

## **Statement by H.E. Mr .A. Gopinathan, Acting Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations (22 April 2002)**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, my delegation would like to congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election. We are confident that under your chairmanship, this Committee will achieve considerable success in providing guidance and oversight to the work of the Department of Public Information. We associate ourselves with the Statement made by Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 outlining the position of the Group on major issues before the Committee at this session.

We appreciate the lucid presentation given by Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Interim Head of the Department of Public Information to the Committee, the focus this year being on the re-orientation of UN activities in the field of public information and communications. This has aided our understanding of the issues involved and will, we believe, greatly assist our work.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation shares the Secretary General's commitment to enhance communications as a key element in the reform and revitalization of the United Nations in a new information age, and to developing a culture of communications within the Organisation. Indeed, information and communication technologies have revolutionised the world. They have enhanced our awareness, interest and concern about happenings anywhere on the globe. This function of sensitization, education and enlarging awareness is integral to the pursuit of the vast agenda of the UN and to enlisting support for it among the peoples of the world. We should be particularly mindful of the need for strengthening it.

The dramatic developments in information and communication technologies come along with a bitter contradiction. The greater the progress made, the deeper the technological gap between the developed and the developing countries. The United Nations, through the DPI, has an important role to play in seeking to bridge this digital divide. In this context, the present reorientation exercise is particularly meaningful and one, we sincerely hope, that will meet the aspirations of the developing world and succeed in correcting the present bias against it in the field of information and communications.

Mr. Chairman

Within the context of the mission statement proposed by the SG in his report "Reorientation of UN activities in the field of Public Information and Communications", my delegation extends its wholehearted support, in particular the emphasis laid on the "greatest public impact" dimension of it (A/AC.198/2002/2). In living up to the statement, the Department must be guided by the priorities laid down by the General Assembly, and we are happy to note in this context that in para 22 emphasis has been laid on catering to the needs of the African countries.

Mr. Chairman,

We support the increasing use of advanced technology by the United Nations. We would like, in particular, to commend the DPI for developing and maintaining the very useful website of the UN, which is a major communications tool for amplifying the Organisation's message and providing information to millions around the world. At the same time, utilizing the new technology should not be at the cost of traditional means of communications, still the main source of information in most developing countries. While enhancing nontraditional means, the DPI should continue to reach out by utilizing traditional media, print, radio and television, specially through local languages. The idea of reaching out to specialist targetted audiences such as NGO's, research institutions, libraries, academic communities is indeed an attractive one. This would be one way of alleviating the shortcomings of promoting UN activities at the people's level and would help improve access to information by all nations and peoples.

Turning to the services provided by the DPI to the member states, the daily press releases merit a mention. We believe that the service is of immense practical utility and that this should be continued in its present form. The releases are particularly invaluable to the developing country member states, most of whom do not have large Missions and who thereby are not able to cover all the official meetings being held everyday. Besides, we believe that in the process of reorienting the activities of the UN in the field of public information and communications, the current level of services provided to member states must not be adversely affected.

With regard to the dissemination of information, the DPI should focus more on publicizing UN activities and achievements in the area of social and economic development. Sustainable development issues, poverty eradication, women's rights and empowerment, children's issues, health, education and other socially relevant issues should get priority attention. A new area where DPI could play an important role is in the global fight against Terrorism, by spreading and creating awareness of this scourge which poses a very real and dangerous threat to humanity as a whole.

We take note of the effort to streamline the management of the DPI and to match performance with customer needs. Performance management must be a vital part of all of the major DPI activities and programmes. We must however commit our support to the DPI to endow it with the required resources to carry out this task. In the same vein, it is worth addressing simple, but clear-headed proposals, such as the one pertaining to the Cartography Unit in the DPI. These activities could easily be billed to either the UN Security Council which is dealt with in the Fifth Committee under a separate agenda item, or better still, to debit the expenditures of the Unit to the relevant Peacekeeping budget.

