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**CLOSING REMARKS BY
THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 40th SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION**

**WEDNESDAY, 2 May 2018
Conference Room 1 (CB)**

Thank you, Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee as you conclude your General debate for this 40th session. I should like to begin by noting what an enriching and educative experience it has been for me to hear the many thoughtful ideas expressed and the range of specific suggestions for our collective action. I say “collective” deliberately because if the purpose of United Nations global communications is to build informed support for the Organization, we can have no truer allies than our Member States.

I have been particularly touched, and strengthened in my mission, by the many generous words addressed to me. Thank you. Your kindness is a reaffirmation of the trust and support you continue to extend to the Department as a whole, to the many women and men at Headquarters and in the field who tell, and who shape, the great United Nations story – the “family of communications professionals”, as the distinguished delegate from Senegal put it so eloquently.

Our effort to tell this story even more compellingly, and to shape the narrative still more effectively, informs our efforts to effect meaningful changes in the Department’s conduct of its responsibilities. In our efforts to keep our Department “spontaneous and agile”, as one delegate put it, we realize that reform and change are not punctuation points, but part of a constant process. I should like to assure each of you that where this involves specific products or

services by the Department, or the adjustment of expenditures in their regard, we shall report to the General Assembly through the appropriate bodies for such consideration. In addition, I would be happy to continue the practice of briefing members of this committee informally, and joining in brainstorming sessions with them – again in the “collective” spirit to which I referred earlier.

In my opening statement yesterday morning, and during the interactive dialogue in the afternoon, I shared with you a necessarily abbreviated picture of our many communications products and activities. I wish to emphasize that in all our work, as with the Department’s reform, gender parity and equality will be both a goal in itself and intrinsic to how we work. This is a personal conviction and a priority that I will continue to champion.

Let me now address some of the questions and observations that I heard in the course of the general debate. While I may not be able to cover each point, I remain, as always, available to you for any direct specific clarifications that you may seek.

I would like, at the outset, to say that as someone who has always enjoyed learning new languages, and who has been enriched by them, I was heartened by the eloquent reaffirmation of the importance of multilingualism. We remain guided by the assertion by this Committee, and by the General Assembly, that there are key attributes essential to the information we provide. It must be accurate, impartial, comprehensive, balanced, timely and relevant. And it must be multilingual.

As we informed the Committee last year, while we are striving to do more within existing resources, the Secretary-General, in his biennium budget proposal for 2018-2019, included a request for additional resources of \$4.2 million to allow the Department to meet some requests for multilingualism. To our regret, that request was not approved and the Department experienced additional budget reductions. That said, we shall continue to pursue our efforts towards the multilingualism ideal, using the talented human resources we possess, the opportunities afforded to us by technological tools and our partnerships with language schools and universities.

I note the point that has been made by more than one delegation – and, indeed, by this Committee itself – that “multilingualism” must extend beyond a finite set of languages, and that United Nations guided tours, in particular, are available in languages spoken by large groups of visitors. We recognize that this is important from both the communications and revenue generation angles.

Several delegations inquired about multilingual meetings coverage. Meetings coverage is labour-intensive. To expand the coverage from the current two languages to six languages would require corresponding increased resources. Hence, in the budget proposal for both 2016-17 and 2018-19, the Secretary-General put forward requests for eight additional posts and related operating expenses in the region of \$1.5 million dollars – for external translation – to enable the Department to start providing meetings coverage in all the six official languages. The General Assembly did not approve the requests for these and other proposed posts to support multilingualism.

Several delegations inquired about webcast multilingualism. DPI received funds in the 2016-17 budget that the Department prioritized for multilingualism and that allowed the Department to hire five language staff to provide on-demand videos in the six official languages for the plenaries of the General Assembly, Security Council and ECOSOC. When the Department’s 2018-19 budget was reduced, DPI could not retain those five staff, limiting its ability to provide this service.

As a temporary measure, DPI is still providing on-demand videos of plenary meetings of the Security Council in the six official languages. The title and description of these meetings, however, are only in English, and are not discoverable in the other languages. As we examine how to reform the Department, we are looking at options for a longer-term solution.

Several delegations remarked on language disparity with regard to content on un.org. In line with the General Assembly mandates on multilingualism and with respect to the websites under its own purview, DPI is deeply committed to the production of content in all six official

languages and with maximum adherence to principles of accessibility for persons with disabilities. In line with the UN's internal instructions, content, including multilingual content, is the responsibility of the respective author department. With respect to the websites of different departments of the Secretariat, where author departments are responsible for content, where possible within existing resources, the Department has assisted other sites to achieve a minimum level of multilingualism. This requires a high volume of work, and we continue to seek partnerships with universities to assist. I would like to underline that the 158 websites directly under DPI's purview and the websites of the main bodies (Security Council, General Assembly and ECOSOC) and their main committees are fully maintained in the six official languages.

