

**AS DELIVERED**

**CLOSING REMARKS BY  
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**AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE 31<sup>st</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION**

**THURSDAY, 7 MAY 2009  
TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER**

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee as you conclude your general debate for this 31<sup>st</sup> session. I thank all the delegations for their kind words addressed to me and to the Department of Public Information and its staff. I appreciate the support that you have provided to me as head of the Department.

The many positive comments and encouraging statements that I have heard during this general debate are very gratifying. I was also very pleased to hear many Member States refer to our “mantra” and mission: the need for timely, accurate, impartial, comprehensive, relevant and coherent information. The confidence that many of you have expressed in the Department encourages us to build on our achievements and to continue to find ways to improve our impact and performance.

I would now like to respond to some of the specific questions and comments that have been raised over the course of the Committee’s general debate. If, at the conclusion of my remarks, you feel that your questions and concerns have not been fully addressed, please feel free to contact me or my senior colleagues at any time.

Many delegations have welcomed the strategic approach that the Department has adopted in its work. This approach has seen the closer integration of its field offices with Headquarters, a focus on communications priority themes, and our ability to quickly mobilize and adapt to developing and new issues, like the global financial and economic crisis, and the A (H1N1) influenza outbreak.

On the influenza outbreak, for example, DPI is working closely with WHO and a UN Communication Group task force to help maintain communication coherence and message discipline during this period of widespread and intense media and public attention on the outbreak.

In Mexico, our Information Centre is working with UN agencies and other Information Centres in the region, under the guidance of WHO messaging and information. It is providing

up-to-date information to key Spanish-speaking audiences, including through a website that provides crucial information and sources to journalists and the general public.

With regard to the global economic crisis, we have drawn attention to and generated media coverage for several events and reports that focus on the impact and consequences of the economic situation. In addition, DPI is working closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to provide full communications support for the United Nations Conference at the Highest Level on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development, to be held 1-3 June. A website and press kit are being produced in the six official languages, and a number of regional press events are being organized later this month.

I would like to thank the distinguished delegate of Bangladesh for drawing our attention to the impact of climate change on developing countries. My Department has and will continue to address this issue in a number of ways. UN TV, for example, has produced video programmes that illustrate how climate change is affecting peoples in different countries like Bangladesh, Jordan and Kenya. In addition, we are working within the UN Communication Group to revamp the UN Climate Change Gateway website. We are also working on a site to promote the “Seal the Deal” campaign that will highlight the effects of climate change throughout the world.

Mr. Chairman,

I take note with appreciation the comments made by many delegations on the Department’s efforts to broaden and modernize the ways in which we communicate the United Nations’ priorities, including through new media. While we will continue to explore creative ways to inform and engage different audiences, I assure you that it will not be at the expense of traditional media which continues to be of importance in much of the developing world. This point has been raised strongly by the Republic of Korea, and the Ambassador of Burkina Faso.

DPI will continue to work to improve the quality, scope and format of its radio and TV programming while continuously assessing feedback from its partner stations to ensure that we meet the needs of our clients. At the same time, DPI makes every effort to expand the network of partner broadcasters in different parts of the world. It also uses the latest advances in technology to develop the most effective means of distribution -- the success of Unifeed is a prime example.

I thank the distinguished delegate from Syria for his kind remarks in support of DPI’s work to strengthen the UN website. My Department will continue to exert every effort, within existing resources, to achieve parity between all the official languages. As the delegate from Syria knows, we have already taken significant steps to improve the Arabic page on the website and this is a work in progress.

I would also like to reassure the distinguished delegate from Syria that the issues of Palestine and Iraq will continue to have prominence on the UN website. Currently, the link to the information on the “Situation in the Middle East,” including the question of Palestine, is featured on the front page. And the link to Iraq is just one click away from the *Peace and Security* button on the front page.

De nombreux orateurs ont discuté de l’importance de réaliser la parité linguistique dans les activités du Département, en particulier sur le site Web des Nations Unies. Comme je l’ai

souligné auparavant, le multilinguisme est l'une des pierres angulaires de notre travail pour assurer la présence des Nations Unies sur l'Internet. Toutefois, il y a plusieurs points importants que j'aimerais souligner à cet égard. Tout d'abord, le contenu du site n'émane pas entièrement – ou n'est pas produit – par le DPI. Une partie importante est postée par divers départements et autres bureaux chargés de fournir du contenu. La plupart d'entre eux ne disposent pas des ressources suffisantes pour reproduire et poster ce contenu dans toutes les langues officielles, bien que nous fassions de notre mieux pour les encourager à œuvrer en faveur de la parité linguistique.