Mr. Chairman

In response to the Secretary General's call for the creation of a culture of communication and coordination in the Organisation, we concur with the observation in the SG's report that coordination between DPI and other Secretariat Departments should be improved, and that DPI, within the context of the ongoing reorientation should structure itself so as to provide a

more direct interface with the substantive Departments. We also agree that a part of this onus falls on the Departments as well who must ensure that DPI be included in their decision making processes, and that for major activities, DPI participate in the relevant planning meetings from the beginning of the preparatory process.

On the subject of the flagship publications of the Organisation, we strongly believe that they serve a useful purpose and are invaluable reference points for all matters related to the Organization, meeting the highest standards of quality and reliability over the past so many years. The Yearbook must be continued for its unparalleled archival and reference values. Similarly, the UN Chronicle has continued to serve the Member States as a stimulating and thought-provoking publication and as a platform for intellectual discourse on a wide variety of issues currently engaging attention of the international community. An Indian edition of the Chronicle, for circulation in Asia, is being brought out at no additional cost to the UN. Here, we wish to reiterate the point made by us last year that similar approaches for other regions should be explored to enhance the reach and leadership of the Chronicle. We are happy that the Fifth Committee pronounced itself last December on the need for continued publication of the UN Chronicle, and allocated the financial resources for this purpose.

We agree that as long as the organisation of special events constitute important United Nations observances, it would be difficult to imagine the Secretariat ceasing to commemorate them. We have noted that pending a final decision on the matter, attempts are being made to leverage events held at Headquarters to global audiences through video conferencing and other means. We also believe that the exhibition space at Headquarters should continue to cater to the purpose that it presently serves, serving a vital promotional purpose for the Organisation. We also express support for the journalists' training programmes which, we feel, should continue since this meets the aspirations of the developing world in particular and is one of the elements in bridging the gap between the developing and the developed societies.

The United Nations Information Centers play an important role in disseminating and promoting United Nations information materials, contributing thereby to spreading the message of the relevance and significance of the United Nations in present times. Here we would like to note with appreciation the role played by the UNIC in New Delhi. We agree with the suggestion that practical criteria should be established with regard to the location of United Nations Information Centers. We also agree that one possible criterion would be the provision of free premises by the host Government and would urge Governments of developed countries to make efforts to facilitate the work of the information centers in their countries by the provision of rent-free or rent-subsidized office space and to assist through cash contribution for information services. This could be the starting point when discussions on the UNICS are held since the rental costs for the premises in the developing world are often insignificant compared to that in the developed world.

Mr. Chairman

A key issue is the extent to which financial considerations should determine the continuance of a mandated program. As the Secretary General observes, while financial transparency

helps Member-States appreciate the connection between the cost of a program and its measurable impact, there are some activities worth promoting for valid programmatic benefits, all of which are not tangible and therefore cannot be quantified, outside of cost considerations. As the voice of the United Nations, indeed its torch-bearer whose activities and benefits touch the four corners of the globe, the DPI plays a vital role. As is the case with some of the other Departments in the Secretariat, all of whom have their own rules to play by and none of whom have been subject to such excruciating scrutiny so often in such a time span as the DPI, we would urge that a similar yardstick be applied to the activities of the DPI whose benefits are not always visible, but nevertheless which lie at the center of the strategic management of the United Nations. Purely by way of illustration, it is inconceivable that such logic would have been upheld, say for example, in the area of human rights.

In closing, it is pertinent to recall that reform, revitalisation and renewal are continuous processes. We note, in this connection, that seven periodic reviews and/or reappraisals on UN public information policies and activities have been conducted, so far, most of them in the last 20 years. We wish to particularly compliment the DPI for focusing our attention, through this Report, on the specific areas that this Committee should address with a view to offering guidance to the General Assembly at its 57th and subsequent sessions. We would encourage the Secretary General to continue with the measures within his competence to improve the functioning of DPI, while looking forward to this Committee providing further guidance and to the report of the Secretary General on the comprehensive review of the management and operations of DPI in response to the request in resolution A56/253. We will work with other delegations to ensure that concrete ideas are contained in the Report of this Committee which will help both the DPI and the General Assembly in their efforts to reorient the public information activities of the United Nations.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.