

As delivered

**Under-Secretary-General Melissa Fleming
Opening Statement to the 46th session of the Committee on Information
Monday, 29 April 2024**

Thank you, Chair.

Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation to you, Ambassador Muhammad Usman Iqbal Jadoon, as well as to the Vice-Chairs, for your steady leadership of the Bureau of the Committee.

And thank you also in your personal capacity, for your statement and your summary of our troubled information environment, as well as proposals to address it – which could also be through our UN global principles which are still being drafted.

Please count on my support and that of the entire Department of Global Communications, to you and the Committee on Information.

We depend on your counsel and generous assistance to help us achieve our mandates.

I'd also like to acknowledge that I'm here today with my senior management team, Robb here, and my colleagues who are in the front row in the back. They'll all be here during the informal segment, all of us collectively, to answer any questions you might have, to listen to you, your comments and reflections.

Distinguished delegates,

We meet here, once again, in perilous times.

Fossil fuel pollution is driving the climate crisis off the charts.

Inequality and injustice have reached egregious levels.

Polarisation and hate are spreading – fuelled by digital disinformation.

Against this backdrop, armed conflict, acts of terror, and violence are proliferating across the globe – from the Middle East to the Caribbean, and from central Africa to eastern Europe.

Yet, there are reasons to hope.

Solutions are happening in real time.

The renewables revolution is unstoppable. New wind power, for example, was up sixty percent last year, compared to 2022.

We've seen 143 countries outline commitments to transforming education – one of the safest paths to a more equal world.

Efforts are picking up to build guardrails against online disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech.

While the New Agenda for Peace presents a vision for how the international community can more effectively prevent conflict and sustain peace.

The Department that I lead communicates to global audiences about these challenges but also about the progress made.

And I want to emphasize that we are focusing not just on the troubled state of the world, but also what are the solutions that are out there.

Not just UN solutions but solutions that you may have in your Member States, in your governments, in your communities.

And we do so by creating and disseminating clear, accurate and impartial information.

We do this through our news, but also our campaigns, our outreach activities. And I'm proud to say we reach millions of people with our content.

We don't just leave them with content and facts and data, but we also show ways that they can get involved, and we try to build through that support for the United Nations.

We amplify the voice of the Secretary-General and other UN officials – but also the voices of Member States.

We cover developments here at UN Headquarters but also at our headquarters around the world. And we act as correspondents for what is happening in the field.

My teams communicate in all official UN languages – and often in the 10 languages used by UN News.

And our Information Centres broaden significantly our footprint. Through them, they have produced, translated and adapted materials in 153 languages, in addition to the official ones.

Distinguished delegates,

A key part of our support to the Organization's peace and security efforts are our Crisis Communication Cells.

These cells bring together UN system entities at the country, regional and global levels.

They examine narratives, agree on strategy, align messaging, tackle disinformation and reputational issues, and coordinate the response to media queries and social media reactions.

We have these crisis cells currently focusing on the situation in Ukraine, Sudan, and Haiti, as well as Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Let me expand a little on this work:

We are now in the seventh month since the horrific terror attacks by Hamas and others in Israel, including mass killings, and the use of sexual violence, torture, and the taking of hostages.

As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has reiterated, these attacks were an intolerable denial of the most basic values of humanity, and a breach of the most fundamental values of international law.

In the months to follow, the Israeli military operations have brought relentless death and destruction to Gaza.

2.2 million Palestinians are in the midst of an epic humanitarian catastrophe.

And there is a serious risk of famine and disease.

Desperation and scarcity have led to a near-total breakdown in law and order.

And the eyes of the world and the eyes of history are watching. It is our job to report the facts to large numbers of people who are coming to the United Nations' platforms for news and context.

Our crisis portal on the main UN website, [un.org](https://www.un.org), is helping audiences understand what is happening in Gaza, as well as the position of the United Nations Secretariat.

Updated daily, in all official languages, the portal aggregates content from across the UN system, including meetings summaries, statements and updates from the entities working to bring humanitarian relief.

Since its launch in 2023 in October, this dedicated crisis portal has generated over 700,000 views.

In parallel, 5.4 million people have viewed coverage of the situation offered by UN News.

And media organizations across the world, whose international correspondents have been unable to enter Gaza, have depended and widely used our news, and our service called UNifeed, which is our video service delivering video content to those broadcasters who are unable to cover the situation, as well as social media content.

They include the likes of *Al-Arabiya*, *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *TRT* and *The Wall Street Journal*, just to mention a few.

Our Information Centres in Middle East and North Africa have arduously supported our UN communications efforts around Gaza.

They've provided strategic advice, engaged in media partnerships and facilitated high-level visits in the region.

