

Statement by His Excellency Dr. Manuel Augusto, Vice-Minister for Social Communications of the Republic Of Angola (2 May 2001)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the government of my country, the republic of Angola, and in my own name, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the United Nations committee on information on this 23rd period of sessions you started on 30 April 2001.

My warm congratulations also goes to the outgoing chairman, His Excellency El Hassane Zahid, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, for his excellent work during his mandate through the 22nd period of the sessions of our committee.

The Angolan delegation also congratulates Armenia and Libya on their admission as members of the committee on information, as they will now be able to contribute with their valuable participation to the proceeds of this relevant body of the United Nations.

The development of information and communication technology introduced major changes to all areas of human activity around the world.

Today, the use of new it systems can no longer be seen as a sign of megalomania, but as a necessity of life for the common citizen because of its speed, efficacy and safety.

To give you an example, according to the statistics, in 1998 the internet had 140 million users and this year this number has grown to more than 500 million.

However, access to these modern information and communication technologies has polarized the world into two groups: those who are connected and those who are isolated This situation has simply led the marginalization of the people in developing countries because they lack the financial resources and the manpower with the required skills to use the new technologies and compete on equal footing with the developed countries.

This situation forces the developing countries to rely mainly on the traditional media such as radio, television and the printed press to get their daily information. Today, the flow of information is a global phenomenon that requires the modernization and use of new technologies enabling the information to reach the users wherever and whenever they may be.

A viable solution to make modern technology available to all regardless of their status is the implementation of the new information and communication world order declared by the United Nations general assembly resolution 34/189 of 1979.

The Angolan delegation believes that the translation of this project into concrete results would help lessen the gap imbalance in the relations between developed and developing countries in terms of their technological capabilities.

The Angolan delegation hopes that the dpi restructuring will consider expanding the broadcasting staff by including the position of producer/assistant in the United Nations Portuguese-language radio broadcasting service. This would allow the CPLP countries to participate directly with their own production of regional programming and broadcasting of information and world news.

The United Nations Portuguese-language radio broadcasting service which is an extremely important part of the DPI, is operated by one single producer. It covers the different regions: Latin America (Brazil), Asia (East Timor), Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe), and Europe (Portugal).

During this year (2001), the United Nations Portuguese-language radio broadcasting service improved the quality of its programs with the use of its new short-wave frequency and its audience rose to 230 million listeners across the Portuguese-speaking world, including East Timor in the continent of Asia and Oceania.

In Angola, the radio programs broadcast from the United Nations in New York are listened to by more than 12 million people which is one more reason for a continued improvement of the dpi public information services and the strengthening of its relations of mutual cooperation with the local media.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

My government approved recently its strategy for the development of information technologies in Angola for the period 2000-2010, with a view to establishing a national infrastructure for the modernization of the government and the building of an information society.

This plan will enable the Angolan government to develop public information systems that will integrate the economy, science and technology, natural resources and the environment.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

On May 3rd the freedom of the press world day will be celebrated, and my delegation cannot let it go unrecognized, given its significance to so many around the world.

Freedom of the press, which will be celebrated across the world on May 3rd, is one of the most important pillars of a democratic society under the rule of law. Freedom of the press is closely linked to sustainable economic and social development and it is a valuable tool to ensure the exercise of the fundamental rights and liberties of the people.

Freedom of the press, the democratization of the media, and freedom of speech expressing different convictions are principles that the Angolan government holds as important political priorities in its endeavours to achieve peace.

In Angola, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are rights granted by our constitutional law and in other laws. Although we have experienced one of the most ravaging armed conflicts ever seen in history, which could justify the adoption of exceptional measures during a state of siege or emergency, we are instead determined to build a democratic state under the rule of law.

Today, in my country, we are at a stage where the answer to the question about what kind of press law we should have is found by polling the country's population.

With that philosophy in mind, our Head of State, President José Eduardo dos Santos, presented to the country a new press law bill and invited everyone especially the members of the press to discuss that bill in a democratic and open way with an overwhelming response from the Angolan people.

The Angolan government is aware that there is still a lot to be done with regard to freedom of speech and freedom of press. However, the United Nations secretary-general, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his latest report on Angola recognized that in spite of the climate of instability created by the ongoing war, the opposition parties and the media have more space with respect to political debate and the flow of information.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

To conclude, the Angolan delegation appeals to this committee for the need to increase its efforts to help developing countries in order to improve their existing infrastructures and their information and communication technological capabilities in this third millennium.

The new information and communication technologies led to globalization and also offer many opportunities for human progress, in addition to driving the goals of economic, political, social, cultural development as well as the preservation of the environment.

Thank you.