Notre Département fait face à des contraintes similaires, en particulier lorsque que nous essayons d'établir un équilibre judicieux dans la répartition des ressources entre tous les programmes entrepris. Pour faire face à ces défis, nous avons exploré des moyens innovants pour réaliser la parité linguistique, notamment en établissant des arrangements pro bono avec des universités.

Alors que la question du multilinguisme sur le site Web demeure vitale pour nous, je suis très heureux d'apprendre que certains distingués délégués ont appelé à allouer des ressources supplémentaires pour assurer la pleine parité entre les langues et surmonter le fossé entre les différents sites Internet dans les six langues officielles de l'Organisation. Nous avons certainement besoin de votre soutien dans cette entreprise.

Monsieur le Président,

S'agissant de la Journée internationale de la langue maternelle, 2009 a marqué la fin de l'Année internationale des langues, observée en 2008. À ce titre, elle a couvert une année d'activités des Nations Unies pour promouvoir la diversité linguistique et culturelle et le multilinguisme. En ma capacité de Coordonnateur du multilinguisme, j'ai adressé un message à cette occasion. En outre, les centres d'information des Nations Unies, y compris ceux qui se trouvent au Bangladesh, au Mexique et au Kazakhstan, ont organisé des programmes pour marquer cette Journée et des activités au Siège des Nations Unies ont été couvertes par des articles disponibles sur I-see et deGate. Le Département attire aussi l'attention sur la Journée internationale de la langue maternelle en usant de ses différentes ressources multimédias, comme le Centre des nouvelles de l'ONU et les programmes de la radio des Nations Unies, qui touchent directement des publics du monde entier. À travers ces activités, le DPI continue de souligner l'importance des langues, qui forment le lien entre les individus d'une société multilingue.

J'ai également pris note du fait qu'un certain nombre d'orateurs avaient fait référence à l'importance du dialogue interculturel et interreligieux et demandé au Département de l'information publique de jouer un rôle plus vigoureux dans la promotion du dialogue entre les civilisations.

Comme vous le savez, il y a quelques années, le Département avait lancé une série de séminaires intitulés « Désapprendre l'intolérance » afin d'examiner les différentes manifestations de l'intolérance et promouvoir le respect et la compréhension entre les peuples. Ces événements offrent l'occasion de discuter des moyens de désapprendre l'intolérance à travers l'éducation, l'intégration et des exemples positifs. Le prochain séminaire de cette série -qui devrait se tenir cette année en juin- aura pour thème « La haine sur Internet : danger dans le cyberspace », a

pour objectif de traiter de la question des discours encourageant la haine sur Internet, en particulier à la lumière de leur impact sur les jeunes dans le monde.

Le Département continue également à fournir un soutien au travail du Secrétariat de l'Alliance des civilisations. Il fournit par exemple des directives stratégiques sur le développement du Mécanisme de réponse et de réaction rapide, un annuaire des experts sur les questions interculturelles vers lesquels les médias peuvent se tourner en temps de crises internationales, ainsi que du Centre d'échanges de l'Alliance des civilisations, un outil éducatif en ligne sur les multiples questions visant à améliorer la compréhension transculturelle.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of my Department, I would like to thank the many delegates who have spoken positively about the work of our Information Centres and the need to ensure that they are provided adequate resources. This point was made by, among others, the distinguished representative of Sudan, on behalf of the G77 and China, who urged that all possible measures be taken to strengthen UNICs. I would again like to thank those Member States who continue to provide support to the Information Centres, either through rent-free premises or voluntary contributions. I hope that others will be inclined to follow suit.

I would also like to give particular thanks to the distinguished representative of Brazil for encouraging all States that host UNICs, and that are in a position to do so, to consider offering rent-free and maintenance-free premises for their operations. This would allow DPI to concentrate its limited resources on outreach and public information activities, as well as on strengthening the UNIC network.

