

**STATEMENT BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION**

**Tuesday, 26 April 2016, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 4, United Nations Headquarters**

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Imnadze,

Dear members of the bureau,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning! I hope that you have all had a moment to catch your breath after the exciting events at the United Nations last week, including the record-breaking signing of the Paris Agreement. To see so many of your leaders here on Friday was a statement of the importance that Member States attach to climate action, and a reminder of the need to begin implementing the Agreement as soon as possible.

I would like, at the outset, to express my appreciation to all of you for your guidance, support and commitment to the work of the Department of Public Information. We welcome it. As requested by the General Assembly, the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the three sub-programmes of the Department and the proposed strategic framework for the period 2018-2019 are available for your review.

Close collaboration with Member States allows the Department to continually strengthen our work to better deliver on our mandate to inform, engage, and educate the people we serve all over the world about the issues on the United Nations' agenda and the actions that the Organization undertakes.

This session of the Committee on Information falls in the 70th anniversary year of the inception of the Department. In 1946, in the very first Report on the Work of the Organization, then Secretary-General Trygve Lie underlined how integral the Department's work is to the functioning of the overall Organization.

The Secretary-General stated that “the success of the United Nations depends ultimately on the continued support of the peoples of the world. This support, in turn, should be based upon enlightened public opinion and the widest possible knowledge of the problems concerning the United Nations and the procedure used for their solution.”

Trygve Lie added that this need is “particularly true at times of crisis” – a point that resonates especially strongly at a time when the world faces such complex challenges and threats as the conflict in Syria and the spread of the Zika virus.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department of Public Information’s focus in 2016 is in three main areas: ensuring that, through communications, the Sustainable Development Goals – including the Paris Agreement on climate change – are known and starting to be implemented worldwide; building greater awareness about the need for a humane and coordinated global approach to dealing with the large movements of refugees and migrants; and explaining and making visible the broader work and impact of the United Nations as we moved towards a moment of transition in the Organization’s leadership.

In our focus, we strive to reflect the priorities of Member States and the wider Organization – this year should be a year of action and implementation, starting with sustainable development. The need for action on the 2030 Agenda that you adopted last September also extends to the Paris Agreement on climate change that so many of you signed last Friday, and the crisis faced by refugees and migrants worldwide.

All of these themes are, of course, closely inter-connected. The Department works throughout its activities to not only raise awareness of these issues, but to demonstrate how they mutually reinforce each other. This year’s agenda can be viewed as a single integrated narrative, with key upcoming markers presenting communications opportunities. These include the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next month, the Fourteenth Session of UNCTAD in Nairobi in July, the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants in New York in September, and Habitat III in Quito in October.

Another major effort of the Department to expand awareness of the sustainable development agenda will take place next month. The 66th annual UN DPI/NGO Conference is to be held in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, from 30 May to 1 June, and organized under the theme of “Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.” Mobilizing this crucial community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is vitally important to us. We count on your encouragement of NGOs from your respective countries to participate

The challenge for the Department is to bring to bear all of our assets and tools in a manner that ensures we communicate the UN story as efficiently and effectively as possible. We live in a world where people are consuming information in more ways than ever before, and where resources for public institutions are limited. Therefore we must think strategically and creatively as we balance the traditional and the digital, as we engage a diverse array of partners, and as we find ways to speak to audiences in languages that they understand.

How do we do so? Starting with its leadership of both the UN Communications Group and its taskforces dedicated to specific issues, the Department coordinates messaging across the UN System and with

major external partners. This allows the Organization to project the work it is doing on sustainable development and other issues in a coherent and streamlined manner.

Further, the Department regularly creates and shares multilingual press kits, visual identities, social media packages and other digital material with colleagues across the UN System, using an online content-sharing platform

Through a series of cost-effective WebEx video-conferencing sessions, DPI colleagues at Headquarters and in the field discuss the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals at the country level. They have also connected UN subject experts in New York to journalists worldwide so that they can better report on UN activities.

Our global network of 63 UN Information Centres has taken on a leading role with UN Country Teams to make the Goals more known and relevant to local communities. The Centres have translated the Goals and their visual icons into at least 45 local languages, from Afrikaans to Armenian, from German to Greek, from Hausa to Hindi, and from Sesotho to Shupamum.

UNICs have also embarked on a host of innovative partnerships and initiatives related to SDG promotion. These include an exhibition alongside the first Dakar International Marathon, which introduced an estimated 10,000 participants to the SDGs in French and Wolof. The Goals were also presented to audiences at a music festival in Argentina and at a “mini-Olympics” sporting event in Egypt.

UNICs from Antananarivo to Beirut and beyond struck media partnerships with radio, television, print and online outlets to promote the SDGs as widely as possible. Through the efforts of our Centre in Mexico City, SDG messages will be showcased on public transport – including buses, airports and the metro system – reaching at least five million people daily.