Distinguished delegates,

Beyond the Middle East, my Department works to ensure that other crises remain at the forefront of the world's attention.

This is a challenging feat – given that the media has very short news cycles and audiences have very short attention spans.

We are also seeing growing news avoidance, a worsening phenomenon as the number of crises around the world continue to grow.

And this is why we find ourselves having to communicate strategically, not just putting out the facts, but also using storytelling that both raises the alarm and gets people to care.

So we are continuing to extensively cover the various crises around the world, both conflicts as well as other natural disasters – climate change fuelled disasters.

And, we continue to extensively cover Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

From December 2023 to the end of March this year, situation updates, interviews and other publications on the war in Ukraine garnered more than 650,000 views on UN News.

A peg we used to do detailed reporting was the two-year anniversary of the invasion – when we conducted dedicated interviews and covered across languages meetings of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

We've engaged in similar efforts to help refocus the world's attention on Sudan – which is often characterized as a "forgotten war."

UN News teams have delivered impactful interviews and images, and have shared human stories that we have collected from Sudan to the world.

Our social media accounts have also amplified content from the UN system, including on Ukraine and Sudan, as well as the Secretary-General's statements, to keep the spotlight on the crises.

And meanwhile, our interviews, video explainers, social media and news content from Haiti offer insights into the security and human rights situation, the food crisis there, as well as the UN's humanitarian relief efforts in the country.

Dear friends,

While the world is facing multiple crises in the realm of peace and security, the climate emergency is not letting up.

2023 was the hottest year ever recorded, and each month of 2024 so far has been the hottest on record.

This creates an urgent challenge for my team: how do we communicate about this emergency in a way that raises the alarm but doesn't leave people feeling frightened and also hopeless?

Many fossil fuel companies would like them to remain hopeless.

So our climate communications strategy is built on three pillars:

The first is to inform: we are driving a science-based narrative, focusing on the need to limit global warming, and leveraging at the same time the authority and the voice of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Second, we aim to inspire: we forge an emotional connection with the audience through bold messaging, impactful visuals, and hopeful storytelling.

Third, we mobilize audiences to act and speak up, through positive examples, practical avenues for change, and individual steps to make a difference.

We use this approach to counter what is termed by many as the strategy of the disinformation actors, and that is to counter delayism, deflection, division, and doomism. These strategies used by certain vested interests are only there to obstruct progress.

So, we have a lot of work to do to give our existing climate communications a boost. We are also drawing on the success of our UN Verified model, that we deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are pivoting it to address climate-related disinformation and to promote the benefits of transition to renewable energy.

We are calling this initiative “Verified for Climate.”

We have already launched a new campaign under Verified for Climate on Earth Day, which was on the 22nd of April, and it’s called “The Future Thanks You.”

The campaign uses engaging messaging to shift global narratives around climate and renewables by celebrating the positive benefits of clean energy.

And in addition, it engages trusted messengers from diverse backgrounds, who use their voice on social media to reach people who may be “indifferent” to the climate crisis.

So, there is a great deal of potential there, especially considering the growing demand for content on climate action:

Over the past three years, our climate website has seen a 20-fold increase in traffic to it. In 2020, it had 940,000 pageviews and in all of 2023 we had 18.8 million. So again, it’s increased 20-fold. Huge demand for our content on climate.

Distinguished delegates,

While we communicate about such burning issues, we constantly reevaluate and try to improve our approach.

In the year since we last met, the Department’s News and Media Division has made great strides in producing original content faster, with an emphasis on achieving greater impact and engagement with our audiences around the world.

Our goal is not just to report the news. It is to help audiences understand the challenges that the world is facing – and to bring to light the solutions.

We are producing a stream of explanatory pieces – in text and in video – that are also tailored for social media, and we’re making much more use of infographics and other striking visual elements.

But in our digital age, speed is also essential.

That is why the UN News team has piloted “live pages” – also known as “live blogs” – to report in real time about key meetings, for example of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as other important events, such as COP28 in Dubai.

We have found that our readers – and many of our readers are Member States like you – are staying longer on our sites, and returning, as a result.

So, when people are tuning into a meeting of the Security Council or the General Assembly, they can not just watch the webcast, they can go to the website and see live blogging on what Member States are saying in real time.

And we’re expanding this into different languages – and this will evolve over time to include more contextual analysis and input from experts.

So, this I would say is an indicative example of the innovation of our news teams, which continue in parallel to provide their usual, standard, important services – like coverage and summaries of UN meetings, stakeouts, as well as press conferences – with the utmost professionalism and care.

But innovation is also a key for the success of the @UN or @UnitedNations social media accounts.

By now, these accounts have amassed more than 71 million followers across platforms in nine languages.

