

CLOSING REMARKS BY
MR. KIYO AKASAKA, UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 32nd SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION

WEDNESDAY, 28 APRIL 2010
CONFERENCE ROOM 2

Monsieur le Président,
Délégués distingués,

Je vous remercie de me donner l'occasion de m'adresser au Comité de l'information, alors que vous concluez le débat général de cette trente-deuxième session.

Les nombreux commentaires positifs et encourageants que j'ai entendus au cours de ce débat sont extrêmement gratifiants. La confiance que beaucoup d'entre vous ont exprimée envers notre Département, alors que nous travaillons à informer le monde et à éveiller son attention sur les buts et les objectifs des Nations Unies nous motive énormément. Elle nous encourage à aller encore plus de l'avant, en nous basant sur ce que nous avons déjà accompli, et à le faire d'une manière encore plus efficace.

J'aimerais maintenant répondre à certaines des questions et des observations qui ont été soulevées au cours du débat général du Comité. Si, à la fin de mon intervention, vous avez l'impression que des réponses claires et satisfaisantes ne vous ont pas été apportées, n'hésitez pas, je vous prie, à prendre contact avec mes collègues ou moi-même quand vous le voudrez.

We note with appreciation the interest shown by Member States to the inter-sessional conversations with Member States organized by DPI, including the discussion forums on new media. I thank the distinguished delegate from Jamaica, and welcome her suggestion to organize in the future a forum dedicated to the issue of "bridging the digital divide."

I know that the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Lima, is also very keen on this subject. I will discuss this further with him and with other members of the Bureau to decide on an appropriate format and date for such a discussion forum. I also note your request for arranging a discussion forum that would include communications focal points of various UN agencies and programmes. Let me assure you that we will proceed with this request.

Let me respond to some of the issues raised by delegations, though my responses here are not exhaustive.

A number of delegations, including the Representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, commented on DPI's special information programme on Palestine. I would

like to assure you that DPI remains fully committed to implementing this special information programme in order to raise the awareness of the international community on the question of Palestine, as well as on the situation in the Middle East, in such a way as to effectively contribute to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process. In this regard, I'd like to inform you that preparations for the 2010 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East and the 2010 DPI training programme for Palestinian journalists are currently underway.

We appreciate the concern expressed by the distinguished representative of Bangladesh on the issue of climate change. We agree that the climate change situation has significantly changed since Copenhagen. While DPI, along with its partners across the UN system, have adopted a markedly different communications approach to climate change, the Department has not cooled in our efforts to promote awareness of the issue. We are committed to this issue, which the Secretary-General identified at the start of this year as one of the Organization's seven strategic opportunities.

DPI works closely with the Secretary-General's Climate Change Support Team, UNFCCC, UNEP and many other agencies to promote climate change, not only as a stand-alone issue, but at it relates to other issues, including the Millennium Development Goals. Today, the Secretary-General launched a key report of his Advisory Group on Energy and Climate Change that calls for a transition to a new energy pathway. In addition, DPI has worked extensively with partners, inside the UN system and outside, to correct misperceptions of the science, a problem that has grown considerably over the last six months. Finally, DPI, through its UNTV programme 21st Century, has produced reports on the impacts of climate change, from the melting of glaciers in Bolivia, to the impacts on Bangladeshi fishing villages, to consequences in Viet Nam and in Indonesia.

Several delegations commented on DPI's quarterly magazine, *UN Chronicle*. I note the interest of Argentina, Mexico and Yemen, among others on the matter of publishing *UN Chronicle* in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish, in print, in addition to the English and French versions. I would like to assure you that we continue to look for opportunities to locate partners who are able to help us produce other language versions. As we continue to source opportunities and interested parties for translation options, I would welcome any suggestions which members of the Committee may have with regard to academic and research institutions, and publishers in your countries, who may be interested in partnering with us to publish the magazine in official languages locally. In this connection, I thank the distinguished representative from Bangladesh for her offer of assistance in finding a local partner for a Bangla version of *UN Chronicle*.

