

USG Smale's Statement to the Committee on Information
Monday, 29 April 2019
12:00 p.m.
Conference Room 1, UN Headquarters

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Allow me at the start to congratulate you and the other members of our Bureau on your election this afternoon to guide the deliberations of this Committee at its 41st and 42nd sessions. You, Mr Chair, have been a valued friend and mentor to our Department and your delegation was among the first to foresee what we now take for granted – the power and reach of social media.

I should also like to place on record our gratitude and deep appreciation of the work of the outgoing Bureau, led by Ambassador Jan Kickert, who did so much to ensure the smooth and productive functioning of the Committee in the past two years.

This is my first opportunity to address this Committee as head of the newly named United Nations Department of Global Communications. More than anything else, our new name reaffirms our commitment to ensure what the General Assembly and this Committee have emphasized every year – that “a culture of communications and transparency should permeate all levels of the Organization as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations... in order to create broad-based global support for the United Nations.”

The new name reflects the reform that the Department is undergoing with your support – one with the goal of ensuring that we can deliver modern, agile and global communications every day. At a time when resources are constrained the world over, this staff-led process aims to change our collective culture and mindset as much, if not more, than it does our structure or policies.

We are taking a data-driven approach that measures and evaluates the impact of our outputs. We have introduced a grid calendar system to inform and shape our strategic planning on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. We are starting to undertake transformative projects, such as a revamp of the UN website, and increasing our social and interactive content, so that we are better prepared for present and future challenges. We are also finding diverse partners to help us deliver as well as mobilize extra-budgetary resources in key areas that we and Member States have identified.

In addition, we are redesigning the relationship between our team at UN Headquarters and our teams in the field so that our UN Information Centres are fully integrated into the work of our Department and the UN presence at the country level. This will lead to improvements in the way we can produce and share multilingual content, in the way administrative decisions can be taken and implemented around the world, and in the way that we can support and complement the UN's development system reform.

Above all, we are looking to increase our collaboration and innovation, shifting to a culture where silos are broken as we work horizontally – so we can more quickly and effectively identify problems and brainstorm practical solutions.

Distinguished delegates,

We communicate globally when we unite our resources and talent to conceive, create and conduct campaigns around key issues on the UN agenda. Climate action is an immediate example. As we head towards the Secretary-General's Summit in September, we are ramping up a multi-pronged, coordinated effort that harnesses all the tools, assets and partners at the Department's disposal.

I look forward to telling you more about our climate communications during the interactive segment tomorrow afternoon. Before that, I would like to note just one way in which we are doing things differently. Public engagement and mobilization represent a core element of our climate communications. Now, through an artificial intelligence bot we developed and launched with UN and external partners, individuals around the world have logged and shared more than 115,000 separate climate actions undertaken – with particularly high participation recorded in countries such as India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Australia. This is communications for impact.

Meanwhile, as requested by Member States, in February we launched the second phase of the 'Service and Sacrifice' campaign to highlight the contributions of individual countries to UN peacekeeping. The current spotlight is on El Salvador, the immediate predecessor was Uganda, and the next to shine will be the Republic of Korea – an illustration of the truly global character of UN peacekeeping. In parallel, our multilingual un.org web team launched a renewed digital campaign to raise awareness of the Secretary-General's Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping.

Distinguished delegates,

We communicate globally when we produce factual, timely, high-quality, multilingual digital news and feature content for all platforms, including social media. Our news and video coverage of the Cyclone Idai crisis in southern Africa last month, as an example, was widely picked up by media amplifiers including Globo, the BBC, the *New York Times* and newspapers across the Lusophone world. With the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, we recently sent a multimedia team to gather content in Cameroon and Chad on how the UN is working with Member States to help survivors of terrorism. UN News also partnered with OCHA in a field visit to Gaza from which we produced a wealth of multimedia features in eight languages. The feedback from consumers is increasingly positive. And, since last December, select articles from the Department's *Africa Renewal* magazine are being translated into Kiswahili, to further expand that magazine's audience reach in Africa.

Social media is an increasingly important part of our digital output, allowing us to connect with audiences worldwide and young people in particular. We are matching and adapting content to specific social media platforms to achieve the greatest impact with audiences. One illustration of that strategic approach is our Giphy channel, which has now reached almost 80 million views with the help of targeted, shareable content. A gif posted by the Department for the International Day of Happiness last month proved popular across platforms and languages, and the accompanying Giphy story that we produced garnered more than 13 million views.

We communicate globally when we build durable alliances with national and international media outlets. The SDG Media Compact is steadily growing, with nearly 50 active members in the news and entertainment business committed to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals in more than 80 countries on four continents. Our editorial calendar highlighting one of the Goals each month provides a useful focus for the media as well as our own UN platforms, helping to take a deeper look at each of the Goals.

A recent partnership was with *Glamour* magazine, which carried our video feature *What Does a Free Woman Look Like?* on its highly popular social media platforms; also, our video packages for broadcasters have recorded an increase in air time of some 15 per cent compared to last year.

We communicate globally when we reflect, record and preserve the proceedings of the Organization, in particular interventions by Member States. I am pleased to report that we are moving full steam ahead with the audiovisual digitization project, made possible by the support of the Government of Oman.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has produced a new version for one of its flagship products, *Member States on the Record*. With a streamlined look and feel, it provides access to the wealth of information available on each Member State's participation in the main UN deliberative organs, including date of membership and links to statements.

