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**Special Political and Decolonization Committee
(Fourth Committee)**

Summary record of the 16th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 24 October 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Özgür (Vice-Chair) (Turkey)

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In the absence of Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Ms. Özgür (Turkey), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 p.m.

Agenda item 57: Questions relating to information
(continued) (A/72/21, A/72/258 and A/C.4/72/L.9)

1. **Mr. Kafle** (Nepal) said that his country had been mobilizing the Government, civil society and the private sector to disseminate information related to United Nations activities; for example, a public campaign had been launched during the eleventh Kathmandu marathon to highlight the role of sports in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly provided information about socioeconomic development, peacekeeping, climate change, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and disaster risk mitigation on its website.

2. In the interest of multilingualism, the Department of Public Information should expand its language repertoire to include Nepali, which was spoken by millions in his country and elsewhere. It should also help produce media content in Nepali, in particular on his country's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping efforts and on cooperation between Nepal and the United Nations, with a view to garnering greater support for the Organization. The United Nations information centres helped to reach the global population in a number of local languages; their technical and infrastructural capabilities should therefore be further strengthened. Nepalese libraries, including the designated repository for United Nations publications at Tribhuvan University, needed to be modernized in order to expand their outreach activities. As civil society, transparency and accountability were closely interrelated, the Department should broaden its partnerships with young people, educational institutions, NGOs and civil society, the better to publicize its information.

3. Developing countries still had limited access to new forms of media, despite their increasing popularity among young people worldwide; traditional means of communication such as television, radio and print remained the primary source of global information, especially in remote areas. Hence, a combination of new and traditional media should be used to disseminate the principles and activities of the United Nations globally. The Department ought to make existing telephone access to United Nations materials free of charge through designated toll-free numbers throughout the world, for such access to audio materials could make a dramatic impact on the ground.

4. The Kathmandu Information Centre had erected a memorial plaque dedicated to the fallen Nepali peacekeepers. His delegation believed that the memorial to United Nations peacekeepers at Headquarters should be placed in a location that was more visible to visitors.

5. **Mr. Halfaoui** (Morocco) said that he welcomed the various communications campaigns spearheaded by the Department of Public Information on matters pertaining to the African continent, the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, human rights, peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts, among others. His Government drew attention in particular to the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which ought to put still more emphasis on the right of the Palestinian people to a viable independent State with Al-Quds as its capital.

6. While notable steps had been taken to publicize the Organization's peacekeeping and peacebuilding work, the Department should pursue closer cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Support in order to remedy existing gaps in the coverage of those activities. As a Vice-Chair of the network on peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations of the Group of Francophone Ambassadors, Morocco drew attention to the fact that the dearth of French-language materials on peacekeeping had hindered the participation of French-speaking peacekeeping forces. Pre-deployment manuals and other documents on peacekeeping doctrines must be made available in the six official United Nations languages. In the process, the Department should continue to highlight United Nations values such as tolerance, solidarity, peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights in order to combat all forms of extremism and xenophobia more effectively.

7. One way to overcome the lack of financial and logistical resources that impeded efforts to ensure the equitable use of the six official United Nations languages in the dissemination of information was to use new information technologies, as the Department had done. The Department should be congratulated for what it had already managed to do to achieve language parity at the United Nations. However, the existing digital divide meant that traditional tools of communication remained important in many developing countries and the Department should adapt its programmes to that reality. The United Nations information centres were at the forefront and should enjoy the Department's consistent support. Since its establishment in 1962, the Centre in Rabat had been able to bring its pioneering activities to the general public

and had recently covered the Marrakech Climate Change Conference with distinction.

8. The coverage and dissemination of United Nations activities were great responsibilities, particularly at a time when trustworthy, neutral and objective information was more crucial than ever. His delegation had been taken aback by the demand made by the representative of Algeria that a report of the Special Committee on decolonization should be made available online. As an independent entity, the Department should not take orders from anyone apart from the Committee on Information, which was mandated to formulate its policies, programmes and activities. Moreover, the request for a single report that dated back over four decades was a highly selective one that might set a precedent for other countries to follow, thereby opening the door to politicization and manipulation.

9. The Department's mission was to promote global awareness and understanding of the work of the Organization, not to serve the Algerian agenda or that of any other delegation. His Government, for instance, would not presume to ask the Department to upload to the website of the Special Committee on decolonization the Security Council resolutions calling for a political settlement of the question of the Moroccan Sahara and welcoming the Moroccan autonomy initiative as serious and credible, or the 2001 report of the Secretary-General (S/2001/613), in which the Algerian proposal to partition the Territory was exposed. Preferring a constructive approach, his Government would ask the Department only to continue to focus on the themes and tasks that fell within its mandate and the guidelines of the Committee on Information.

10. **Ms. Salem** (Observer for the State of Palestine), noting the important role of the Department of Public Information in promoting human rights, dialogue, tolerance, social inclusion, justice, freedom and peace, commended the Department's Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine for raising international awareness of the issue in an objective manner that was consistent with international law and United Nations resolutions. Her delegation appreciated the expressions of support for the Special Information Programme and for the Palestinian right to self-determination voiced by many delegations. Activities carried out by the Department under the Programme included organizing international media seminars on peace in the Middle East and offering an annual training programme for young Palestinian journalists. The Programme should be endorsed by all delegations.

