

**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.

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 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

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 a

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.

In connection with our 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.