Mr. Chair,

We communicate globally when we share our collective memories of what has happened, and we educate ourselves and future generations about what must not happen again. Our series of activities in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade on 25 March united under the theme *Remember Slavery: The Power of the Arts for Justice*. We are grateful for the contributions of the Member States which also participated in a festive event celebrating their culinary wealth. The Ark of Return, the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, was featured at a civil society briefing on the role of memorials in preserving history. The Remember Slavery Programme continues to achieve global impact with information materials produced in all six official languages, plus Kiswahili and Portuguese, and more than 50 activities organized by UNICs in 21 countries.

We communicate globally when we celebrate the legacy of women and men who have enriched our lives. We are grateful to the Permanent Missions of Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Turkey for their support to a very well-received exhibit and conversation on the writer Chinghiz Aitmatov, whose works touched on topics at the core of UN values, including gender equality, respect for indigenous cultures, and the relationship between the environment and human society.

We communicate globally as our thresholds of participation expand and rise. This year's observance of World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April focused on the importance of affordable access to assistive technologies, a prerequisite for many persons with autism to being able to exercise their human rights and to participate actively and fully in the life of their communities. I should like to thank the UN Joint Inspection Unit for its pathbreaking report on "enhancing

accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings of the United Nations system” which guided our Department and the Department of Safety and Security in their work together to ensure seamless accreditation and access to the UN Headquarters event.

Distinguished delegates,

We communicate globally when we find new ways to expand audience reach and create fresh content that builds support for the United Nations and its work. We continue to put strong emphasis on engaging youth. On 12 April, we held our first one-day United Nations Model UN Youth Summit, presenting concrete actions that students could take in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and ways to integrate them into Model UN simulations across the world. A few days earlier, the SDG Book Club was launched. The club encourages children to interact with the principles of the SDGs through a curated reading list of books from around the world related to each of the 17 Goals, in all six official UN languages.

This month, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth also co-organized the annual ECOSOC Youth Forum. Alongside the Forum, our dedicated two-day SDG Media Zone featured live discussions and interviews with young leaders and activists from around the world, attracting strong engagement on social media. Raising awareness about youth needs and rights, the Envoy participated in numerous events and undertook missions engaging with young people, governments, UN representatives, and civil society.

Mr. Chair,

We communicate globally when our value-added at the national and regional level complement each other and build worldwide support for, and interest in, the Organization. Our UNICs continued their outreach to local audiences and their close work with UN Country Teams. For most of them the past months have been especially intense as they harmonize their work with the Resident Coordinator system as part of the UN Development System reform, taking advantage of the new close working relationship with RC Offices and Country Teams in joint communications, especially in localizing global priorities and sensitizing local populations to the SDGs.

Through a detailed joint case-by-case plan with the UN Development Coordination Office, close to 50 of our UNICs involved in the process of development system reform have now been integrated with the RCOs – with a direct reporting line with RCs as of 1 April. At the same time, DGC, our Department, has been working with UNDCO to provide support to Resident Coordinators outside the UNIC network – assisting with the recruitment of new communications officers and providing regular guidance and communications support. This brings about a new dynamic for the Department to have a truly global reach through 131 Resident Coordinator Offices, and for UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators to be able to take advantage of the communications expertise, tools, platforms, guidance, messaging and outreach networks that DGC offers. This creates both potential and a challenge for us as we increase our reach to local audiences, and we ensure that our stories from the field get heard and have a wider audience. At the same time, the UN Intranet has remained at the forefront of internal communications efforts and has brought together all 14 peacekeeping and 15 political missions into iSeek, with roughly 18,000 more staff now using iSeek as their intranet.

Distinguished delegates,

We communicate globally when we reach out to the peoples of the world to celebrate their Organization, to be curious and critical of its record, to be resourceful and creative about its future. Next year, 2020, marks the 75th anniversary of the UN. The Department has commenced preparations, in coordination with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Permanent Missions of Singapore and Iceland, the two co-facilitators, to develop global events and initiatives that will rekindle inspiration and motivation and reaffirm a common commitment to tackle the great challenges of the world today and to build the future we need.

I should also mention that in February, the Secretary-General appointed Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division in our Department, as UN Commissioner-General for Expo 2020 in Dubai. Maher, whom you all know well, is tasked with overseeing the effective participation of the UN system at Expo under the theme “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future”, in line with the UN’s strategic focus on youth and innovation and Agenda 2030.

The 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo is another upcoming global event that offers an opportunity to showcase the Sustainable Development Goals and highlight the role that sports can play for development and peace.

Meanwhile, on 12-13 June, the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, part of the Department’s Question of Palestine mandate, will take place in Turkey, and we express here our thanks to the country’s Government for kindly agreeing to host.

Distinguished delegates,

I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you some recent instances of how our activities and priorities are adapting to the expectations of our Department’s new name, a name that recognizes and does justice to the mandate you have invested in us. We continue to look forward to your thoughts and your guidance, to future sessions of briefing and brainstorming that we initiated last year, and to our collective conversations, including at tomorrow afternoon’s interactive session, in the global cause.

I also hope you will be able to join us in this room at 10 a.m. this Friday when we reaffirm our commitment to freedom of the press and freedom of information and mark World Press Freedom Day with a high-level event looking at the challenges that journalists and media workers face every day around the world as they try to carry out their critical work.

Thank you so much for listening. Back to you, Mr. Chair.
