

**Statement by H.E. Ms. M. Patricia Durrant, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations (23 April 2002)**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the fourteen member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), namely Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bahamas, Dominica, Haiti, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and my own country, Jamaica.

CARICOM is pleased to see you and your Bureau presiding once again over the work of this Committee. We look forward to its successful deliberations under your keen and skilful guidance.

We also wish to commend the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information (DPI), Mr. Shashi Tharoor, for the timely submission of the reports before the Committee. The DPI is to be congratulated for the comprehensive quality of its reports, which will be of invaluable assistance to the Committee in fulfilling its mandate. CARICOM is also very appreciative of the extensive introduction to the reports provided by Mr. Tharoor.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement made earlier by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We would wish, however, to elaborate on some issues, which are of particular concern to our region.

Mr. Chairman,

Information is indisputably an important tool, which assists the processes of education, learning and communication and can be treated as a benchmark in a country's progress towards development. It is noted that the 'digital divide' which was highlighted at the 2000 Millennium Summit is not getting much smaller. It is in this context that CARICOM notes with appreciation the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General in seeking to address this matter through the establishment of bodies such as the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force. CARICOM also looks forward to the holding of the two-day meeting in June of this year on information technology, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/258, when issues relating to the bridging of the 'digital divide' will be discussed.

Initiatives such as those undertaken by UNESCO in promoting access to information and communication technologies at the community level are to be commended and programmes such as SIDSNET — the sustainable network programme developed by the UNDP which links small island states around the world — are also extremely useful in the promotion and exchange of information. These information and communication systems should have coordinated linkages within the information 'family' of the United Nations.

CARICOM has also taken note of the new accent in the Department's report on the need for strengthened and improved coordination between the many other departments which have an

information and communications role within the United Nations and we express the hope that this will lead to the creation of a new access portal for information on the United Nations. CARICOM believes that the creative use of information technology can assist in ensuring this improved access.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM delegations have noted the report prepared by the DPI on the reorientation of activities in the field of public information and communications, contained in document A/AC.198/2002/2 of 25 March 2002, in accordance with resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001 which, in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003, requested the Secretary-General to 'conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the DPI, including the effectiveness and efficiency and operations of the Department keeping in mind the priorities and mandates of the United Nations'.

We appreciate the immense task to be faced by the Department, Mr. Chairman, as it endeavours to maximize the use of limited resources in the conduct of its public information and communication mandate. It is clear that many of the tasks undertaken by the Department have, over the years, proved indispensable to Member States and this is but one of the various challenges in any review process.

CARICOM supports the view that the Department could benefit from a reorganization of its activities thus ensuring the efficient utilization of limited resources, minimizing the likelihood of duplication of activities and ensuring that the work of the Department is focused on its primary goals and mandates. We would however caution that in the need to achieve this greater efficiency, important gains made in the field of information and its dissemination are not eroded to the detriment of various countries and regions.

The dual role of the DPI in:

1. providing information for Member States; and
2. in coordinating outreach activities in sending out the message of the United Nations, must be emphasised.

It is in this context that CARICOM supports the efforts of the DPI in trying to redefine itself through the development of a clear mission statement. We have noted that the proposed mission statement incorporates a multi-pronged approach to the management and coordination of information, information dissemination on the work of the Organization, and the provision of information to target audiences. The envisaged role to be played by the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions in this process is noteworthy and will greatly assist the Department in fulfilling the various tasks which are entrusted to it.

We particularly welcome the emphasis on the development of a culture of communications in the United Nations.

CARICOM delegations are also supportive of the Department's intention to focus on major issues identified by the United Nations Secretary-General, namely poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, terrorism and the needs of the African continent. In this regard, CARICOM believes that there should be a clear relationship between the United Nations Secretary-General's Road Map for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the focus on the activities of the DPI.

The issue of peacekeeping and the improvement of the public information capacity of peacekeeping and other field missions also needs to be kept constantly in view.

Information which is provided through media, such as radio, is essential to promoting awareness and understanding of Peace Accords and of the United Nations Mandate.

## **Radio**

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM delegations have noted the express intent of the Department to evaluate its performance on the basis of results-based budgeting. While we can support the need for an evaluation process based on such criteria we would urge that any evaluation take into account the impact that the work of the Department is having on various regions. In other words, evaluations should not be solely based on the "numbers crunch" but on the information, communication and educational impact that the Department's activities are having on Member States, in particular those in developing countries.

We note that the Department has indicated the need for a systematic evaluation of the live radio project. The report produced by the DPI highlights the fact that the current pilot radio programmes reach a listenership of some 180 million persons around the globe. Again we would urge that an assessment of the impact of these programmes be based not only in terms of the numbers of active listeners, but on the effect that these programmes have on certain regions in providing information on the United Nations and its activities.