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Many of you remarked on the potential of, and our performance in, global social media. The Committee underlined at its last session the importance, in the implementation of new communication tools such as social networks, that the linguistic dimension be taken into account. Pursuant to this, the Department created social media teams in each of the official languages, as well as in Kiswahili and Portuguese.

One delegation encouraged the use of digital diplomacy and synchronized hashtags. We do make social media materials, including synchronized hashtags, available to Member States for coordinated planning. Our social media team is ready to meet with diplomats when requested for training and to organize special events on digital diplomacy.

One delegation encouraged more planning by geography and age groups. Now that we have a more precise analytics dashboard, we will be looking at how to better reach different audiences. With the combined multilingual social media team, we plan to create materials for specific audiences.

Several delegations stressed the importance of balance between digital and traditional media. The Department remains fully committed to the production of audio, video and print to reach audiences with different capacities, and to reach audiences of different generations. We continue to produce radio as well as video feature programming, along with a variety of print materials. These are all showcased on the UN News websites and distributed to partners, including radio and television broadcasters and news aggregators.

Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the many members of our team who fly the UN flag at information centres around the globe, our gratitude goes to the many delegations who spoke so generously and positively about their work. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support provided to our Information Centres by you, the Member States – whether through direct financial means or providing them with reduced rent or rent-free premises or various partnership opportunities. We welcome the progress being made on the UN information centre in Luanda.

I should also add, in the context of one delegate's remark about the need for durable, rather than event-based outreach, that both our 'Remember Slavery' and Holocaust remembrances are now year-long programmes, with sustained messaging around an annual theme supported by educational materials and activities at Headquarters and the United Nations globally. I note the comment by one delegation about a specific event related to the Holocaust not being mentioned in the report; this was because the event was finalized after the deadline for contributions to the report had passed. Here I would like to mention that beginning from next year, we will now work with a July to December timeframe for our reports to the Committee on Information and a January to June timeframe for our reports to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, and we trust such an established pattern will ensure a coherent and comprehensive narrative of our work.

Several delegations voiced their appreciation and expectations regarding our work on refugees. The Department produced two animated videos in all six official languages on the story of a young Syrian girl who fled the conflict in her homeland and that of a young Rohingya boy who

found refuge in Malaysia. These videos were screened on the International Day of Peace in New York and at events organized by the global network of UN information centres.

Distinguished delegates,

We take note of the statement by several delegates on freedom of expression, the safety of journalists and media workers, the dangers of misinformation – and disinformation – and of fake news. It is important to hear these assertions from you because, when you speak, we hear the voices of your governments. As the Secretary-General has said, “we need leaders to defend a free media. This is crucial to counter prevailing misinformation. And we need everyone to stand for our right to truth.”

A delegation has requested to participate in the World Press Freedom Day event. The event is open to all Member States and has been advertised on deleGATE. In addition, the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists has sent a note verbale to all Permanent Missions inviting them to the World Press Freedom Day event at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

I was heartened by the number of delegations who stressed the importance of youth and of the Department engaging younger audiences. One delegation inquired why the Envoy’s participation in the 2017 Sochi youth meeting, which I noted in my opening statement yesterday, was not referenced in the corresponding report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department. Within the space of the Report of the Secretary-General on the Department’s Outreach activities, the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth reported all country visits that the Envoy and her staff undertook in the period under review. This includes reference to the Envoy’s travel to Russia, during which she participated in the World Festival of Youth and Students 2017 in Sochi. The mention of specific events attended by the Envoy for such country visits, however, was regrettably not possible within the confines of the report. Such details are expected to be reflected in the separate progress report to be prepared by the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth.

Another delegation inquired about the accuracy of press releases. Our press officers take their work very seriously. Accuracy is paramount. When a factual mistake has been made, it is corrected once it has been brought to our attention. Despite the time pressure and sheer volume of work, only a handful of mistakes have been identified among almost 1,700 meetings summary press releases that were produced in 2017 – a testament to the professionalism and dedication of our press officers.

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

I hope that I have substantially addressed the thoughts and concerns you have expressed, even as I have taken note of, and benefited from, many more of your remarks. As I said, I look forward to more regular engagement with you, through periodic meetings and brainstorming sessions. I am grateful to all of you for having made my first COI session so substantive and so memorable. My gratitude extends in particular to the members of the Bureau, including especially our Chair. Ambassador Kickert has been unstinting in the time he has made available to this Committee and the Department.

Thank you.
