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**STATEMENT BY MIAN JAHANGIR IQBAL MINISTER (PRESS) AT THE 35th SESSION
OF COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (COI)**

APRIL 22, 2013

Madam Chairperson,

Let me begin by congratulating the new chairperson of the Committee on Information (COI), Ambassador Lyutha al-Mughairy of Oman, and four new Bureau members on the assumption of their offices. Having served the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) with distinction, Madam al-Mughairy, the chairmanship of this Committee's 35th session is your crowning glory. We are more than confident that under your able guidance, the Committee will achieve optimum results. We assure you of our complete cooperation and support.

2. We also commend the valuable job done by the Department of Public Information (DPI), which has worked vigorously to carry out its mandated task.

3. We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Fiji on behalf of Group of 77 and China.

4. We have heard with great interest the statement made by Head of Department of Communication and Public Information, H.E. Mr. Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, in which he gave the Member States a comprehensive account of the activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI).

Madam Chairperson,

5. As we meet for our spring session, I am happy to state that Pakistan has reached a democratic milestone. A democratically elected government has recently completed its full five-year term for the first time in Pakistan's history. In less than 19 days, the people of Pakistan go to the polls to elect national and provincial assemblies. The whole world is watching the May 11 elections, which are crucial to the further consolidation of democracy in our country. Intense campaigning is taking place; the nation is in election mode. The historic democratic transition has also become a huge media event, which will be overseen by a large number of journalists and foreign observers. Indeed, it is exciting time in Pakistan.

Madam Chairperson,

6. The government and people of Pakistan felt greatly honoured when our Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, called Malala Yusafzai, the young Pakistan education activist, a "daughter of the United Nations." On April 6, the Secretary-General spoke to Malala, who is now residing in England, by Skype from Madrid, where he was on a visit, to mark the 1,000-day milestone in the run up to a Millennium Development goal to reduce poverty by the end of 2015. Indeed, the Secretary-General chose the right to speak on the occasion. In this regard, let me say that Pakistan has, on its part, taken steps to keep Malala's dream of spreading female education alive. On 10 December, UNESCO and Pakistan launched the Malala Fund for Girls' Education at a high-level event in Paris, held as part of the celebrations for Human Rights Day. At the event – Stand Up for Malala, Girls' Education is a Right – the President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari announced that Pakistan would donate the first \$10 million. The aim is to give new momentum to the quest to provide access to school for all girls by 2015.

Madam Chairperson,

7. In the present day information overload, getting a message across is, indeed, a challenge. At the same time modern technology and the Internet has opened up unprecedented possibilities of connectivity and outreach. In this regard, the DPI's work as the public face and voice of the UN is commendable. It has also synergized traditional and new media technologies. Without traditional means of communication, the message

of the UN will not reach the world's poorest populations, particularly in developing countries. The new media, on the other hand provides a dynamic asset both in terms of improving the networking capacity of the Organization and of providing timely information to a varied array of actors.

Madam Chairperson,

8. Since Pakistan attaches high importance to UN Peacekeeping missions, we urge the DPI to continue lending its support to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support for raising awareness of the new ground realities, its successes and challenges of peacekeeping operations.

Madam Chairperson,

9. The importance of the work of United Nations Information Centers (UNICs) around the world cannot be over-emphasized -- You know better, Madam Chairperson, you have the first hand knowledge of these UN outposts having served as the chief of UNICs. As a vital source of information, these 63 centers greatly help to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries in terms of access to information and communication technologies. We, therefore, urge the DPI to allocate adequate resources for UNICs to ensure their effective functioning, particularly in the developing countries. To secure rent-free premises for UNICs from host countries, it is important that the economic conditions of those countries should also be taken into considerations while ensuring full allocation of financial support for the centers. Pakistan welcomes the appointment of new Director for UNIC Islamabad but at the same time also urge DPI to restore full services for its center in Islamabad.

10. We welcome DPI's efforts to make available U.N. publications and translated information material in local languages, including Urdu, while maintaining websites of those languages. These steps ensure the spread of the United Nations message of peace to all corners of the world. We also appreciate the live coverage of the meetings of the Security Council, the general debate in the General Assembly, daily press briefing and other major events at the UN Headquarters and abroad through UN webcast.

Madam Chairperson,

11. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that needs to be promoted and protected. But it should not be abused to create fissures between various cultures, civilizations and religions. The Committee has a central role to ensure that the UN public information policies are geared towards forging greater harmony and mutual respect among peoples belonging to various societies, cultures and religions.

Madam Chairperson,

12. We welcome the initiative that helps in strengthening training programmes for the media persons from developing countries. In this context, we appreciate the annual Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists Fellowship Programme and request the DPI to consider expanding the number of scholarships.

Madam Chairperson,

13. Pakistan is among the countries where media enjoys complete freedom. As a result of the Government's media-friendly policies, there is an unprecedented surge in the expansion of electronic media. At present, there is a network of 84 Private TV Channels and 143 FM Radios that are licensed to work independently in the country. The constitution of the country under article 19 also ensures that every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression while article 19A ensures that every citizen shall have the right to access to information in all matters of public importance.

Madam Chairperson,

14. Allow me to conclude by reiterating our support to the Department of Public Information and its endeavours to carry out its mandate effectively and reassure you of our fullest cooperation in this regard.

Thank you.