

**STATEMENT ON INFORMATION
23RD SESSION OF THE
COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
MAY 2, 2001**

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the fourteen Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) represented in this Committee, I extend sincere congratulations to you and the members of the Bureau on your election. We are confident that under your skillful guidance, the Committee's proceedings will be successful.

The members of CARICOM wish to congratulate the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, and the staff of the Department, for the timely submission of the Reports before the Committee for its consideration. We must commend the DPI for the excellent quality of the reports received, as this will assist the Committee in carrying out its mandate.

Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Kensaku Hogen, immediate past Head of the DPI for this able leadership of the Department of Information.

CARICOM fully associates itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 but would like to make some comments on some aspects which are of importance to us as a region.

Mr. Chairman,

It is undeniable that the goal of closing the "digital divide" or the information gap between industrialised and developing countries is still elusive. We all agree that the internet and information technology are very powerful tools for the dissemination of information critical to promoting development. Sadly, the developing world trails behind on the superhighway and our people run the risk of being

marginalized. Indeed, current data show that less than one percent of the populations of Africa and the Middle East have access to the internet.

It is in this regard that we are heartened to hear of the initiatives taken by UNESCO, to promote community based projects aimed at promoting universal access to information, as well as to new information and communication technologies. We fully concur with the view expressed by the UNESCO Representative that "building access is not just a matter of connectivity. It also involves enhancing the body of information in the public domain, where it is available to all." These initiatives need to be linked with other sustainable development network programmes developed by UNDP - such as SIDSNET, which links small island states around the world. For us in the Caribbean, SIDSNET has proven to be extremely useful in exchanging information and ideas on our unique developmental status.

Mr. Chairman,

We join others in expressing appreciation to the Secretary General for his initiative in creating an information and communication technologies (ICTY) task force aimed at bridging the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

Similarly, we are encouraged by the reports of the Secretary General and the medium Term Plan for 2000- 2005 which continue to place emphasis on the need to promote the United Nations as an "indispensable common house for the entire human family". We emphasise the importance of garnering public support for the Organisation and in this connection, welcome the recently launched "UN Works" website. We see this as a positive medium, through which people around the world can learn that the United Nations is working to solve the problems of the twenty-first century, in particular those relating to economic and social development.

We specially commend the DPI for its continued airing of programmes about the United Nations on Channel 78 (UNTV), in

New York, and we would wish the Department to explore how these programmes can receive worldwide coverage.

UN PILOT PROJECT

CARICOM continues to appreciate the untiring efforts of the DPI to develop the capacity of international radio broadcasting through the launching of the radio pilot project last year August. The Caribbean region has over the past months benefited from the broadcasts of the 15-minute daily news package, and would welcome the continuation of this project on a more permanent basis.

We must, however, continue to call on the DPI, to fulfil its obligations under resolution 38/82 B of December 15, 1983 to introduce radio programming in Creole for the Haitian public.

TELEVISION AND RADIO

We note that the Department is in the process of retooling its production and delivery capacities, through *inter alia*, the overhauling of the radio and TV broadcast facilities. While we welcome technological advances, we are also mindful of the fact that the vast populations in developing countries, presumably among the target audiences of the DPI, depend largely on the traditional means i.e. radio.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND PEACEKEEPING

Mr. Chairman,

Our delegations attach great importance to the role of public information in peacekeeping operations. As was clearly articulated in the Report of the Expert Panel on Peace Operations, "The Brahimi Report", public information remains critical in the education and sensitisation of the public especially in conflict torn regions about the role of the United Nations. Effective public information and communications capacity in mission areas an operational necessity for the success of peacekeeping operations and in this regard, we fully endorse the view that every peace operation should formulate

public information campaigns in the mission areas on different aspects of the mission's mandate in particular, its purposes, scope and objectives.

It is also necessary that an effective public information programme for generating international public support for the UN peace operations be mounted. Experience has shown that the importance of radio programming in peacekeeping operations can be an indispensable tool of communication. We make specific reference to Radio UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone and MONUC in the DRC. In the case of Sierra Leone where a revised concept of operation is being undertaken to further deploy UNAMSIL within Sierra Leone, the importance of sensitising the Sierra Leonean population of the expectations of the UN should be a priority. These discussions should aptly take place before the Security Council adopts resolutions, so that the information component can be fully integrated in the mandate of the Mission and prepare the population for an incoming peacekeeping operation.

We therefore take note of the proposals to enhance the DPI's capacity in this area and look forward to further details on the implications of such a proposal on the Department. CARICOM delegations believe that there is also need for a closer working relationship between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the DPI. It is also imperative that the DPI seeks to integrate programmes with others of the UN system under the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) or the Resident Coordinator.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND SPECIAL SESSIONS

Mr. Chairman,

Our delegations wish to commend the Department for the sterling efforts to promote upcoming Conferences and Special Sessions including those HIV/AIDS, Children and Small Arms, which are of particular interest to our region. Our delegations also support the work done by DPI in promoting the Decade for the Culture of Peace, and Non-violence for Children and fully

subscribe to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh in this regard.

Next year the Rio+10 and Financing for Development Conferences pose special challenges to the DPI in generating the required understanding of support for the UN Sustainable Development Programmes. We also believe that next year which marks the twentieth year of the signing of the groundbreaking UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in Montego Bay, Jamaica is an occasion which should not go unnoticed. We therefore urge the Department to collaborate with the relevant departments in promoting this event. The Department could also begin liaising with commercial stations such as Discovery Channel and CNN to effectively sensitise the public at large about the importance of the Law of the Sea.

MEDIA OUTREACH

Mr. Chairman,

Our delegations concur that the ability of the United Nations to communicate its message and relevance to audiences around the globe depends to a large extent on how well it projects its operations to the media. We are heartened that the information flow from the UN to journalists is beginning to increase substantially and that technological advances have been made in disseminating timely news to journalists worldwide. In our region, the Caribbean continues to underscore the importance of maintaining close contacts and developing partnerships with journalists in the region, through whom the message of the United Nations can be propagated to the public at large.

We commend in this regard the training programmes offered by the Department especially to developing countries. It would be useful if training were extended in corporation with UNITAR to members of the Permanent Missions in New York.

DAG HAMMARSKJOLD Library

CARICOM delegations fully support the initiatives of the Department in enhancing the presence of the Library on the internet. Our delegations are fully satisfied with the remarkable service rendered by the Library and look forward to future developments.

UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTERS (UNIC)

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM continues to underscore the importance of the United Nations Information Centres to our region. We fully agree that the role of the UNIC at the grass root levels is important in shaping public opinion of the UN and what is perceived as the relevance of the United Nations to the society as a whole. We therefore look forward to the enhanced information component in the UNDP Multi-island Office in Kingston, Jamaica, which would augment the UNIC Office in Trinidad and Tobago, which currently serves the entire region.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, CARICOM delegations wish to encourage the DPI in its endeavour of retooling and restructuring to meet the information needs of the changing societies and wish to commend the Interim Head for the steps taken so far towards promoting dynamism and influencing world opinion.