

STATEMENT BY MR. KIYO AKASAKA
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FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRTY-FIRST SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
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Trusteeship Council Chamber

Monsieur le Président,
Délégués distingués,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est pour moi un grand plaisir de prendre part à la 35^e session du Comité de l'information. Je félicite l'Ambassadeur Pedro Monteiro Lima pour son élection à la présidence du Comité pour 2009-2010. Je suis convaincu que l'Ambassadeur Lima, qui est un diplomate chevronné possédant une vaste expérience dans le domaine de la diplomatie multilatérale, pourra guider le Département de l'information (DPI) dans sa mission visant à renforcer la compréhension des objectifs et des réalisations des Nations Unies à travers l'utilisation efficace de l'information. Je félicite également les autres membres du Bureau pour leur élection. Je me réjouis de la perspective de travailler en étroite coopération avec le Président et les autres membres du Bureau.

En tant qu'organe subsidiaire de l'Assemblée générale chargé de superviser les travaux du DPI, le Comité de l'information joue un rôle important dans la manière dont nous déployons nos efforts. Au cours des 30 dernières années, la coopération entre États Membres et le Département s'est transformée en un partenariat actif et productif. Au nom de mon Département et de mon personnel, je tiens à vous exprimer ma reconnaissance pour la contribution positive du Comité et mon appréciation pour son soutien constant.

La session annuelle du Comité est une opportunité de faire connaître nos réalisations, de souligner les défis auxquels nous faisons face et de discuter conjointement de nos projets d'avenir. Lors du débat général et dans le projet de résolution sur les questions relatives à l'information, nous nous tournons vers les États Membres pour qu'ils nous indiquent la marche à suivre en matière de politiques et d'activités de communication et d'information. Votre avis et votre expertise sont plus que jamais importants dans un environnement qui ne cesse d'évoluer.

Plus tard dans la journée, mes collègues se joindront à moi dans cette salle pour engager un dialogue interactif sur les nouvelles initiatives prises par le Département. J'espère vous voir à cette occasion pour un échange ouvert et franc.

Mr. Chairman,

The General Assembly, in its resolutions 63/100 A and B, requested the Secretary-General to report to the thirty-first session of the Committee on Information on the activities of the Department and on the implementation of its recommendations on questions relating to public information. Through consultations with the Bureau of the Committee, it was decided that the information requested in the above resolution would be grouped into the three reports listed in your agenda (A/AC.198/2009/1). In presenting these reports, we have tried to provide a clear picture of a Department that has made significant strides, both in terms of widening its outreach and improving its performance.

Four clear trends have emerged.

First, complex issues require proactive and strategic approaches. DPI's adoption of a strategic approach has had a meaningful impact on what we do and how we do it. Guided by the decisions of Member States and the vision of the Secretary-General, our communications priorities for this year centre on the UN development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, peace and security in a number of conflict zones, human rights, climate

change, and disarmament and non-proliferation. The financial and economic crisis, including the promotion of the General Assembly high-level conference on this subject in June, has been added to our list of priorities. The Department identified Africa as a regional focus, and youth as a strategic audience. This strategic approach has involved the following elements: advance planning; new partners; clear organization and coordination; responsible use of resources; and impact assessments.

Second, we continue to pay close attention to providing timely, accurate, impartial, comprehensive, relevant and coherent information about the United Nations and its multifaceted aims and objectives. This is a challenging task, at a time when the media and general public demand quick and clear sound bites, but where our role is to inform the public about a complex array of issues – from the balance between peace and justice, to the nature of different conflicts, to the rights and responsibilities of individuals and States.

I would like to refer to one example that is a matter of concern to all of you. The Secretary-General met with the General Assembly this morning on the current state of play of the A (H1N1) influenza outbreak. The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised its alert level to Phase 5. Phase 5 means the pandemic is imminent. That means that any day – this week or next – it is possible that WHO will announce Phase 6. But as the Secretary-General said to Member States this morning, even if WHO does declare Phase 6 – a pandemic – that would be a statement about the geographic spread of the virus, not its severity. This message has to be clearly understood. I call upon all Member States to work with us to ensure that the current state of play of the influenza outbreak and the possible declaration of Phase 6 is clearly understood so that people do not panic. This is a challenge to the Committee and to our Department. This is also my plea to all Member States to work together so that UN messages, and those of our UN partners like the WHO, are understood clearly and accurately by the general public.