And this contributes to a constant stream of factual content, on platforms where misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are rife.

Our Social Media team follows persistently all developments in the field, exploring emerging platforms and their potential towards achieving our communication goals.

And to that end, we opened Threads accounts shortly after the platform was launched to use them to communicate to now already over one million followers.

In addition, we regularly employ new features across platforms to engage particularly with youth.

Indicatively, we launched an Augmented Reality Instagram filter, that allows users to encourage their own social media followers to “ActNow for the SDGs”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Beyond the quality of our output and our innovative approaches, intensive outreach and partnerships are key in our effort to lead the narrative in an increasingly competitive information environment.

This is why the Department continues to expand initiatives such as Football for the Goals, which engages 280 entities in the football industry to inspire action on the Sustainable Development Goals as well as human rights.

Similarly, we continue to invest in the United Nations Academic Impact – which now comprises over 1,600 Universities in some 150 countries – as well as the Model United Nations programme.

Both of these programmes are seminal in the effort to teach *young* people about multilateralism.

As we look forward to engaging with Member States, we are translating the *UN Guide to Model UN* into more languages, complementing the existing versions in English, French and Portuguese.

In the same vein, we rely on our education programmes, to reach young people and all generations.

In January, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme paid tribute to the extraordinary courage of Holocaust victims and survivors, at the annual observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

Last month, for the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we arranged statements at the General Assembly Hall by Sir Hilary Beckles, Chair of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, as well as Yolanda Renee King, author and granddaughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

And, just a few days ago, my team collaborated with the Permanent Mission of Rwanda on a Memorial Ceremony marking the 30th anniversary of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

The aim of all these activities is to educate global audiences about these terrible events, to help stop them from happening again – but also to cultivate long-term support for the values and principles of the United Nations.

To achieve the latter, we also use avenues like guided tours, as well as the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

And it's with great pride that I announce that in 2023, the UN Digital Library achieved a remarkable milestone: more than 61 million downloads from over 12,000 locations around the world.

In parallel, we try to cultivate the UN's most important asset and advocate: its staff.

Through the UN intranet, iSeek, the Department provides a single, unified platform where over 185,000 personnel worldwide come together to receive important messages and share their work, in English and in French.

Dear friends,

A long-standing ally in our Outreach are influencers with large followings – including Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace – with whom we share our key messages and campaigns, and engage on social media.

One way we did this recently was through an initiative called the “SDG Circle of Supporters”, which engaged 24 high-profile supporters between July 2023 and March 2024.

During that period, they posted 150 social media posts, encouraging their more than 290 million social media followers to take action for the SDGs.

Many of them come from the entertainment industry, with which we partner in different ways.

An indicative example is our recent collaboration with major TV studios co-producing a video for the season finale of the TV series Shark Tank.

High-profile cast members, who are business leaders themselves, came here to UN Headquarters for an all-day briefing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The resulting video highlights the role that business plays in solving global problems and calls for the series’ tens of millions of viewers to take individual actions on the SDGs.

Another key partner is the media industry that works with us through the SDG Media Compact – which is a flagship initiative of my Department.

The Compact’s membership has blossomed to more than 400 media organizations who use their talent, resources and creativity to accelerate advocacy, action and progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Meanwhile, registration has just concluded for the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship, which will once again select a group of young journalists from developing countries to cover the opening of the General Assembly here in September.

I am also excited to report that, thanks to the generous support from the Government of Japan, the UN system will participate in the Osaka Kansai Expo 2025 with a dedicated pavilion.

Maher Nasser, Director of Outreach in the Department, will serve as Commissioner-General for the UN presence, coordinating more than 30 UN entities in developing an ambitious programme for the UN at Expo.

Its goal will be to highlight the importance of multilateralism – both for addressing global challenges and for achieving the SDGs and the outcome of the Summit of the Future.

Dear friends,

Everything I have said so far – all the work of the Department I am highlighting today, as well as the progress contained in the Department’s Reports to this Committee – is getting harder year by year.

Getting the UN's messages heard is more challenging and more complex than ever before.

Since the rise of social media, we have witnessed the unprecedented scale at which misinformation, disinformation and hate speech can pollute our information ecosystems.

And now we have also witnessed how AI tools are being deployed.

To circulate false, misleading, and hateful narratives, sometimes targeting individuals or groups.

Taking advantage of platform algorithms designed to prioritize user engagement, and to amplify posts that generate outrage.

By design, these algorithms often limit the reach of factual, reliable information – including that of the United Nations.

We're also seeing concerted efforts to use disinformation to undermine trust in institutions and science.

And deliberate campaigns calculated to inflame societal divisions and deepen a sense of chaos.

