

**Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications
Opening of the Fortieth session of the Committee on Information
Tuesday 1 May 2018**

Mr. Chair, Ambassador Jan Kickert,

Dear members of the Bureau of the Committee on Information,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour as Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications and head of the Department of Public Information to address this Committee for the first time.

At the outset I would like to express my appreciation to all of you for your guidance, support and commitment to the work of the Department – and to me personally since I joined the United Nations in September last year. We welcome this support and look forward to our partnership continuing and deepening.

I would also like to take the opportunity in this setting to acknowledge Maher Nasser for his stewardship of the Department as Acting Under-Secretary-General for much of last year.

Distinguished delegates,

I have the fortune to address you at an auspicious time, as the Department undertakes a process of review and reform. Many of you will already be aware of this from the informal briefing I gave to Committee delegates on 28 March.

The reform has been requested by the Secretary-General and is being conducted in parallel with other reform streams, including development, peace and security, and management.

The Department's reform process started with one question: how does and how should the Organization communicate the values it upholds on behalf of all Member States?

We live in a world where 5G is the near future and yet a substantial digital gap persists – between countries and even within countries. We live in a world where trust in major institutions is increasingly hard to maintain. And we live in a world where the public is being overwhelmed by the noise of news that is sometimes fake.

Our aim, therefore, is to create rapid, strategic and integrated communications – to have in place an operation that meets the needs of today's world and ensures we can tell the UN story to people in languages they understand and via platforms they can use and access, digital as well as traditional.

We recognize that we must be nimble with our resources in doing so – we live in a time when Member State budgets are being stretched to deal with so many complex challenges. We must also invest in training, ensuring that our staff have the skills needed to carry out the tasks required. In addition, we need to monitor developments in emerging technologies, including the better use of artificial intelligence, so that we can keep pace with the constantly evolving field of communications.

Our reform is informed by several key analyses: a new evaluation from the Office of Internal Oversight Services that reviews the Department’s work from 2012 to 2017; the DPI Staff Engagement Survey; and the DPI senior staff retreat earlier this year.

Ultimately this is a staff-led and staff-driven exercise. Colleagues from across the Department came together in eight working groups to focus on key areas where we can improve, and their ideas and proposals will form the basis of a broader plan that I will take to the Secretary-General later this month.

Our plans for change start with our name: to move from the Department of Public Information to the Department of Global Communications, in line with the title of Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications that the Secretary-General gave me. This is much more than a cosmetic change; it is a signal of the direction in which we are heading.

There will of course be many steps ahead, and I will keep you informed as we proceed.

Mr. Chair,

Even as we move towards more modern communications, the Department is already innovating in terms of its products as well as its structure. As I hope you will see during the interactive segment scheduled for this afternoon, we are finding new ways to work, smarter ways to partner, and more effective ways to make an impact.

One example is the new integrated UN News portal, launched late last year. It offers not only the latest news and features in one, user-friendly website, but more than 400,000 historical radio, photo and print legacy items, enhancing the intellectual and historical value of the site.

Along with the UN News site has come the updated United Nations News Reader smartphone app, on which you can find all UN-related news in the six official languages as well as Kiswahili and Portuguese. I would invite all of you to download the app.

The Department is updating and modernizing its core platforms: the digital asset management system for audio and video content; and new systems for photo management and archiving, and for webcast live-streaming.

We are creating better stories and packaging our multimedia materials to be socially optimized, using digital tools ranging from podcasting to newer media for immersive story-telling and mobile access, and continuing to provide rich content for traditional media.

In recognition of the ways in which people are now consuming information, we have begun exploring virtual reality films offering 360-degree experiences, with the first such film to be available later this month.

In the eight months since a centrally coordinated multilingual social media team was established, the number of followers on the main global platforms in the eight languages has increased by two million to 31 million. This rise reflects improvements in all languages. Engagement on our posts is also increasing, thanks in part to the outstanding performance of the live videos and posts from the UN General Assembly VIP Social Media Space in September 2017, which received support from major social media platforms.

The flagship website un.org continues to grow in terms of reach and engagement. We will soon embark on a project to review and refresh the home page and associated webpages, that will include in-depth analysis of audience behavior on the site across all languages, to attract even wider audiences. As we move ahead, we are also continuing to digitize the United Nations historical audiovisual records to preserve and protect our common legacy.

Mr. Chair,

Our network of 59 operational United Nations information centres or UNICs communicates the UN's work to local audiences in more than 80 local languages, anchoring the Department's global communications efforts with audiences in every region of the world. My intention is to strengthen the contributions of UNICs to all Department-wide functions, which will help our programmes become more impactful, effective and multilingual.