Third, information and communication technologies have dramatically changed our world. We have seen the speed with which information travels around the globe – whether on the current economic crisis – or on today's A (H1N1) influenza outbreak. Here, I would just note that DPI is playing a key role in linking UN System communicators and ensuring coordinated

communications on this outbreak to the general public and the media, through the UN Communications Group platform. We are also playing an important role in communicating to UN staff, and to Member States.

The availability of instant information has required the Department to enhance its capacity to deliver UN public information effectively and efficiently. We must do the right thing – to be effective, and also do the thing right – to be efficient. By maximizing the use of the Internet and by putting it to creative uses, including for radio and television, DPI is now able to reach a much wider audience, as well as targeted groups, like students and young adults. For example, DPI's new multimedia page is showing noticeable growth in the number of registrations from college radio stations and similar outlets.

Fourth, through more evaluation, we are learning lessons that allow us to better design and sharpen our communications strategies and the way that we reach and engage the world's publics. These evaluations, with their measurable data, are also helping us to improve our internal systems and procedures. One example of a recent evaluation is of the High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals and the General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs last September. The main findings of that assessment are referred to in the report on strategic communications services. We have undertaken similar evaluations of other UN communications priorities, including on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

One of the areas where DPI's strategic approach has shown results is the Millennium Development Goals. The High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals and the High-level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs -- and three major UN reports on the MDGs -- provided us with a framework around which to build our communications strategy. Our coordinated key messages emphasized the need for Member States to meet their commitments to achieve the MDGs -- in spite of ongoing, as well as new, challenges -- rising food prices, climate

change and the unfolding financial crisis. Crucial support to the campaign was provided by the network of UN information centres, which organized numerous events in cities around the world.

Our information centres also played an important role in the 2008 Stand Up and Take Action Against Poverty and for the Millennium Development Goals campaign. That citizens' campaign was a stunning success, with more than 116 million people – almost 2% of the world population – taking part in events across 131 countries. This was thanks to the efforts of Member States, information centres, the UN family, NGOs and the general public, and demonstrates the extent to which public support for the MDGs has been mobilized.

Similarly, as the chair of a UN system-wide task force on climate change, DPI has also been able to present coordinated key messages to the general public as well as to policy and opinion makers. This effective example of the UN system's joint effort is now geared to achieving success at the Secretary-General's high-level event on climate change on 22 September, and at the Copenhagen negotiations in December, under the common UN slogan: "Seal the deal." Please remember this slogan – "Seal the deal". You will hear it from the Secretary-General, UN Radio and the Department at large. We are going to campaign on this important issue between now and Copenhagen. Tell your friends and Governments to "Seal the deal!"

Africa's development, especially NEPAD, continues to be a priority for DPI's communications and media outreach. Through our participation in the advocacy and communications cluster of the ECA-led regional coordination mechanism for NEPAD, DPI highlights the activities of UN agencies and programmes in support of NEPAD. DPI's magazine, *Africa Renewal/Afrique Renouveau*, is now reaching an ever larger global audience. Its short feature articles are published regularly in many African countries and increasingly in other parts of the world. Last year, 63 different articles were published a total of 578 times in 205 separate media outlets in 48 countries.

As part of its efforts to meet increased public interest in United Nations peacekeeping, the Department continues to produce and disseminate a range of products. The Department also

provides strategic guidance and operational support to the public information components of United Nations peace operations and facilitates media relations for senior peacekeeping officials. Over the past year, we have focused on providing more timely and comprehensive information to both our media audience and the general public. Our regularly updated fact sheets on the situations in Somalia and Darfur and our up-to-date websites on all UN peacekeeping operations are examples of this effort.