Distinguished delegates,

The universality of the 2030 Agenda means sustainable development is a part of all that we do. Just last Friday, for example, the Department worked to increase awareness of the urgent need to ratify and implement the Agreement, and of how climate action impacts so many of the 17 SDGs, at the Paris Agreement signing ceremony here at UN Headquarters.

This was a truly multi-dimensional approach that started with planning several months ago to identify suitable outreach partners, to engage broadcast and other media, and to create original multilingual and multimedia content.

As 175 countries signed the Paris Agreement, the level of media and public engagement was extraordinarily high. Across the week, there were more than 8,000 press articles worldwide on the Agreement. On one social media platform alone, Snapchat, at least 1.4 million people viewed the UN’s “snaps” on Friday.

With the issue of the movements of refugees and migrants at the top of the global agenda, the Department is also working closely with UN offices and departments to promote awareness of the United Nations' efforts to identify a durable, mutually acceptable solution. While the UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants in September will serve as a major milestone, the Department's focus is on the year-round promotion of the issues that are driving that summit. To that end, we are bringing together a unified, multilingual web presence that will serve as a repository for key UN content on the issue.

Mr. Chairman,

For DPI, multilingualism is a thread running through everything we do. Our news platforms, including Radio, News Centre, Webcast and social media, operate in multiple languages. Our aim is to provide equitable coverage across all official languages, although our capacity to do so is limited by our resources. The Secretary-General's budget submission for the 2016-2017 biennium included a request for additional language posts for social media, webcast and elsewhere to ensure language parity. The General Assembly decided not to approve the additional posts proposed by DPI though it approved non-post resources for multilingualism.

DPI is continuing to pursue ways that will maximize our multilingual reach and impact.

We are doing so, for example, by building multilingual considerations into our planning at an earlier stage, and by modifying content for use across languages.

The Department has developed partnerships with Member States and educational institutions to create, translate and adapt its materials in multiple languages. For example, a series of posters related to the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme was created in English and translated into French, Russian and Spanish. An exhibit related to the Remember Slavery programme, entitled *Africans in India: From Slaves to Generals and Rulers*, was produced in Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese and Spanish.

And we are assembling and deploying multilingual teams to cover major UN conference, like the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit and Midterm Review of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries in Antalya, for our different platforms, from the web, to radio, print and social media.

UN social media, across all languages, continues to grow in popularity. For example, the Secretary-General's greeting for the Chinese New Year was viewed more than 1 billion times across several combined platforms. The UN's English-language Twitter account just passed the milestone of 7 million followers. Large increases have also been recorded on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram.

The Department's news platforms, meanwhile, also make increasing use of new technology, with infographics, embedded videos, photos and other digital tools being integrated into stories and social media posts. DPI has also begun podcasts, including one earlier this year on refugees and migrants.

While downloads of audio programmes have risen across all languages in the past year, with an average growth of 9 per cent, multimedia content is also becoming progressively more popular with audiences. In one example, an Arabic-language video clip about refugees, produced by UN Radio, has been viewed more than 200,000 times.

UNifeed, which provides syndicated packages of raw TV footage for broadcasters, is also rising in popularity. Data from an analytical company indicated UNifeed stories were used more than 7,000 times by different broadcasters in January this year, a growth of 74 per cent over the same month last year.

Distinguished delegates,

DPI's work incorporates all three pillars of the UN agenda. On human rights, the Department works with partners inside and outside the UN System to keep the spotlight year-round, and not just on International Days, on issues such as the importance of equality and non-discrimination. The Rwanda genocide was commemorated earlier this month in a solemn ceremony at UN Headquarters, and film screenings will take place throughout the year. This coming Friday, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Women and the NGO Black Women's Blueprint, there will be a special event related to the International Decade for People of African Descent, with women of African descent sharing their experiences of promoting women's rights and discussing ways to improve justice and accountability. Next month, at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the communications component of the new System-wide action plan for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples will also be presented.

DPI remains committed to promoting the work being undertaken by the UN in the fields of peacekeeping and conflict prevention. A recent workshop held in Dakar, Senegal, for the chiefs of public information of all UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions focused on ensuring that all field missions are guided by the same policy guidance on strategic communications.

Media outreach to troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries is also being stepped up so that their publics are much more aware of the activities of their compatriots. Next month's International Day of Peacekeepers will be a case in point.

The communications effort extends to the serious issue of sexual exploitation and abuse. Working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, and with the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations' response on the issue, we are taking immediate steps to make clearer and more widely known what actions the Organization is taking to prevent such abuses, to investigate allegations as soon as they arise, to bring perpetrators to justice, and to provide counselling and other forms of support to victims of these crimes.

We are also working with peacekeeping operations to increase awareness among both the staff of peacekeeping missions and the local populations about the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Further, we have deployed senior DPI staff on temporary assignment to the Central African Republic to support the peacekeeping mission there in its communications on the issue.