Several delegations stressed the importance of DPI working closely with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support - DPKO and DFS - in support of UN peacekeeping operations. DPI does in fact work very closely with the two Departments in a number of areas. DPI and DPKO, for example, last year collaborated on the UN Day Concert with a first ever theme, "A Tribute to Peacekeeping." This year, we are working together to organize the annual observance of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers (29 May) with the

special theme “Haiti Standing.” A special exhibition on Haiti will open in the General Assembly Public Lobby on May 28th.

DPI has produced information materials in Chinese for the World Expo in Shanghai, which will observe the UN Peacekeeping Week from 29 May to 5 June. These materials include a DVD on women in peacekeeping, entitled, “Power to Empower,” a peacekeeping operation timeline and fact sheet, and photographs and other exhibit materials. The UN Police Adviser will represent the United Nations at the Peacekeeping Week observation at the World Expo. DPI is also participating in a forthcoming field personnel selection exercise, which DFS is conducting in Brindisi, Italy.

The delegations of India and Pakistan indicated that DPI should publicize their contributions to UN peacekeeping more. I am pleased to inform you in this regard that the 2009 *Year in Review in UN Peace Operations*, for example, features a photo of Pakistani General Ghuman, Commander of the South Kivu Brigade, working with the visiting Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Susana Malcorra, in Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The publication also highlights the all-female Formed Police Unit from India to the UN Mission in Liberia.

With regard to the statement made by the Minister of Information of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, H.E. Mr. Lambert Mende Omalanga, on the work of MONUC, I drew the attention of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to his concerns. We have been advised by DPKO that MONUC is not engaged in lobbying anybody in the DRC in order to influence decisions regarding MONUC’s future. The mandate of the Mission and its duration fall within the purview of the Security Council.

We have been further advised by DPKO that when MONUC releases information regarding developments in the country and about its own actions, it does so in line with the principles and guidelines of the United Nations regarding relations with the media, and in the interest of transparency and informing all interested audiences, including the media and the public, about the Mission’s actions and the context in which MONUC is operating. The Mission makes every effort to verify the accuracy of the information it releases, and to indicate the source, as appropriate, if MONUC is not the primary source.

With regard to the incident of 4 April, to which the Minister of Information referred, I understand that MONUC’s investigation is continuing.

Mr. Chairman,

Several speakers, including many speakers today such as Egypt, Russia, Lebanon and Tunisia, discussed the importance of achieving linguistic parity in the work of the Department, particularly on the UN website. As I have emphasized before, multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of our work related to the UN’s web presence.

However, there are several important points that I would like to note in this regard. First, not all the content presented on the website originates from – or is produced by – DPI. A

significant part of it is posted by various departments and other content-providing offices. Many of them do not have sufficient resources to reproduce and post that content in all official languages, although we are doing our best to encourage them to work towards language parity.

Our Department faces similar resource constraints, particularly as we try to strike a judicious balance in the allocation of resources for all the programmes we undertake. In an effort to deal with these challenges, we have sought innovative ways to achieve linguistic parity, in part by entering into pro bono arrangements with academic institutions.

With regard to the comments by the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation, we are also very pleased by the agreements that have been concluded over the past few months that will continue to make UN Radio's Russian-language programmes available on several major stations in Moscow and elsewhere in the country. Expanding our audiences in Russia has been always a key goal of UN Radio and we are very grateful for the support of the Russian Federation in this important area.

I was also very happy to hear the words of praise for the Russian-language UN News Centre and the expressed support for adequate resources to ensure that our news portal is able to provide the broadest possible scope of coverage. We have been making every effort to strengthen News Centre operations in all official languages, which is an important aspect of ensuring language parity on the UN website. We will rely on the support of the Committee on Information in this regard.

Concerning the use of the Arabic language in radio broadcasts, I would like to assure the distinguished representative of Egypt that UN Radio's Arabic service continues to produce a wealth of material daily. In addition to a daily 15-minute news programme, we provide news updates, news from the field, interviews and raw audio material. We also produce two weekly radio programmes and special programmes, as warranted. All of this is available on our Arabic Radio website and Arabic Language News Centre.