This has created a feedback loop, in which loss of trust produces fertile ground for mis and disinformation, which further erodes trust.

And it is into this maelstrom that we must communicate for a better world.

To that end, we have continued to work intensively on a code of conduct for information integrity, which is now framed as the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity.

The research and consultations for the Principles have been very encouraging.

Most recently, at the informal dialogue of the Committee on Information on the 15th of April – in which non-Committee members and many of you here also participated – Member States welcomed the focus of the Principles on a multistakeholder approach, involving States, civil societies, as well as the private sector – including technology companies.

Many Member States appreciated that the Global Principles addressed concerns around AI technologies, including measures to ensure responsible development and use of AI.

They also welcomed the prominent space given in the Principles to capacity-building at the national level and also cooperation between States.

By encouraging a holistic approach, the Principles will be an important step to getting global standards for safety, transparency, and privacy in information spaces.

They will support a shared understanding of information integrity and provide recommendations for making the information ecosystem more humane, and firmly based in human rights.

With a focus on public policy, media literacy, capacity-building and demonetizing disinformation, they will put forward measures that reduce risks and mitigate harm, while upholding freedom of expression and supporting a more inclusive digital space.

In my remarks to Member States at the informal dialogue, I presented in detail the truly global consultations that we undertook to develop the Principles.

Now, I would just like to highlight the indispensable work of UN Information Centres, or UNICs, in this consultation process, and on information integrity more broadly.

A number of UNICs held roundtables, they also held training sessions, or courses or workshops on particular areas around information integrity, misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

Among others, UNIC Pretoria hosted a Fact-Checking and Verification workshop for South African journalists in Johannesburg, and UNIC Lima engaged 215 journalists for a course on digital journalism that also addressed the subject of violence against women.

Our UNICs also translated and conducted the Information Integrity Global Survey – a questionnaire that gave us an even better understanding of the digital ecosystem at the country level.

In terms of capacity-building, the Department is establishing a unit to foster increased awareness within the UN system and beyond about information risks and their implications.

It will allow us to scale up our response to risks that undermine the delivery of UN mandates.

And, in the meantime, we continue to explore how we use technologies like AI to further the UN's work.

But I'd like to just also acknowledge the important collaboration in this process with key UN organizations who've been working for years in the area of information integrity, namely UNESCO and OHCHR.

We will continue to consult and work closely together with UNESCO, OHCHR, as well as many other UN organizations that are now creating their own capacities – as well as entities like DPO within the Secretariat – to address information integrity.

So, we are continuing to see how, though, can we use these technologies to further our work, especially AI.

For example, our UN Publications section recently took part in a Google Conference, to learn how AI can improve the discoverability as well as the dissemination of UN research and data.

I think it will also be important for us to explore constantly how we could perhaps further our multilingualism, using AI tools.

They continue to get better, they're still flawed, but I can assure you it's so important for us to extend our multilingualism.

And we will be looking to see whether we can benefit from the strides in AI in this context.

Distinguished Delegates,

Finally, our efforts are building momentum in the run up to the Summit of the Future.

We have rolled out the initial phase of a digital campaign for the Summit, with a suite of new and dynamic assets in multiple languages.

Part of this effort is a initiative called “ActNow: Summit of the Future”, it’s a challenge actually.

It includes the call to ‘Speak Up’ to show decision makers that people worldwide are not just taking individual actions but that they are also taking a stand for a more sustainable future.

It was launched in mid-April during the ECOSOC Youth Forum, in which young people produced key messages and findings that will serve as inputs to the Summit.

And, until now, it has registered some 300,000 actions.

Besides, in the coming week, more than 2,000 participants will convene in Nairobi for the UN Civil Society Conference in support of the Summit of the Future.

We’ve been working on this Conference in close collaboration with the Co-Facilitators of the Pact for the Future, the office of the UN Secretary-General and the office of the President of the UN General Assembly – and we expect it to be a key moment of engagement in preparation for the Summit.

We hope to see you in Nairobi and we hope to see in Nairobi the creation of coalitions among stakeholders to push forward proposals or reforms in the consensus language of the Pact for the Future, and to raise the ambition as well for the Pact overall.

Distinguished delegates,

In these times of global tension and division, it is our responsibility to remind and reassure people that, through it all, the UN continues to protect human rights, to eradicate diseases, to save lives with humanitarian action, to shape the norms of international development, to pave the way for environmental protection, and to work tirelessly to mitigate conflicts.

It is sometimes hard to see beyond the crises and challenges, but we will not give up on this mission.

Shedding a light on these issues and offering solutions to overcome them.

Working with you, we have many reasons for optimism, and a lot to look forward to – most immediately, the discussions to be had during this session.

Thank you.