11. She thanked the Department for updating the permanent exhibit on the question of Palestine and for

its activities commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It was crucial that the language and terminology used by the Department on the question of Palestine be consistent with the language adopted in United Nations resolutions.

12. The following year, the International Day of Solidarity would coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations partition plan of Palestine and with the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba. That tragic history, while a defining aspect of Palestinian life in the intervening years, had overshadowed personal stories of courage and determination in the face of great injustice and adversity.

13. In collaboration with the Division for Palestinian Rights, the State of Palestine would present an exhibit the following month to honour the resilience of the Palestinian people and the achievements of outstanding individuals and groups in a number of areas. Their lives embodied the Palestinian people's long journey towards freedom and their quest to attain their rights and fulfil their potential, a quest that enjoyed and deserved solidarity. In that connection, she welcomed the organization in June of the United Nations forum to mark 50 years of Israeli occupation. Her delegation was confident that the Department would continue to disseminate information highlighting the urgency of ending the injustice and dispossession the Palestinian people had endured for so long.

14. **Ms. Saidane** (Observer for the International Organization of la Francophonie) said that it was vital to mobilize the Secretariat and Member States in support of multilingualism, particularly in the light of the serious challenges facing multilateralism. More than ever, people were in need of access to information on the impact of United Nations activities on the daily life of millions; such access must be guaranteed while preserving traditional means of communication alongside new technologies. To that end, a firmer commitment from the Department of Public Information in support of Member States on issues relating to information management would be welcome. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the imminent reforms of the Organization would depend on effective multilingualism, enabling Member States to contribute equally in the reform process.

15. Ahead of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2018, a multilingual communications strategy would be crucial in creating a sense of genuine sharing in the Organization's founding values, and be key to advancing its Sustainable Development Goals.

16. Her organization welcomed the commitment and achievements of the Department's News and Media Division, particularly its efforts to make the news application available in the six official languages; and also praised the work of its Press Service, Publications Section and Radio Section. However, in order to reflect adequately the diversity of culture and opinion within the Organization, content must be not only translated into but also produced in other non-official languages. The Department's awareness-raising and strategic communication work would hinge on such an approach. Steps taken to work more closely with national institutions and build their capacities were especially laudable. For its part, her organization would go on actively supporting the efforts of the Department of Public Information to promote multilingualism and thereby ensure the success of multilateralism, to the benefit of the world's peoples.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

17. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that his delegation had merely pointed out the absence on the United Nations website of the report of a visiting mission to a Non-Self-Governing Territory, an absence that was not in line with United Nations practice. The fact that the report dated back to 1975 took nothing away from its value, any more than the Charter's 72 years of existence diminished its importance. Algeria had always endeavoured to promote the independence of United Nations organs. However, that independence was not absolute but must be respected in the context of each organ's mandate. He reminded the representative of Morocco of the United Nations resolution calling on the Department of Public Information to disseminate information on the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The report on Western Sahara was the only report of a visiting mission that was not yet available on the United Nations website, an unacceptable omission and dereliction of the Department's duty. Moreover, the question of Western Sahara — not Moroccan Sahara — hinged on the exercise of self-determination by the people of that Territory, which was listed by the United Nations as a Non-Self-Governing Territory.

18. His Government was not against Western Sahara becoming part of Morocco. However, that or any other political outcome should be freely chosen by the people of Western Sahara without foreign interference, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, not imposed through an invasion such as that perpetrated during the Green March.

19. **Mr. Halfaoui** (Morocco) said it was regrettable that the representative of Algeria continued to raise the question of the Moroccan Sahara, muddling a number of

issues, ranging from respect for international law to the so-called invasion by Morocco. The Green March had been a peaceful march through which Morocco had recovered its Sahara region in 1975.

20. A delegation's request for a single report of a visiting mission could foster selectivity; it would be preferable to make available online all documents and reports produced by the Organization since its establishment. There was no relation between the Charter and the report in question, as the Algerian representative's dangerous comparison had suggested; nor had his delegation either questioned the Charter's validity on account of its date of adoption or dismissed it as outdated.

21. Various Security Council resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General called for neighbouring countries to make important contributions to the peace process. Given that the delegation of Algeria had interpreted that call as an invitation to drag the question of the Sahara into every debate, perhaps the Secretary-General should issue a more specific call for positive contributions.

22. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) said that the Green March had not been peaceful but instead had resulted in disappearances, torture, murder and the presence of refugees on Algerian soil since 1975. In the interests of promoting transparency and avoiding selectivity, Algeria was in favour of making all United Nations reports available online, including the report of the Special Committee's visiting mission to Western Sahara. After the later visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the region, the report produced by that agency had also been shelved. His Government's call for the reports to be disseminated was not new.