In response to concerns raised by the G77 and China, I would like to reaffirm that any future decision regarding a reorganization of UNICs would be made in close consultation with the host countries, taking into account the geographical, linguistic and technological characteristics and needs of the different regions.

In this regard, allow me to address the proposal to establish an Information Centre in Angola, a subject raised by both the representatives of Brazil and Cape Verde. As I have said, the resources available to the UNIC network and, indeed, to the Department as a whole, have been limited. As much as we appreciate the generous offer on the part of the Government of Angola to provide rent- and maintenance-free premises for a Centre, we simply lack the posts and operating funds to be able to establish a Centre in Luanda to serve the needs of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

Moreover, in the present budgetary climate, the Department was not in a position to request an increase in its budget of the magnitude required to establish and operate such a Centre, either for the current biennium or to include it in its submission for the 2010-2011 biennium. Without the provision of the additional posts and financial resources required, the creation and staffing of such an office would not be possible.

However, we will continue to be guided by the Committee on Information on this matter and stand ready to provide whatever assistance or information may be needed.

Mr. Chairman,

In response to the statement by the distinguished delegate from Senegal, I should like to express DPI's appreciation for the support and, indeed, the excellent premises provided by the Government of Senegal for the UN Information Centre in Dakar. Indeed, in February this year I visited the UNIC and I was very impressed by the premises provided by the Government of Senegal. I encourage every one of you to visit the UNIC premises, which provides us with the opportunity and the facilities to do our work.

However, as for expanding the Centre, this is not possible within the Department's current or projected financial and human resources. DPI would nonetheless welcome the opportunity to enhance the reach of the Centre, should additional funds for increased operating costs as well as additional posts be provided.

The distinguished delegate from Bangladesh noted that the Information Centre in Dhaka has not had a Director for more than 25 years. Unfortunately, as the Department has had to reduce the number of posts over time and is likely to have to continue to do so in the face of budgetary limitations, this Centre and many others no longer have DPI Directors heading them. In such instances, we fully recognize and applaud the excellent job being done by the national staff of the Information Centre to reach out to the public and promote the work of the UN.

With regard to concerns expressed by the distinguished delegate from Yemen on filling the post of the Director of UNIC Sana'a, my Department regrets that the selection process has taken so long. In the light of the fact that none of the recommended candidates was able to be confirmed in the position, we have been obliged now to begin the process anew by re-advertising the post.

In our evaluation of the new pool of candidates who apply for the post, we will take into account their knowledge of the region, its culture and language, their expertise in information, including information and communications technology, their knowledge of and contacts among the media, and their management skills. Indeed, these are factors we take into account in the selection of any UNIC Director.

Mr. Chairman,

I have noted that the delegate of Israel referred to our programme on Palestine and called for a new resolution to mandate future activities. We know that the current resolution has not been a consensus resolution supported by all countries concerned. Because of the lack of consensus, our Department has had difficulties in ensuring well-balanced participation from both Israeli and Palestinian sides, despite the fact that the media seminar has been appreciated greatly by participants of both sides at the end of each seminar. We hope that Member States continue their efforts, consultations and negotiations with a view to having the resolution acceptable to all members of the Committee.

The Committee last year asked for clarifications and explanations about our proposal for a new journal, "UN Affairs". We have presented to you a non-paper containing more details on the project, and we have tried to answer your questions and concerns.

I am pleased to note the positive comments on our presentation from many delegations, and I have taken note of the reservations expressed by the G-77 and China during our informal meetings and in the General Debate at this session.

Distinguished delegates, DPI is ready to work with the Committee to address your concerns. I assure you, once again, that “UN Affairs” will be produced within existing resources. We are committed to pursuing multilingual editions. With the approval of the Committee, which I continue to hope for, we can pursue pro-actively our early contacts with external publishers for editions in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. At the same time, we welcome Member States’ willingness to engage with us and connect us to other interested institutions in their countries.

Though the formal debate has now come to a close, my Department looks forward to continuing our dialogue through the Bureau on these and other relevant issues. I intend to ask for the organization of regular inter-sessional briefings, as we have done in the last year, with members of this Committee. I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations over the coming days, and to the strategic direction and guidance that the Committee will provide through its recommendations to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session.

Thank you.

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