

**CLOSING REMARKS BY
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COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

**AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 35TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION**

**TUESDAY, 23 APRIL 2013
Conference Room 2, 3:00 p.m.**

Madam Chairman,

Distinguished delegates,

Thank you very much for a very lively and very thoughtful debate on questions relating to information over the course of the last two days. I thank all the delegations for their kind words addressed to the Department of Public Information, addressed to our colleagues in DPI, and to myself. We have taken note of your comments – both words of appreciation and words of constructive criticism. I am particularly grateful for your participation in yesterday's interactive dialogue. Your comments and your new ideas will serve as essential building blocks for making DPI a better and more effective voice of your Organization, the United Nations.

Many of you raised the critical importance of multilingualism; the role played by UN Information Centres worldwide; the increased use of social media; the digital divide and the impact that has on access to UN information; the need to balance new forms of media and technology with more traditional forms; and the necessity of having strong evaluation methods and tools to ensure that the Department is always improving.

We have taken note all of the questions and comments that were raised over the course of the Committee's general debate, and we are looking forward to working with you in the months ahead to try to address those points. Please allow me first to respond to some of your specific questions and comments.

Madam Chairperson,

First and foremost, on UN Information Centres. Some Member States commented on the need for consultation with the host country and neighbouring countries when deciding on the possible

realignment of the network of United Nations Information Centres. Member States also drew our attention to the importance of the UN Information Centre in Luanda.

In this financial situation, the support of your governments to the UNICs is particularly appreciated. The provision of rent- and maintenance-free premises, exemptions on taxes and other charges, and favourable rates on utilities and other services would all assist in ensuring that UNICs can continue to deliver high-quality services and products to the peoples of the countries in which they are located. We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to those Member States which have already been able to assist us.

In view of the tightening budgetary situation across the whole of the UN Secretariat, DPI has undertaken a review of the entire network of UN Information Centres, and is trying to harmonize that structure where feasible without diminishing the services provided. Such harmonization will be undertaken in close consultation with the host government and with other concerned countries.

At the request of DPI, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Angola met recently with the Minister in the Government of Angola in charge of the project to construct a new UN Information Centre in Luanda. According to the Minister, a construction site has been identified. The construction has been budgeted and will start upon approval by the Council of Ministers. The actual construction period is expected to take about 24 months. During this period, DPI and other UN entities will work closely with our Angolan partners to finalize a host country agreement, to assess security requirements and to recruit staff for the UN Information Centre.

On a second note, references were made to a strategy for press releases. Several delegates reiterated their request for DPI to devise and implement a strategy for issuing press releases in additional languages. I would like to assure you that this is an issue of great importance to the Department, and, as the Organization's focal point on multilingualism, to me personally. As I mentioned yesterday, we are currently working on a pilot project with DGACM to produce press releases in Spanish from the Commission on Population and Development. The outcome of this pilot will enable us to see what additional resources might be required to make this type of

project sustainable. This pilot is a first step, and we are continuing to explore effective ways to further expand our multilingual reach.

As demonstrated at yesterday's interactive session, DPI's commitment to work in as many languages as possible is firm and principled, derived from its mandate given by Member States. In some of our programmes, this multilingual approach has now been firmly embedded. Take, for example, our outreach just last month to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The DPI programme, working with UN Information Centres and other UN offices, produced and disseminated an array of content – including education materials, exhibits, songs, poetry and social media posts – in the six official UN languages as well as in Bahasa Indonesia, Bambara, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Turkish.

Improving and expanding the UN's social media reach in as many languages as possible is a priority of the Department, and we are encouraged to hear that Member States are starting to see social media as an integral part of our work.

That said, social media is a resource-intensive activity, requiring staff to customize content and to monitor social media activity in real time, and to respond to an ever-growing number of postings.

We are aware that there are disparities in the numbers of followers of our accounts across the various languages. We are taking steps to strengthen the different language accounts by setting up shared online workspaces and sending out guidance notes so our field staff always have access to the newest and most important content. This effort also requires additional training. We are working with our colleagues at OHRM to improve staff skills when it comes to dealing with social media.