DPI has also taken the lead in bringing to the attention of the Organization the importance of media and communications as a cornerstone of governance in peacebuilding. A concrete example of how the UN can help in establishing a dynamic public sphere in a peacebuilding context has been DPI's collaboration with other UN actors to support the establishment of an independent national public service broadcaster in Sierra Leone, on which legislation is now pending. The public service broadcaster would be based on assets and programming from the UN radio station, which was to close with the departure of the former peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, and from Sierra Leone's own state broadcaster. If the new and independent broadcasting authority is established, this will be a first for UN peacebuilding in Africa.

Another important focus for my Department is the implementation of its Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine. In this regard, I am pleased to inform the Committee that the Government of Brazil has agreed to host the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in Rio de Janeiro on 27-28 July. This will be the first time this seminar will take place in Latin America, which we very much welcome. I take this opportunity to thank the Government of Brazil for its kind offer and we look forward to our collaboration for a successful seminar.

DPI also leads the Outreach Programmes on the United Nations and the Holocaust, and the United Nations and Rwanda. The Department organized the fourth annual observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust in January. And last month, on the occasion of the 15th commemoration of the Rwanda genocide, DPI organized a solemn ceremony at Headquarters. Both outreach programmes have an important

educational focus and a range of tools and activities to inform and engage students, institutions, and the global general public on the dangers of hatred and bigotry.

As many of you know, the Department also organized a series of events in March as part of its outreach programme established in 2008 in response to the General Assembly resolution on the permanent memorial to and remembrance of victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. We look forward to working with all Member States, in particular from the Caribbean Community and the African Union, as well as with new partners, on this programme. We will also help to draw attention to the permanent memorial, an important initiative of Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to raise an issue that I believe is of interest to this Committee, and one that has required the Department to rethink how we communicate our message to the global public. That is the issue of the changing media landscape – and the shrinking newsroom. The media in many parts of the world have been hit by the financial and economic crisis and by the many new ways of getting and sending information. Consider the following:

A report released last year by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism shows that here in the United States the subject that is losing space in the greatest number of newspapers is foreign news. International affairs tops the list of topics getting fewer reporting resources. The Pew Center also reports that “nearly one out of every five journalists working for newspapers in 2001 is now gone, and 2009 may be the worst year yet.”

Furthermore, according to Pew, audiences now “hunt and gather what they want when they want it”. This “on demand” news culture has seen only two platforms clearly grow: the internet and cable television. And while traditional forms of journalism still have value, network television, radio news, and news magazines have all been faced with cuts.

The European Parliament and the United States Senate have been called upon to examine the situation, with concerns being cited for democracy and plurality of opinion.

The Department is acutely aware of this situation and is responding in different ways, including by balancing our use of traditional means of communication and new media, and by making news products more responsive to users' demands. But this is an issue that Member States -- and this Committee -- may also wish to consider closely in guiding future UN communications and public information policy.

For our part, in the past few months, UN Radio has added more than 20 new partner stations that will be airing its programmes in a wide array of countries, from Ecuador and Brazil to Mozambique and Comoros. Similarly, UN Television has been able to expand the network of broadcasters taking its material. The latest additions include RTR, Turkey's national public broadcaster, as well as Arirang TV of the Republic of Korea.

DPI also continues to expand its strategic use of the Internet and new media as a vital tool for promotion and distribution. By offering broadcasters free downloads of the UNifeed video news service, the Department has been able to reach television companies that were not able to subscribe to a satellite news service. This has allowed us to add new clients in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Africa and in parts of Asia. Hundreds of broadcasters use UNifeed video to create their own stories about the UN.

DPI is also using cost-effective social networking tools to reach a broader audience. There is now a United Nations channel on YouTube, where we continuously update UN videos. We are also running an experiment on the photo-sharing site Flickr and exploring other opportunities presented by such sites as Facebook, Orkut and Twitter.

Many of you may have already had a chance to see the newly redesigned home page of the UN website, un.org. This afternoon, at the interactive dialogue, we plan to demonstrate the site. Over the past year, the Department has also pursued a broader goal of improving overall Internet governance throughout the Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to briefly point out some examples of our new integrated approach to our outreach mandate, which I believe has strengthened our capacity to identify and develop new projects and alliances to serve the Organization and its Member States.