23. Algeria had always welcomed Security Council resolutions that called on neighbouring countries to make important contributions in their capacity as observer countries. The question of Western Sahara pitted two parties in clear conflict, namely, the Frente Polisario and Morocco, against one another. Algeria and Mauritania had always taken positive steps as observer countries. His country's contributions could only be considered positive as they were in support of the internationally recognized right to self-determination. As long as any Territory remained under foreign occupation, Algeria would continue to call for that right to be upheld and would ultimately join the international community in welcoming its exercise by the people of Western Sahara.

24. **Mr. Halfaoui** (Morocco) wondered whether the representative of Algeria was in any position to claim

that the Green March had not been peaceful. Had he been present at the March? Furthermore, the Moroccans held hostage in the Tindouf refugee camps, where they were deprived of freedom of expression and many other rights, could scarcely be referred to as refugees. With regard to the reports of the visiting missions sought by the delegation of Algeria, it would be necessary to ascertain whether the Department of Public Information had a mandate to undertake that task in addition to its many, more pressing duties.

25. Algeria could be described only as a party to the conflict, not a mere observer, as that country had created, trained and harboured the Frente Polisario. The concept of self-determination must neither be deployed as a political tool nor understood as being synonymous with independence. In recovering the Sahara, Morocco had restored its territorial integrity, not invaded a distant foreign land.

Draft resolution A: Information in the service of humanity (A/72/21 (chap. IV))

Draft resolution B: United Nations public information policies and activities (A/72/21 (chap. IV); A/C.4/72/L.9)

26. **The Chair** invited the Committee to take action on the draft resolutions before it under agenda item 57, noting that draft amendment [A/C.4/72/L.9](#) to draft resolution B had been withdrawn by its sponsor.

27. **Mr. Kendrick** (United States of America), speaking as the sponsor of the draft amendment to draft resolution B, said that the United States had chosen to withdraw its proposed amendment following further productive consultations with other Member States; his delegation would therefore join consensus on the resolution.

28. However, his delegation expressed its continued frustration with the persistent misreading of paragraph 24 by the Secretariat, specifically with regard to its budgetary implications. The language in paragraph 24 regarding the necessary capacity for the Department of Public Information was identical to the language used in the resolution adopted during the previous three sessions of the General Assembly. In his proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016–2017, the former Secretary-General had requested 29 additional posts for the Department, citing that language as justification; the General Assembly had approved none of those proposed resources. Then in 2017, the Secretary-General had submitted his proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 to the Fifth Committee for consideration, citing the same language (found in paragraph 23 of resolution [71/101](#))

as justification for 18 new posts in the Department. Although the General Assembly had already sent the message that the language in the resolution did not justify additional resources, the Committee was now faced with the same, albeit reduced, request for additional resources. His delegation reiterated that the language of paragraph 24 was not a justification for additional resources and must be read in conjunction with paragraph 23, which stipulated that the said capacities must be met from within existing resources.

29. The United States was committed to freedom of expression and the existence of a robust, free and independent press. Neither its statement nor the proposed amendment, now withdrawn, should be interpreted as negating its commitment to freedom of expression or retracting its support for a broadly inclusive, multicultural and multilingual United Nations. As a diverse multicultural country, the United States supported the activities of the Department as well as the recent General Assembly resolution [71/328](#) on multilingualism.

30. **The Chair** said that draft resolutions A and B contained no programme budget implications.

31. *Draft resolution A was adopted.*

32. *Draft resolution B was adopted.*

33. **Ms. Hunter** (Canada) said that her delegation welcomed the adoption by consensus of draft resolution B, which reflected the central role of the Department as the public voice of the United Nations. As a bilingual country, Canada actively promoted multilingualism and had been proud to sponsor General Assembly resolution [71/328](#) on multilingualism.

34. Her delegation noted that paragraph 23 in draft resolution B clearly called on the Secretary-General to work within existing resources without additional funds; paragraph 24 could not, therefore, be interpreted as incurring additional resource requirements.

35. **Mr. Kishimori** (Japan) said that his delegation was pleased to join the consensus on the draft resolution B and to note that a vote on paragraph 24 had been averted. The Committee could now resume exploring how best to advance United Nations public diplomacy based on mutual trust among the diverse stakeholders in the Committee on Information.

36. Although the proposed amendment to the draft resolution had been withdrawn, its intention of addressing an apparent misunderstanding regarding budgetary implications was both understandable and acceptable. It would be a severe oversight if the Secretariat continued to misread paragraph 24 as entailing additional resource

requirements under the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, despite the language of paragraph 23 calling on it to mainstream multilingualism in all its communication and information activities within existing resources in a cost-neutral manner.

37. **Mr. Ashby** (Australia) said that paragraph 23 did not entail any further budget implications or signal any significant expansion of regular budget resources, as it clearly called on the Department of Public Information to work within existing resources. His delegation looked forward to discussing the Department's financial requirements in the Fifth Committee.

38. **Mr. Lee Joo Il** (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation welcomed the adoption by consensus of draft resolution B. The Secretariat was responsible for mainstreaming multilingualism throughout all its communication and information activities; however, paragraph 23 clearly stipulated that such activities should be conducted within existing resources. Paragraph 24 could not be interpreted as entailing additional budgetary implications.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.