



**Statement by Dr. Mariam Shaikh, Counselor,
For the General Debate of the Forty-Fifth Session of Committee
on Information (April 25, 2023)**

Honorable Chair,

At the outset, my delegation congratulates the honorable Chair Ambassador Aamir Khan, and Vice Chairs, for their election for the next term and look forward to the close cooperation during the committee's work.

Pakistan aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Group of 77 and China. In addition, I would like to deliver remarks in National Capacity.

My delegation thank Ms. Melissa Fleming, Under Secretary General of Global Communication for her comprehensive briefing and appreciates her efforts and for her skillful leadership in taking the message of the United Nations so well.

At the outset, Pakistan appreciates the activities carried out by the Department of Global Communications (DGC) in particular, the efforts to support the cause of multilingualism.

In this regard the launch of a United Nations website in Urdu, known as "UN Khabarnama" (United Nations Newsletter), which is now reaching millions of Urdu-speaking people worldwide deserve appreciation.

It is also heartening to note that the issue of Climate action remained a communications priority for the Department. The continued engagement of United Nations information centers and offices of the resident coordinator system in their coverage of Climate-related events, in particular the solidarity visit paid by the Secretary- General to Pakistan following the historic floods in that country deserve appreciation.

Honorable Chair,

The rapid pace of advances in new technologies particularly in digital technologies are having a major impact on the world, affecting all our work on human progress, sustainable development and international peace and security.

My delegation expresses deep concern over the central issue of growing inequalities that is negatively impacting information landscape and generating unequal access to the reliable, timely, trustworthy, and multilingual information.

Foremost in this regard is the issue of digital divide. Most of the poor around the world lack reliable and affordable internet access giving rise to digital divide, emerging as a new form of inequality between and among states.

According to the UN report, some 2.9 billion people still have never used the internet, and 96 per cent live in developing countries. Women are doubly disadvantaged, especially in the developing countries.

We believe that a Global Digital Compact can potentially serve as a universal and consensus global framework on digital issues in all its aspects, especially in addressing digital divide, enhancing connectivity, and supporting digital transformation.

Second, is the issue of unequal access to information due to lack of linguistic diversity.

Multilingualism remains a critical part of the UN's work and serves to promote inclusivity, diversity, greater transparency, and the effective participation of all – ensuring no one is left behind.

The Covid -19 pandemic has exposed the disturbing fact that due to limited English proficiency, the most affected population did not have access to outreach safety information adequately or on the assistance available to them in the language and format understood by them.

A report on recent Floods in Pakistan by Translators without borders also identified dangerous information gap due to disparity between use of English and non-English information creating a language barrier that increased risk to affected community.

The Department of Global Communications of the Secretariat must continue to enhance its capacity to provide multilingual information to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization.

Further, the United Nations Information Centers should extend the United Nations messages in multiple mediums, relevant formats, and

local languages of their respective regions especially in times of emergencies.

Then, the issue of deepened inequalities due to unequal access to information with persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable segments. Access to assistive technology is recognized as a human right in the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of the Child.

Recognizing the importance of Assistive Technology for inclusive development, Pakistan tabled the flagship resolution on assistive technology (WHA71.8) at the 2018 World Health Assembly aimed to create an inclusive society.

The COVID-19 pandemic and recurring natural disasters has deepened these pre-existing inequalities. Department of Global Communication must highlight the role of Assistive Technology, raise awareness, and ensure access for everyone at the international, regional, and national level and continue to promote the design, development, production, and distribution of accessible information so that these become accessible at minimum cost.

Fourth, Disinformation, misinformation, and mal information and other forms of false information especially online, are inciting social divisions and creating mistrust in public institution and widening the information gap, together with the growth of hate speech and propaganda about the growing phenomenon of Islamophobia and other forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, negative stereotyping, and stigmatization

Hate is a threat to everyone.

Combating it must be a collective effort.

We urge DGC to raise international awareness to promote the message of tolerance, peaceful co-existence and interfaith and cultural harmony among all religions, races, and nations. We also request the Secretariat, in particular the Department of Global Communications, to observe the “International day to Combat Islamophobia” in an appropriate manner.

Deliberately placed false information also has a potential to incite violence and create inequalities in access to reliable and trustworthy information especially to people of vulnerable groups in vulnerable situations such as natural disaster, conflicts, and where there is use of force or threat to use of force such as foreign occupation. The rise of social media makes it easier.

Disinformation in such situation can impede rescue and relief efforts, may likewise be directed against humanitarian organizations providing relief to beleaguered civilians, jeopardizing their operations, and sullyng their reputations.

Disinformation therefore has continued to pose the most serious threat to the information integrity especially on digital platforms. We agree greatly with the concerns expressed by Ms. Melissa Fleming that deliberately placed disinformation:

- a. hinder progress of SDGs.
- b. is creating doubts, delays necessary action in case of climate change.
- c. is causing people lose faith in election system,
- d. is leading to support for quake cures in the case of pandemic
- e. is eroding facts and supports in the case of wars
- f. is prolonging or exacerbating conflicts and fostering tensions that might lead to future wars
- g. and causing a disturbing impact on humanitarian, development, or peacekeeping operations, around the world.

My delegation notes with appreciation the consistent efforts by the Department of Global Communication to advocate the menace of fake news that threatens the U.N system.

Allow me to recall GA resolution 76/227 on Countering Disinformation for the promotion and protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, initiated by Pakistan.

Building on that, we should make a concerted effort, through cooperation, to minimize the negative impact of disinformation on human rights and relations between communities and States, by building firewalls against false information.

We must develop the digital tools to identify such malicious activities, to defend against them, and to neutralize them.

Pakistan would welcome the development of an intergovernmental formulated Code of conduct for Information integrity on Digital Platforms & Policy brief on public information.

The UN, through this Committee on Information, should open a comprehensive dialogue, led by Member States, and with the participation of the private sector, business enterprises, media and social media platforms and civil society stakeholders, to develop a coherent consensus on international cooperation in developing a strong code of conduct to combat disinformation.

Pakistan reaffirms its commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information, combating disinformation in all its manifestations, as well as upholding the principles of independence, pluralism, and diversity of the media.

I would like to reiterate my delegation's full support to the Department of Global Communications. We also assure you of our full cooperation during this Session of the Committee.

I thank you.