Numbers are not always the only way to measure success. Some accounts with smaller numbers of followers may actually be cultivating the most influential followers. We also need to be cautious in terms of how we use our limited resources and make sure we are devoting time to platforms that are actually being used by speakers of different languages. This is why we have

been so successful using Weibo to reach Chinese-speaking audiences, and we are hoping this success will be replicated in VKontakte for the Russian-speaking world.

DPI is a strong advocate for multilingualism on social media and we are pushing and will continue to push our partner departments and offices across the Secretariat to produce multilingual content.

It should be stressed that our pursuit of a greater social media presence will not be at the expense of traditional forms of media such as radio and television. We remain fully aware of the need to bridge the digital divide and ensure that people everywhere have full access to information about the work and goals of the United Nations.

While we focused in our presentation yesterday afternoon on multilingualism and partnerships with Member States, and in response to a number of questions and references in statements or questions from yesterday's sessions, I would like to stress that we continue to place great importance on the work we do with civil society, whether through our work with NGOs, academia or the creative community. These partnerships play an important role in promoting the work and ideals of the UN to audiences that we would not necessarily reach through our own traditional or social media platforms. We would greatly welcome expressions of interest from Member States in hosting future DPI/NGO conferences.

On the issue of digitization, the Department was asked to consider a timeline for completing the project for digitizing UN documents. This issue has been of concern not only to Member States, but to academics as well.

The most important documents – 3.7 million of them – are the first priority. To date, the libraries in New York and Geneva have processed around 340,000 of them, comprising more than 3.5 million pages. The timeline for completing this task, using current resources and methods, would be in the region of 20 years. There are another 13 million official documents – background reports, working papers and the like – which should also be digitized. This might take a further 60-plus years. The actual timelines will vary according to the complexity of the documents and the challenges in handling them – which are increasing with time and the documents'

deterioration. These are very long time-scales. DPI, however, will intensify its search for funding partners and alternative production models to accelerate progress.

Several delegations mentioned the Department's important communications support to peace operations around the world. DPI supports the full range of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions operated by DPKO, DFS and DPA. This support is not confined to assessment visits to the field by DPI staff; here at Headquarters, staff from the Department draft and develop communications strategies; participate in pre-deployment planning; help recruit and train public information staff in the field; and produce and disseminate content to the media about the work of all the missions, as well as the contributions of individual troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries.

On the issue of evaluation, delegates asked about the direction and strategies used in our evaluation work.

- DPI's methods and tools for evaluation and self-evaluation range from surveys to social media performance measures to global media monitoring and analyses. The results help us to monitor our outputs and outcomes in terms of results-based management, and to draw lessons learned for the improvement of our programmes.
- For example, United Nations Information Centres conduct surveys on their briefings and activities attended by a range of participants, including students, educators, non-governmental organizations, media and members of the general public.
- In 2012, survey results showed that participants' opinion of the UN significantly improved after attending a briefing or activity. Results also showed that 87 per cent of participants considered the programme effective in improving their understanding of the United Nations.
- In addition, DPI continuously monitors relevant results of public opinion polling to observe trends in the image and perception of the United Nations.
- Going forward, it will be important to the Department to equip itself with robust monitoring, risk and content management tools for both traditional and social media in order to provide quality content across platforms.

Many delegates have expressed interest in the work of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi. While Mr. Alhendawi's office is part of DPI, he will be working and

coordinating closely with many other UN departments and agencies, particularly the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Madam Chairperson and distinguished delegates,

Although I have tried, I may have not been successful in fully addressing all your questions and comments made over the past two days of our general debate. I hope we will continue our dialogue. My Department looks forward to working closely with your bureau, seeking its guidance on the way forward. I particularly look forward to the outcome of your deliberations over the coming days and to the strategic direction and guidance that this Committee will provide through its recommendations to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

Before I conclude, I would like to inform you about a new DPI product. On the website of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, the authoritative reference work on the activities of the UN System, will be the free multilingual *Yearbook Express*. This will feature the chapter introductions and table of contents of the most recent Yearbook in all official UN languages. The Yearbook Express was produced by teams of UNV Online volunteers working directly with the Publications and Editorial Section of the Outreach Division.

Thank you.