This requires that UNICs be fully integrated into strategic planning, digital and multilingual content development, audience analysis and youth outreach. As part of the wider reform of the Department, we are conducting a programmatic and operational review of each of our field offices to ensure they meet the Organization's strategic communications needs.

At the same time, the Department is in discussions with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General about how changes to the development system will affect UNICs and our global communications efforts. We want to ensure that the UNICs are fully equipped to support the reform of the development system and enhance UN system-wide coherence, especially around Agenda 2030. We must ensure that the centres continue to promote the broader UN agenda as mandated by Member States, including the issues of peace and security, humanitarian assistance, and the advancement of human rights.

We are continuing with our successful digital campaign 'Service and Sacrifice', which honours the engagement of troop- and police-contributing countries to United Nations peace operations, focusing on a different Member State every week. The campaign is an example of emotional and behind-the-scenes storytelling about a unique UN endeavor that is resonating positively with local populations and governments and building support for the Organization's mission.

Our participatory 'Add Your Voice' video project is part of the campaign to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to better connect ordinary citizens and individuals with the promotion of their rights. More than 3,000 people around the world, speaking in 70 different languages, have recorded videos of themselves reading out an article of the Universal Declaration. A special edition of the Universal Declaration, branded for the landmark anniversary, has also been produced in all six official languages.

Looking ahead to major events on the peace and security agenda, the Department will provide coordinated communications support for the first-ever High-Level Conference for heads of

counter-terrorism agencies of Member States next month, and for the process leading up to and at Marrakesh, for the adoption of the first-ever Global Compact on Migration in December.

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals will occupy the centre of attention at the High-Level Political Forum in July, and the Department is exploring fresh approaches to inspire public and personal action to help achieve the Goals.

DPI is also deeply engaged in preparing for a critical climate change agenda over the next year and a half, through the twenty-fourth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Katowice, Poland, in December, to the UN climate summit slated for New York in September 2019.

Distinguished delegates,

Our outreach is expanding in many ways. The UN Digital Library – a partnership between UN libraries in Geneva, Beirut and Vienna – continues to grow. In its first five months there were more than 1.1 million downloads of content to users. More broadly, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is undertaking a process to improve the ways in which collects, preserves, organizes and shares UN materials with clients.

Earlier this year, the Department marked the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade with a number of activities. We are grateful to Permanent Missions and Representatives for their active engagement and support.

Our focus on SDG awareness is increasingly on engaging young people, which must be a priority for all of us. As showcased during the XIX Festival of Youth and Students in Sochi, Russia last October, and a multi-country mission to Africa at the beginning of this year, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, whose office is part of the Department, has been able to mobilize young people on- and offline to advocate for and engage in the implementation of the Goals and embrace the values on which the UN was founded.

If we are to succeed across Agenda 2030, young people must be informed and engaged. The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which is entirely funded by extra-budgetary means, requires more support from all sources. More generally, the Department, mindful of the budgetary situation facing Member States, is exploring creative avenues for fundraising to ensure that we can meet all of our mandates, particularly those regarding multilingualism.

As part of the UN's ongoing campaign to promote the SDGs, the UN Academic Impact (UNAI) initiative launched today a series of articles highlighting the importance of higher education in achieving the Goals. This series, which will focus on a different Goal each week, aims to inspire action about the SDGs and showcase what UNAI member institutions are doing to help achieve them.

Looking ahead, we can announce that the sixty-seventh DPI-NGO Conference will be held at UN Headquarters on 22-23 August. The Conference agenda is being finalized and will be shared later this month. Bringing in the voices and diversity of civil society and youth in the work of the UN – as advocates and change agents – is a key priority of the Department.

Distinguished delegates,

I very much look forward to hearing your views, observations and comments this week, as well as your guidance and support in the year ahead. I welcome, specifically, your ensuring that your support in this Committee for the Department of Public Information is equally expressed in the Fifth Committee; that you provide us with mandates that allow us the flexibility to build support for the United Nations in line with modern communications and on the basis of research and analytics; and that you continue to work creatively and share best practices with us for the greatest impact.

I hope you will be able to join us this afternoon for an interactive dialogue as we discuss our partnership further. I also look forward to seeing you on Thursday when we gather here to mark World Press Freedom Day, a cause very dear to my heart. Indeed, just yesterday, 9 journalists were among those killed in a targeted attack in Kabul, Afghanistan. This illustrates the grave dangers that journalists and media workers face every day around the world.

Thank you.
