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USG Smale's Closing Statement to the Committee on Information

Wednesday 1 May 2019

10:00 a.m.

Conference Room 1, UN Headquarters

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

This has been an extraordinarily enriching debate. I am grateful for the support you have extended to the Department, to the ideas you have shared, to the creative suggestions you have made. I was heartened by how you have easily adopted our Department's new name, that of Global Communications, during our conversation, which I believe shows your support for what we're doing – as one delegate put it, moving to create content and audiences, rather than processes.

Much of our debate this week understandably focused on communications about the Sustainable Development Goals, as we enter the fifth year since their definition, and climate change. These are, of course, the biggest challenges of our time. It was therefore heartening to hear from you about your own efforts to promote the Goals as well as the trust and confidence that you have invested in our communications campaigns – particularly 'A Race We Can Win' on climate change.

As you saw during the interactive segment yesterday, the Department's approach to climate communications is emblematic of our new way of doing business: modern, agile and designed to take advantage of new technologies and new ways of connecting with the global public.

We are taking a similar approach as we head towards September, when many high-level meetings and events will take place here at UN Headquarters. Our communications will be integrated and streamlined, showing how the Goals are inter-connected and why they matter to people everywhere.

One way in which we are already bringing clarity to our Agenda 2030 communications is through the promotion of a 'Goal of the Month' – creating and sharing dedicated content about that SDG with partners such as the media. May's 'Goal of the Month' is SDG-16, which allows us to spotlight the critical field of UN peacekeeping.

DGC works in close partnership with Department of Peace Operations throughout the life of peacekeeping operations, from their start-up to their conclusion or transition. We help conceive and design the strategic communications of peacekeeping operations; carry out technical assessment missions and training; draft communication strategies; set up websites; deploy staff to the field on a short-term basis while key posts are vacant; and conduct outreach to international media. We manage the peacekeeping website and work with our global network of UN Information Centres and social media platforms to amplify messages about the UN's inter-connected peacekeeping, peacebuilding and prevention work. The 'Service and Sacrifice'

campaign, now in its second phase, continues to showcase the role that Member States play in peacekeeping, developing targeted, country-specific content.

As events in the past few weeks have reminded us, terrorism and violent extremism, and the efforts to counter them, loom large on the global landscape. We continue to provide communications support to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism as well as to the Security Council-mandated Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate to raise awareness on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Secretary-General's Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and the work of UN system entities.

Under the guidance of the Secretary-General, and in close consultation with the office of his Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, we are working to articulate and implement the communications elements of the UN's plan of action to combat hate speech. Similarly, we are acting in coordination with the UN Alliance of Civilizations as it leads on the development of a strategy to help ensure the safety of religious sites.

I should note that the national Holocaust Remembrance Day is being observed in Israel today; Distinguished friends, I would like to invite all of you to join us tomorrow evening at the screening of *Broken Dreams*, a new film on the short life of Renia Spiegel, a Jewish girl who, like Anne Frank, recorded her final days in her diary during the Holocaust. We are pleased to partner with the Permanent Mission of Poland on this event, which will be held at 6:30 p.m. tomorrow in the ECOSOC Chamber.

Madam Chairperson,

Many of you noted the importance of the reform of the UN development system and the central role that UNICs, with their unique position, are playing in that process as they integrate and cooperate more closely with Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. As you heard, that integration continues apace, shaped by the overall goal of creating more impactful communications at the country level. We very much welcome your strong expressions of support for our UNICs.

There has also been generous reference during this session made to the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, which has grown to include more than 1,350 institutions in 136 countries. In October, UNAI launched its SDG Hubs, with member universities committed to advancing scholarship, research, solutions and best practices on the SDGs.

Meanwhile the Department has embarked on a major project to redesign un.org. This is to be a long-term project; the first phase is due to run until the later part of 2020. This revamp of the UN website is just one prong of what we are doing – and planning – on digital communications. Our multimedia content, including increasingly popular podcasts, is expanding; our partnerships with media outlets which take our content continue to grow; and we are stepping up our investment and focus on social media.

Indeed, so many of you in your statements recognized the advances we have made on social media and the need to continue to be agile and to respond to the evolving ways in which the global public,

and young people particularly, consume news and information. This is not at the expense of traditional media platforms – our approach is to find complementary ways of reaching audiences.

Throughout our content cycle, from conception to production to dissemination, multilingualism is a guiding principle. Some delegates noted that not all UN websites and information products are available in multiple languages. I would like to note that of the websites under DGC’s purview, 90% are fully maintained in the six UN official languages. We will also continue to press other UN departments and agencies to maintain their websites in all six languages.

Reflecting the requests of Member States to promote multilingualism and language parity in DGC’s output, the Secretary-General, in his budget proposal for 2018-19, put forward requests for 18 new posts and associated non-post resources to enable the Department to expand output in Meetings Coverage press releases, UN Webcast, social media and television documentary production into all six official languages. The General Assembly did not approve the request. In addition, due to further budget cuts, other non-post resources for multilingualism were no longer available.

The reduction in resources significantly constrains DGC’s capacity to enhance its multilingual products. For example, the provision of on-demand webcast videos in all six official languages, which DGC started providing on a trial basis in 2016, thanks to additional resources approved by Member States, has had to be curtailed. While the videos are still available online, the associated metadata is now in English only.

Nevertheless, the Department continues to identify creative ways to promote and expand multilingual products and services. These include consolidating UN News outputs to one website per language; managing apps that enable mobile access to UN news and social media content in eight languages; establishing media accreditation websites and associated application systems in multiple languages; and exploring new partnership models to extend the multilingual range of TV products.

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

Some of you have rightly asked: how do we measure our impact? Let me give you specific examples. DGC’s Evaluation Unit is undertaking an evaluation of ‘Service and Sacrifice’. That campaign’s digital dimension has specifically sought to reach key audiences in the military, government and civil society with messages of gratitude on the personal service and sacrifice of peacekeepers. One of the main objectives of the evaluation is to assess the campaign’s impact at the country level and to determine whether key messages have effectively reached and engaged with intended audiences.

Preliminary results indicate that the tailored approach has been effective in reaching social media influencers. For example, in Nigeria and India, influencers engaged with and helped to amplify campaign content among key networks. This, in turn, reached broader national audiences with messaging about the value of peacekeeping. As part of the Department’s wider reform initiative, the Evaluation Unit will assess the reach and impact of DGC products and services, review the

mechanisms and tools for evaluation, and establish new standards and key performance indicators to enhance the Department's learning and accountability to you, the Member States.

In the months ahead, the Department and I look forward to continuing to engage you in conversations, consultations and brainstorming sessions as we update you on our activities, the results of our evaluations, and our ongoing process of reforms.

Some of you asked how you can help, especially when it comes to reform. One crucial way is resource mobilization. Whether it's giving funding, providing junior professional officers, offering in-kind support or introducing us to and unlocking potential partners in your countries, we are counting on you to help us accelerate the modernization of our Department and our communications.

We will be coming to you soon with detailed, specific requests on key projects and needs, from the un.org revamp and social media to youth outreach and engagement and the deployment and use of ICT tools.

Distinguished delegates,

The United Nations wants, and needs, to be understood. This is especially important at a time when the value of multilateralism is being questioned. For the UN's communications to succeed, they must be clear and they must engage audiences in ways they understand, on platforms they use and in languages they comprehend. We will be relentless as we pursue these goals. I thank you.
