

**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN , COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION,
AT THE OPENING OF ITS THIRTY-EIGHTH SESSION
(April 26, 2016)**

Madam Under Secretary-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

I am delighted to welcome you to this session of the Committee on Information. It has been a busy month for all of us, more particularly so in the last week, and it has been a period yet again where the Department of Public Information has demonstrated its strengths in communication, the promotion of understanding of the Organization's mission, and the creation of a true engagement, through informed discussion, of our purposes and principles.

We see this in the daily news output that the Department produces for a world audience, including the media, global civil society, Member States as well as the general public, providing a comprehensive, global and coordinated picture of UN's activities in the areas of human rights, development and peace and security. And much more.

We see this in the increasing use of social media and multimedia content, reaching new demographics including the young generation and wider audiences in both the developing and industrialized world, tailoring the narrative to the ordinary person, explaining and clarifying complex topics and finding UN voices to tell the story to the world.

We see this in UN published content---including the flagship UN Chronicle and Yearbook of the United Nations---, both now available on state of the art aggregated platforms to facilitate public access from everywhere. We see this in the United Nations iLibrary, a digital platform where for the first time ever all UN sales publications since 2010 are in one place, allowing the public to search, discover and read in all available languages.

We see this in the heritage of the United Nations audio-visual materials, a unique record illustrating a world of struggle and progress, challenge and development, inspiration and achievement. We see it in the Dag Hammarskjold Library of the United Nations Secretariat in New York which has for seventy years made the official records and publications of the UN's activities readily available to the citizens of the world, allowing researchers, academics, students and the general public to have easy access to information about the Organisation and its work.

We see this in the work of United Nations information centres that reach the people whom we serve and share with them the United Nations story with them in the fluency of their own languages and through location-specific initiatives that support universal strategies.

So there is much to be proud of. And I am glad that the resolutions this Committee adopts reflect that pride.

And, yet, I do sometimes get the feeling that something is missing.

Friends, and fellow delegates, we rightly expect from the Department of Public Information a robust, integrated and workable communications strategy for the Organization. Is it not fair that the Department expect from this Committee robust, integrated and workable guidance for its activities?

A great statesman in my own country, with whom I had the privilege of working closely, once remarked, "You know, to address crowds and make promises does not require very much brains." No one should underestimate the intellectual strength of this Committee, and this Committee should never allow its resolutions to diminish into the populism that Eduard Shevardnadze warned us against.

What do I mean by populism? Simply put, inserting in our resolutions our expectation of what the Department should promise without realistically assessing its capacity to deliver and ensuring, as best we can, the ensuring of that capacity.

I commend members of the Committee, and the successive Chairs of the Group of 77 and China, including the current Chair, Thailand, for their close consultations with the Department in the finalisation of the resolutions. And thank you, Cristina, for the readiness with which you and your team have responded to questions and concerns.

That said, we---the members of this Committee---owe it to ourselves to ask ourselves two questions.

One, should our resolutions seek to be politically attractive even if practically unsustainable?

Two, are we doing all we can within our own missions to ensure that the other members of our national teams---in particular those dealing with the budgetary bodies and committees---are prepared to lend their far from inconsiderable weight to operationalise our decisions?

Let me cite two instances in this regard.

Paragraph 22 of the last resolution on "United Nations public information policies and activities" emphasizes, and I quote, " the importance of making use of all the official languages of the United Nations, ensuring their full and equitable treatment in all the activities of all divisions and offices of the Department of Public Information with the aim of eliminating the disparity between the use of English and the use of the five other official languages, in this regard reaffirms its request that the Secretary-General ensure that the Department has the necessary capacity in all the official languages to undertake all of its activities, and requests that this aspect be included in future programme budget proposals for the Department, bearing in mind the principle of parity of all six official languages, while respecting the workload in each official language." End quote.

Although this is a lengthy, and somewhat breathless, paragraph, its expectation and its guidance is clear and I think we have reason to be grateful to the Department of Public Information for ensuring that the aspect of “necessary capacity in all the official languages” was reflected in its programme budget proposals. As it happened, however, these proposals were not approved.

Friends, I am not arguing for or against the proposals. It is our collective prerogative as Member States to accept, or to modify, or to reject, proposals that are placed before us. What I am arguing for, however, is a greater consistency in the mandates we author and, in particular, greater consultation within each mission between those of us involved in this Committee and those who deal with other matters relevant to the effective implementation of our resolutions.

Let me cite a second instance to you. Paragraph 38 of the same Resolution recalled one of six years earlier in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations information centre in Luanda as a contribution towards addressing the needs of Portuguese -speaking African countries, and reiterated its request to the Secretary-General, in coordination with the Government of Angola, to take the measures necessary for the prompt establishment of the information centre.

Now, as we all know, the process of launching an information centre is never easy. The host government has to identify an available location and the budget for construction. The United Nations has to satisfy itself on the operational and security related viability of the intended premises. While the process in this instance has not been short, both the Department of Public Information and, through it, the Government of Angola have been candid in taking this Committee, at its successive sessions, into confidence about the pace and progress. The Committee, for its part, has been consistent in affirming the importance, indeed necessity, of a centre in Luanda.

However, even as one meeting of the General Assembly endorsed this affirmation by this Committee, another meeting---presumably attended by delegates different from those assembled here---decided to abolish the five national posts approved for the Centre. Here again I remain uncertain about the degree of internal consultation within missions so that legitimate strategic objectives are harmonised with legitimate budgetary priorities.

I leave these thoughts with you, fellow delegates, in the hope that your work over the next several days will yield a resolution that is both inspirational and practical and that, once adopted, you will defend the resolution within the chambers of your own missions. That defence may not always work, I know, but it should not go unheard!

Friends,

For the last three years, the United Nations Academic Impact has partnered with ELS Education Services in a global multilingual essay contest for university students. One of its winners , Rehema Aanyu from Uganda, wrote in her essay:

I have learnt through travel and interacting with all kinds of people that we have so much to give and have in unity than disunity including, understanding our own feelings and those of others whilst developing meaningful and life-long relationships with people from different walks of life thereby embracing forgiveness, hope, accountability, multiple perspectives, solutions and unity against injustices still existent in our world because we understand that we have a shared path and destination.

It is in the sharing of that path, and in the “commonness” of our destination, that the United Nations Department of Public Information and this Committee can work in tangible, creative and uninhibited partnership.

Thank you.