CARICOM is pleased with the programming provided by the Caribbean Radio Unit of the DPI. In the past year, there has been an increase in the number of privately owned radio stations requesting access to these daily broadcasts. It is noted that these privately owned radio stations cater to an expanded demographic range, namely those in the 16-18 plus group, which comprise a significant component in the audience of

these stations. Additionally, the use of the available information technology has meant that these programmes are being disseminated more efficiently from the United Nations to the Caribbean.

We wish to urge that the radio pilot programmes for the Caribbean be instituted on a more permanent basis. Moreover, while the current programmes are of immense benefit to our region, we believe that additional programmes, which are more Caribbean in focus, could

complement these. We therefore see as imperative that the requisite resources, including personnel, be made available to the Caribbean Radio Unit within the DPI to facilitate this process.

CARICOM also calls for the reinstatement of the Caribbean Magazine Programme, which was a valuable resource tool for a wide cross section of Caribbean society, in particular, the academic community. We also continue to call on the DPI to fulfill its obligations under resolution 38/82B of 15 December 1983 to introduce radio programming in Creole for Haiti.

## **Publications**

Mr. Chairman,

The DPI has indicated its intention to consolidate the production of DPI publications within the Department's organizational structure. We note that this will be taken in the context of the wider review to be undertaken of the United Nation's publication and information materials, mandated under General Assembly resolution 56/253.

CARICOM concurs with the position that a review of the publications to be issued by the Secretariat should be conducted. This review should also be based on the continuing benefit and relevance of these publications to the needs and mandates of the Organisation, which have evolved since its inception in 1945. Publications such as the UN Yearbook and the UN Chronicle are valuable reference and information tools for the wider public. Due note has been taken of the concerns expressed by the DPI with regard to production costs of these publications. CARICOM would wish to support the intention of the DPI to investigate creative ways and means, including the use of technology, to assist in the reduction of production costs for publications such as the UN Chronicle. Another aspect which could be considered is that of a reduction in the number of hard copies produced for each publication, but it must be borne in mind that an over reliance on technological means to disseminate valuable resource material on the United Nations could disadvantage those areas of the world which are still on the margins of the information technology revolution.

Mr. Chairman,

The immense benefit of the press releases produced by the Department to CARICOM delegations to the United Nations cannot be overemphasized. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, these press releases are of benefit to small permanent missions with limited staff in providing information on the various meetings, which take place. We therefore urge the DPI to continue with the production of these press releases.

## **Libraries**

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM delegations commend the Dag Hammarskjöld Library on the attainment of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We are pleased at the level of the support offered by the Library to

Permanent Missions and wish to state that the training programmes conducted by the Library are of immense benefit in equipping staff of the Permanent Missions to make effective use of the Library and its research resources.

With regard to depository libraries, CARICOM is of the view that assistance should be made available to facilitate their reorganization. We commend the efforts of the DPI in seeking to make these institutions more geared to the needs of Member States by conducting regional training programmes for depository librarians in developing countries. Additionally, in keeping with the United Nations' role expressed through the DPI in providing information to the wider United Nations community, these libraries should be made more accessible to the public in the Member States in which they are located.

## **United Nations Information Centres (UNICs)**

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM continues to emphasize the importance of the United Nations Information Centres to our region. We support the need for maximization of limited resources, which are made available to information centers and recognize the diverse roles to be played by these centers in providing information and in enhancing the role of the United Nations.

We continue to call for the establishment of an enhanced information component in the UNDP Multi-island Office in Kingston, Jamaica, which will complement the UNIC Office in Trinidad and Tobago, which now serves the entire Caribbean.

## **Outreach**

CARICOM wishes to commend the DPI for the innovative ways it is seeking to commemorate the various special activities, which are of importance to the United Nations. We note that constraints of time and monetary resources may lead to the commemoration of various activities on a more modest scale.

We have always been appreciative of the tenor and content of the exhibitions which have been held at the United Nations because such exhibitions provide an effective way of information dissemination on important topics on the international agenda and promote the work of the United Nations.

In order to have increased public outreach at both the international and national levels, the Department is encouraged to seek ways to promote more traveling exhibitions, such as the one held recently on Small Arms which was a great success. The use of private communication companies and channels which focus on documentaries related to issues of importance to the United Nations should also be explored.

Mr. Chairman,

The DPI's coverage of major international conferences continues to be of importance. CARICOM delegations were pleased with the coverage of the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March and of the recently-concluded Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid. CARICOM also appreciates the efforts of the Department in promoting upcoming events such as the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children to be held in early May, the World Summit on Sustainable Development scheduled for August/September 2002 and the ongoing promotion of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

As this year marks the Twentieth Anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, CARICOM calls on the DPI to coordinate with the Division of Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DIOLOS) in promoting and commemorating this occasion.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, CARICOM wishes to commend the DPI for its creative use of available technology and resources as it seeks to carry out its many and diverse tasks. We continue to believe, Mr. Chairman, that the Department plays an invaluable role in ensuring the dissemination of information on the United Nations and its activities around the world and we congratulate the Department for its efforts in seeking to develop a clear and coordinated information and communication strategy which will serve the needs of the peoples of the world.

Thank you.