per cent; our French Twitter account recently reached three million impressions in three months, compared to 320,000 during the same period last year; and Chinese news coverage of the ECOSOC Youth Forum in February garnered more than seven million views on the Weibo and Miaopai platforms.

Our news and media products have also become more multimedia-oriented, with teams sharing material across eight languages and all formats, from traditional to digital media. To meet changing consumer needs – and to make a compelling case about the value of the United Nations – we are producing shorter news stories in both audio and video formats and more feature stories explaining how the work of the UN benefits people.

UN News will soon unveil its new integrated web platforms in the different languages, with additional features for users. Stories will incorporate an array of digital content, including infographics and other digital innovations and new functionalities.

More than 150 websites for which the Department is responsible are already fully multilingual and accessible to persons with disabilities. And in response to requests from Member States, since last September, our webcast team has been live streaming and hosting on-demand videos of Security Council and General Assembly plenary meetings in all six UN official languages.

The expansion of our partnerships with broadcasters, civil society and the private sector has led to the Department now having more than 172 television partners in 70 countries, and more than 900 radio partners in 137 countries. Through such partnerships, our Kiswahili Radio programmes, for example, reach more than 17 million listeners across Africa. UNifeed, our video news syndication service, feeds major world broadcasters, including Al-Arabiya, BBC, CCTV, CNN, Iran's Press TV, Reuters and SABC, and its unique content of UN news is aired by these clients on their platforms on average 5,000 times per month.

Air Canada, Cathay Pacific, Xiamen Airlines and FinnAir have joined other airlines in featuring DPI multimedia materials as part of their in-flight entertainment. Last month, DPI collaborated with UNICEF, the UN Foundation and Sony Pictures to promote the Sustainable Development Goals in connection with the International Day of Happiness. The resulting multilingual digital campaign "Small Smurfs Big Goals" attained some 801 million potential impressions on social media. This is an example of the amplification effect that results from collaboration with the creative community around UN issues.

These are just some of the numerous strategic partnerships in which we are engaging to tell the UN story, both here at Headquarters and around the world through our UNICs. DPI supported GSMA, the global mobile phone industry organization, in its creation of "SDGs in Action", a free smart-phone app in multiple languages that allows users to post content about actions they are taking to implement the Goals and to interact with others who are doing so as well. The world's biggest advertising, marketing and public relations conglomerates have joined forces under the Common Ground initiative to provide pro bono assistance to the UN to promote the implementation of the Goals. Just this morning I attended the opening of a

three-day innovation workshop organized by the Common Ground companies, in partnership with Google. Creative teams from those companies will compete to pitch ideas on how to promote the SDGs among youth.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department is leading UN system-wide strategic communications around several Member State priorities. Following up on the landmark 2016 UN summit on refugees and migrants, the Department is providing support to the office of the new Special Representative for International Migration and the intergovernmental process that is expected to deliver global compacts for migration and refugees. DPI continues to lead the ‘Together’ initiative endorsed by Member States last September to counter xenophobia and to promote diversity and the social inclusion of refugees and migrants. The aim is to counter negative perceptions of migrants and refugees, and to do so at the local level. In one example, UNIC Mexico City partnered with the municipal government, UN agencies and the private sector to display billboards and videos showing positive images of human diversity in subway stations throughout the city as well as in Guadalajara and Monterrey, reaching millions of commuters every day.

Another example is the support we are providing on the Organization’s response to the appalling crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN personnel. The Secretary-General has tasked DPI to lead on strategic communications and outreach activities in support of the new approach he outlined last month focusing on preventing, reporting, and responding to instances of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretary-General made it clear that we need to build a strong partnership with Member States to stamp out this scourge, and that it will require all relevant actors to work together to achieve this goal that we all share. DPI, in coordination with the Office of the Special Coordinator, DPKO-DFS, and UN agencies, funds and programmes, is developing a UN system-wide communications action plan to support the Secretary-General’s strategy

The action plan will address ways to: educate the general public, troop- and police-contributing countries, host communities, UN staff, and external partners about the issue; enhance transparency in reporting through the use of communications platforms and regular

updates; and strengthen crisis communications response by putting in place procedures to better communicate on credible allegations as they come to light.

We are working with the Department of Management to develop a long-term internal communications plan, which would include information on sexual exploitation and abuse permanently available on iSeek and other UN intranet platforms, with a focus on how this issue affects staff, including with regard to reporting of allegations, and whistle-blower protections for those who do report.

DPI is also working closely with UN peacekeeping operations on how the missions can strengthen their communications at the local level and how DPI, with its multimedia and multilingual communications platforms, can amplify the messages to a global audience. DPI has already produced a number of videos, interviews with officials, and stories on sexual exploitation and abuse, accompanied by social media postings, on our various platforms in all six official languages.

We especially look forward to working with the Victims' Rights Advocate, once appointed, to help formulate effective outreach strategies to ensure that victims of such heinous acts receive the support that they need and deserve.

