



Statement by Mr. A. Gopinathan, Deputy Permanent Representative
at the Committee on Information on April 20, 2005

Mr. Chairman,

We congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election. We look forward to a fruitful session of the Committee on Information this year under your leadership and guidance.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor for his informative statement at the beginning of the session, setting out Department of Public Information's road map for 2005. A transformed DPI is largely due to the efforts of his dynamism and drive and we should like to assure him and his team of our full support and cooperation in meeting the challenges that lie ahead.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by Jamaica on Monday on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Secretary-General for the reports presented for consideration of the Committee. We are broadly supportive of the recommendations contained therein. We would like to offer comments on some issues of particular interest to our delegation.

First, a word on the role of the Department of Public Information. As the voice of the United Nations, it has a critical function in the dissemination of information pertaining to UN's activities and programmes and in seeking to promote a positive public image of the United Nations. This task is rendered doubly challenging in the present context, given that the United Nations has, in the Secretary-General's own words, "been in the eye of a media storm in many parts of the world". The context of the revitalisation and reform of the United Nations promoted by the Secretary-General and the upcoming Millennium Review Summit have further added to this responsibility and challenge. And,

as the UN seeks to communicate, it must do so most effectively, particularly in the developing world, which has not benefited equally from the revolution in information and communication technology. DPI must always be mindful of the need to bridge this digital divide between the developed and developing countries. Given the enormous nature of the challenge, we are pleased to note that DPI has done well for itself. We are heartened that much positive work has been done in the past year, as indicated in paragraphs 5 to 13 of the Secretary-General's report A/AC.198/2005/2. We would encourage DPI to continue to build on this approach as it seeks to promote a positive public perception of the United Nations. We support the proposals of the Department for the observance, in September 2005, of the sixtieth anniversary of the Organisation.

DPI must maintain the focus on the thematic priorities identified in Paragraph 17 of the Secretary-General's report (A/AC.198/2005/2) in the areas of social and economic development, which are critical to the developing countries which constitute the vast majority of UN's membership. We particularly welcome, in this context, the efforts made by the Department to obtain coverage for the 2005 Mauritius International Meeting on the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing States (10-14 January 2005); to raise awareness of the second phase of the World Summit on Information Society (Tunis, 16-18 November 2005); and for the July 2004 and January 2005 sessions of the CEDAW and the exposure and focus on Africa, in keeping with the General Assembly's designation of Africa as a United Nations development priority.

Mr. Chairman,

The debate on the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) has been a major focus of discussions in this Committee ever since the Secretary-General introduced in 2002 reform proposals on their rationalisation and consolidation. We had then been informed that the process would consist of two parts: one, the establishment of a regional hub in Brussels followed by a similar exercise in other regions and two, the ploughing back of resources thus released into the operational and programmatic activities of the Centres. While the first part of the proposal went through, even though we are yet to receive a detailed report on the functioning of the regional hub in Brussels, the second part of the proposal has slipped totally. This undermines the Department's own assertion that the exercise of regionalisation was not targeted to economise, but to optimise the functioning of the network of information centres. Under the circumstances, we are left with little choice but to agree with the Secretary-General in paragraph 11 of his report (A/AC.195/2005/3) that large-scale regionalisation around the world will not be possible.

As for the recalibration or realignment of the rationalisation plan, we are supportive of the proposal that Governments provide rent-free or rent-subsidised premises. However, we wish to underline that any proposal for further rationalisation, which could include the closure of UNICs in the event of these conditions not being met, must necessarily be in consultation with the host countries, other countries served by these Information Centres as well as the regions involved, taking into account the distinct characteristics of each region. The importance of the UNICs in developing countries cannot be overstated where modern means of communications are not always available, and where these, as a consequence, strengthen the flow of information and assist greatly in addressing disparities faced by developing countries in access to information and information technology.

We continue to be impressed by the progress of the United Nations website which is a primary source of information about the Organisation and its activities, and continued to be relied upon by most delegations. We would reiterate, however, that the modern must not be at the cost of the traditional, especially true for the developing countries, where the vast majority still continues to be dependent on traditional means of communications such as the radio and the print media. The balance that the DPI has hitherto managed between the new and the old must continue to be maintained.

As regards the print products of DPI, we remain convinced of the value of their contribution in promoting awareness of the role and work of the United Nations. The same applies to the outreach services. We share the emphasis on outreach to civil society and NGOs as one way of promoting UN activities at the people's level by helping improve access to information by all nations and peoples. We welcome, in particular, the orientation of the *UN Chronicle*, both print and on-line editions, towards educational outreach, and would encourage its greater involvement with civil society organisations and institutions of higher learning.

On the relationship between DPI and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, we would continue to urge that the two Departments work in closer tandem, with the objective to raise awareness about United Nations peacekeeping, particularly relevant given the present surge, as also to project more successfully the achievements of peacekeepers, both in the developed and developing world. While there is a definite paucity of such information in the first instance, in the case of the latter, such publicity could also serve as an incentive to those countries to continue to contribute to UN peacekeeping. We are appreciative of the efforts undertaken by the Department in the case of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti and look forward to an equally pro-active approach by DPI and continued DPI-DPKO collaboration in the United Nations Missions in the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased to note that the reorientation exercise launched within the Department in 2002 is now complete and a transformed DPI with a sharper focus, with the target audiences defined and the tools well in place, is serving the rest of the UN system well. We shall endeavour through this Committee to ensure that the DPI is made stronger and more effective as it attempts to spread the message of the United Nations in all parts of the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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