Another example of crisis communications is our coordinated approach to the Ebola crisis in 2014-15, we have mobilized the UNCG and our UNICs, especially in Latin America, to communicate about the Zika virus since its outbreak in the region at the start of this year. UNIC Rio de Janeiro is coordinating the UN communications response to this emergency in Brazil, along with the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization and other UN agencies. This response includes posting information materials to Portuguese-language social media accounts. UN Brazil's Facebook page, created and managed by the UNIC, now reaches 500,000 followers, for example.

Distinguished delegates,

The Department actively seeks to expand its partnerships with the creative community to help raise awareness of the role of the UN and to amplify key UN messages. Collaborations with film and television productions provide an opportunity to reach large audiences around the world, many of whom would not otherwise be exposed to information about the work of the Organization. To that end, we are working with production companies in the United States which are developing a TV series entitled *In Harm's Way*, which will showcase the real-life stories of UN colleagues in the field who have overcome adversity to carry out their work. This project is in pre-production with filming expected to begin early next year.

The Department is proud to house the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which has played a catalytic role in elevating the global youth agenda. To cap off the unprecedented youth participation in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Office coordinated the participation of 193 youth representatives in the historic moment of its adoption. The Office advocates for youth engagement in the implementation of the SDGs through convening the Global Youth Partnership for the SDGs and the establishment of a one-stop, online platform "Youth Gateway" that will showcase youth contributions to the SDGs.

The United Nations Academic Impact initiative generates links with the global educational and research communities, bringing together academic leaders from around the world to help advance the Organization's work in its priority areas. The collaboration includes events related to migration, inequality and other subjects on the sustainable development agenda. It also includes a partnership with ELS Language Centers on the third annual Many Languages, One World essay competition, which promotes a deeper understanding of the UN's work among college students around the world through multilingualism. Activities of UNAI are underwritten by a range of no-cost partnerships and collaborative projects as well as financial contributions to its Trust Fund. We are particularly grateful to the Government of India for its regular contributions to the Fund over the past four years.

The Department is engaged in forging new partnerships with publishers around the world in order to create content on the SDGs for a wider audience. Working towards women's economic empowerment in order to further SDG #5, for example, DPI's Development Business has created a partnership with the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network and the Government of Kenya in order to create a training programme to give better access to public procurement for women.

The recently-launched United Nations iLibrary allows publication and dissemination of more multilingual content than ever before at no additional cost to the Organization. Moreover, the newly-launched e-commerce platform shop.un.org allows people to order United Nations publications from anywhere in the world in print or digital form.

Let me mention as well another issue that is very important to us. Following a generous donation from Oman for the digitization of audio-visual materials in the UN archives, the Department has begun the process of implementation. This is a contribution that will ensure the preservation of our common heritage and make it accessible to all. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Japan for the digitization of materials on the work of Japan in its 60 years at the UN.

The issue of press freedom and media capacity remains a central concern of the Department. The annual Reham al-Farra Memorial Journalist Fellowship Programme will be held again this year, exposing a group of 15 junior and mid-level journalists from developing countries to the work of the Organization. Similarly, the annual DPI Training Programme for Palestinian Journalists is being planned for later this year. The focus of the programme is increasingly on multimedia journalism – a reflection of the media landscape in the Middle East and beyond.

In this spirit, we would welcome your engagement next week when we commemorate World Press Freedom Day with an event here at UN Headquarters on Thursday 5 May. The theme of the event connects access to information to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

Ensuring that our work is as impactful and effective as possible is of critical importance. To that end, I recently approved the Department's first formal evaluation policy. The policy was prepared in order to update the way that the Department conducts evaluations and to bring them into line with norms and standards for evaluation in the UN system. The policy has already been used as a basis for the evaluation of the "2015: Time for Global Action" campaign, a centrepiece of the Department's communications efforts last year.

The policy will also guide a gender-based evaluation of the Department's activities in 2016. This evaluation will be undertaken as part of the first-ever DPI Strategy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2016-19), which I approved earlier this year. The strategy is itself based on the 2012 UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

For the Department, the strategy sets out the steps for how it can build on its strengths on gender equality and the empowerment of women in its information and communications activities, and as well as how it can improve gender parity in its staffing.

Distinguished delegates,

The outreach and advocacy that were done around the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change in 2015 demonstrate that when people are armed with information, they are empowered to act and will come together in global solidarity to meet the challenges that affect us all.

We at the Department of Public Information know that our job is to help solidify the gains we made last year to ensure that action leads to traction and to lasting change. We depend on the support of Member States to help us amplify these messages and reach audiences who will be critical to the success of the sustainable development agenda. We will continue to use all the resources at our disposal, and to work with ever more partners, to engage with a worldwide audience, and we look forward to ongoing close cooperation with you to that end.

Thank you.