At the same time, we continue to plan and provide multimedia coverage about the work of UN political and peacekeeping missions, from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan and Mali, and about key peace and security issues, such as counter-terrorism, as well as responses to crises that emerge.

Mr. Chairman,

The 2030 Agenda is at the centre of DPI's communications efforts. Looking ahead, a major effort to expand awareness of that agenda will take place in June here in New York when the first ever high-level Ocean Conference is held.

In the lead-up to the Conference, we are convening and leading UN system-wide communications and preparing key materials for the media and general public in multiple languages, including local languages. At the country level, many UNICs are co-organizing or

supporting projects that spotlight the issue of the marine environment or show how individuals can make a difference. UNIC Manila, for example, is partnering with the Philippine Information Agency on an exhibition that illustrates the problem caused by plastic pollution in our seas.

DPI's news platforms are rolling out feature stories on a systematic basis between now and June, including on coral bleaching, overfishing and plastic pollution. Our two flagship magazines, *UN Chronicle* and *Africa Renewal*, are preparing special editions on the issue, while the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is developing a comprehensive online information guide for researchers, Member States and other library users.

For the event itself, DPI will provide live and archived webcasting of the gathering in all six official languages, as well as same-day multilingual, multimedia news coverage. A “media zone” will also be installed on the Visitors Plaza to try to help connect the events at UN Headquarters to the wider world.

Another important milestone this year is the annual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to be held at UN Headquarters in July. The Department has begun implementing a communications plan that uses UNICs and other assets to draw special attention to the efforts of the Member States that will be presenting their voluntary national reviews at this year's Forum, with an emphasis on case studies of how they are already taking action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

Our information products connect our diverse and global audience with the goals and vision of the United Nations and catalyse supportive action. These products can be as simple as our “10 Fast Facts” cards that explain actions the UN takes every day across its three pillars of development, peace and security, and human rights, from vaccinating children and providing emergency food aid to fighting poverty and tackling climate change. You can print these facts on the back of your business cards – we have the electronic files available on e-deleGATE for you to download.

The Secretary-General has made clear that the prevention of crises and conflicts must be the top priority for the UN and the international community. To that end, recent Prevention Forums organized by the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, in cooperation with other UN partners and academic institutions, have highlighted educational strategies for the prevention of violent extremism. Earlier this month, the Secretary-General also appointed his first Messenger of Peace: education activist and youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai – an international symbol of the fight for girls’ education.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, commemorated together with CARICOM and the African Union. A UN Web TV feature on the African roots of Cuba’s music tradition put out on Instagram drew more than 46,000 views in 24 hours. I am pleased to welcome the National Museum of African American History and Culture as our newest partner in the fight against racism and prejudice and in educating on the transatlantic slave trade.

Africa continues to be a focus of the Department’s communications efforts. In February, Africa Renewal issued a special edition – in both English and French, with translation into Chinese forthcoming – on the subject of youth. A smart-phone app showcasing the magazine’s content was also launched in two languages.

Plans are in place to translate the forthcoming new edition of *Basic Facts about the United Nations* into Arabic in partnership with the United Arab Emirates and into Chinese in partnership with Shanghai International Studies University. The efforts of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to share information about and the messaging of the UN with researchers, students and the public are amplified by the 360 UN depository libraries in 134 countries. The Ask DAG platform for frequently asked questions was accessed some 411,000 times in 2016 in English, French and Spanish. The United Nations iLibrary allows anyone anywhere with an Internet connection to search and share UN publications. More than 3,500 publications on all UN themes are available.

As a supplement to our multilingual guided tours of UN Headquarters in New York, an interactive space for children will open by the end of June that will tell the UN story to our youngest visitors.

I would like to remark that in regard to paragraph 18 of last year's Committee on Information resolution encouraging collaborative arrangements between DPI and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), and even merging of their publishing activities to enhance multilingualism, these have proven impracticable due to fundamental differences between DGACM's focus on the timely production, including mandated and funded translation, of official documents and DPI's focus on the impactful production of public information in as multilingual a form possible in the absence of additional resources.

As encouraged in paragraph 95 of last year's Committee on Information I resolution, *UN Chronicle* magazine is available online in all six UN official languages. A small number of printed copies in English and French continue to be made available for distribution to substantive Secretariat Departments, as well as other UN system entities and Permanent Missions.

Finally, DPI houses the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which continues to work to draw global attention to youth issues across the UN agenda, from sustainable development to peace and security, and from humanitarian action to human rights. The Secretary-General is in the process of selecting a successor to the first Envoy. A broad call for nominations from youth organizations and UN entities around the world was undertaken, with a view to having a diverse array of candidates for this important post.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished delegates,

These efforts represent just a sample of how DPI works with Member States and a broad array of partners to promote global awareness and understanding of the activities on the United Nations agenda. We look forward to receiving your guidance and support, and I would also like to encourage all of you to join us in an interactive dialogue later today to discuss our work further.

Thank you very much for your attention.