Two such projects have been initiated at the specific direction of the Secretary-General. The first is the Creative Community Outreach Initiative, in which we partner with the creative community to achieve our mutual goal of promoting peace and raising awareness of critical global issues. As part of this initiative, DPI has recently worked with the producers, writers and casts of two popular television series, *Law and Order*, and *Battlestar Galactica*. Both shows have helped in multiplying knowledge about key UN issues of human rights, child protection and reconciliation. It is our hope that this promising beginning with United States-based programmes will spur a truly global interest in such partnerships.

The second is the “Academic Impact initiative,” which seeks to bring institutions of higher education into a more coherent relationship with the United Nations, and with each other. The aim, again, is to jointly address issues with which the Organization is seized, and where scholarship, research and innovative learning can be vital inputs to finding solutions.

And as part of our proactive approach to helping facilitate the work of Member States, we have developed *deleGATE: iSeek for Member States*. This portal (www.un.int) is the result of a collaborative effort between Member States, through the Working Group on Informatics, and the Secretariat. It provides a consolidated and centralized website linking to essential tools and information resources for delegates at UN Headquarters. The site provides access to content from the Secretariat’s intranet, iSeek, on a cost-neutral basis in response to the wish reflected in General Assembly Resolution 61/266. *deleGATE* is meant to represent an “open channel” of communication between the Secretariat and Member States and will be particularly important during times of potential uncertainties and dislocation, such as the Capital Master Plan, as well as the current A (H1N1) influenza outbreak.

I should also mention my appreciation for the guidance provided by delegations to our proposal to transform the *UN Chronicle* into a more substantive and thoughtful journal. In addition to the details on this project contained in the report and its annex, a non-paper has also been provided which responds to requests by Member States in greater detail.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to draw your attention to another matter of concern to my Department -- that of the steadily rising operating costs of our information centres. Simply put, these costs are outpacing the budgetary allocations we receive.

I would like to express my gratitude for the generous contributions the Department receives from many Member States, particularly where UN information centres are concerned. At the same time, I appeal to those Member States that host UNICs, and where the centres are located in premises for which they pay rent, to consider the possibility of either providing the UNIC with rent-free premises or subsidizing a portion of the rent.

The voluntary support that Member States provide in connection with the work of UN information centres is invaluable to us and can significantly enhance the ability of these offices to engage in meaningful outreach activities at the national level, including by producing information materials in local languages.

Without your help, the extent of these activities is limited. I will personally be following up on this matter with concerned Member States soon, and look forward to working together with you to strengthen the role and work of our information centres.

Although the UNICs have helped to communicate to millions of people through the production of materials and the organization of events in local languages, the Department recognizes the need to continue to make strides towards language parity in the official languages of the Organization. While overall progress has been achieved, the growth of English language

content on our website has outpaced that of the site's language versions. Although the Department is doing its utmost to eliminate the disparities between English and the five other official languages, particularly on the UN website, it is facing a steep challenge -- resources. Neither DPI nor the content-providing offices have sufficient resources for the massive amounts of translations needed to make the site fully multilingual.

Enfin, j'aimerais souligner à nouveau que le Plan-cadre d'équipement pose des défis majeurs en termes d'opérations quotidiennes, en particulier pour celles qui se rapportent à l'information et aux médias. Nous avons fait une planification intensive pour garantir un niveau adéquat de services de radio et de télédiffusion pendant la rénovation, ainsi qu'une transition sans heurts vers le nouveau système multimédia entièrement numérisé à notre retour au Secrétariat. Toutefois, compte tenu de la complexité de nos opérations Web et multimédias, un service ininterrompu et constant exigera à la fois une vigilance et un soutien continu de toutes les parties concernées.

Une attention particulière a aussi été portée à la préservation, tout au long du Plan-cadre d'équipement, de l'héritage audiovisuel des Nations Unies pour les générations futures.

Monsieur le Président,

Mon Département considère que son premier rôle est de raconter les Nations Unies et de connecter l'Organisation à différents partenaires et publics. Raconter les Nations Unies c'est aussi raconter votre travail, ce lui des 192 États Membres de l'Organisation. Nous comptons sur vous pour soutenir le Département – et sur vos propres efforts, dans vos propres pays, pour faire connaître auprès des médias et du public notre agenda commun.

Merci.