As for our outreach to broadcasters in the Arab world, UN Radio in Arabic currently has 21 radio partners, including the Arab Broadcasting Union (which in turn has radio partners throughout the member countries in the region) and the Palestinian News Network, just added this year. We continue to find new radio partners, including networks such as Maan News Network, Global Voices and International Radio Greece. We are also distributed via satellite on WRN (World Radio Network).

While our programmes and content can be downloaded from the web, we also use traditional means to distribute our programming.

With regard to the statement by Argentina on the Guided Tours in Spanish, I would like to inform the distinguished delegate that Guided Tours in all of the official languages are pre-scheduled when they have been reserved in advance for groups of 15 or more. Unreserved public guided tours are dispatched when requested by 15 patrons. I should like to add that since November 2009, audio tours have been made available to the visiting public in the six official languages. Audio tours were introduced to supplement Guided Tours, and to provide increased

flexibility for visitors, who can now choose either a guide-led or audio tour in any of the six official languages they choose. The audio tours have significantly reduced the waiting time for tours and have been developed in two formats -- one that caters to adults, and one that caters to children under 10 years old.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of my Department, I would like to thank the many delegates who have spoken so highly about the work of our Information Centres and the need to ensure that they are provided adequate resources to carry out their work. Among the speakers on this subject was the distinguished representative of Yemen, who spoke on behalf of the G77 and China, and who urged that all possible measures be taken to strengthen UNICs, which are – in his words - “a vital source for the flow of information.”

The work of UNICs was variously described by other Member States as “vitaly important,” “essential,” and “the most direct means of communicating with the world public.” We are grateful for this positive feedback.

I would especially like to thank those Member States who continue to provide support to the Information Centres, either through rent-free premises or voluntary contributions, and hope that others will be inclined to follow suit. DPI also appreciates the statement by the distinguished representative of Brazil, encouraging more Member States to offer rent-free and maintenance-free premises for UNICs. Indeed, as he pointed out, this would allow the Department to concentrate its limited resources on outreach and public information activities.

As I mentioned, I last year wrote letters to those Member States that host a UN information centre to consider either providing the UNIC with rent-free premises or subsidizing its rent. I regret to inform you that the response to my letter was not encouraging. I intend to write another letter to the Governments concerned, and I will continue to press this issue about the UN information centres, which you so highly value.

Several delegations welcomed the decision by the General Assembly to establish an Information Centre in Angola. In this regard, the pledge of support from the Government of Angola, which was conveyed by the Honourable Minister for Social Communications of the Government of Angola, Ms. Carolina Cerqueira, is much appreciated. We will continue to work with the Government of Angola to make UNIC Luanda a reality as soon as possible.

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 characters and needs of the different regions.

We are working to meet a number of challenges ahead, including next week’s NPT Review Conference, the MDG Summit in September, and the elimination of violence against women and women’s empowerment. Indeed, we will continue to implement the mandates of this Committee and those of the General Assembly. One of the most priorities is the freedom of the

press, which we will address tomorrow with a high-level segment and panel discussion on the theme Freedom of Information: the Right to Know.

I would like to add one final word. I appreciate the comments by delegations who said that the mission of the Department of Public Information is “to provide timely, accurate, impartial, comprehensive, relevant and coherent information on UN objectives and activities to the widest global public.” This is the mantra that I have been using on every occasion. I am glad that we agree on this mission. I repeat that we will make our best effort every day “to provide timely, accurate, impartial, comprehensive, relevant and coherent information on UN objectives and activities to the widest global public”. We look forward to working closely with you to accomplish this goal.

Délégués distingués,

Bien que le débat formel soit maintenant achevé, le Département de l’information, dont j’ai la responsabilité, attend de poursuivre ce dialogue par l’intermédiaire du Bureau dont il dispose pour traiter de ces questions et de tout autre sujet pertinent. J’attendrai avec impatience le résultat de vos délibérations au cours des jours qui viennent, ainsi que la direction stratégique et les conseils que le Comité fournira à travers les recommandations qu’il fera à l’Assemblée générale réunie en sa soixante-cinquième session.

Je vous remercie.