

## **Statement by the delagation of Spain, on behalf of the European Union (22 April 2002)**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, align themselves with this statement.

First of all, I would like to congratulate DPI for the timely and excellent reports presented this year to the Committee on Information. The European Union and the countries aligned with this statement wishes also to expresses its appreciation for the constructive interaction between the management of the Department of Public Information, the European Union and all the Members of the Committee on Information.

Mr. Chairman,

As we will be celebrating World Press Freedom day on 2 May next, I would like to reiterate the European Union commitment with the freedom of expression and information. The EU charter of Fundamental Rights provides that freedom of expression is a universal right regardless of frontiers, and that the freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

Freedom of expression is a theme of pivotal importance for the EU, and is often the first casualty of regimes which do not respect human rights. Independent media is a crucial element of democracy building, and informs the domestic and international community about human rights problems, thus contributing to the transparency of public administration. Beside the funds devoted by individual EU Member States to foster the freedom of press in developing countries the European Commission has allocated 5 million euro during 2002 and 8 million euro for 2003/2004 for this cause.

It is regrettable that in many nations in the world a free press does not exist and that the exchange of information is controlled and limited. We strongly condemn the use of violence to silence journalists or otherwise obstructing their work and more in general we condemn attempts to control or influence the media with the aim of distorting or suppressing information and opinions. We mourn those journalists that gave their lives in doing their job in countries all over the world.

Mr. Chairman,

The rapid market and technological advances that are taking place in the area of information and communications technologies have an impact on almost all areas of society, not only in the north, but also in developing countries. The so called "digital revolution" generates truly global information flows and profoundly changes the way businesses, markets, politics and also international organizations as United Nations work.

Information and Communication Technologies offer both challenges and promises for social and economic development and this is nowhere more apparent than in the world's poorest

countries. ICTs are not to be considered in isolation, but as part an parcel of an overall development strategy. They offer significant opportunities to decrease social and economic inequalities and to support sustainable local wealth creation, thus helping achieve the broader development goals. However, on the other hand, if misapplied ICTs might result in a further marginalisation of the poor, thus adding a digital dimension to the existing social and economic inequalities in and amongst developing countries.

As with other development challenges, the decision to embrace these new opportunities belongs to developing countries themselves and the relevant stakeholders, notably the local communities. Ownership by them is indispensable. For its part the international community can play a pro-active role, by pointing to the potential benefits of new policies and assisting interested countries in designing appropriate policies in function of their situation and priorities.

The EU is committed to play a more proactive role in the use of the information and communication technologies in the fight against poverty. Beside the efforts displayed by the individual EU Member States, the European Commission is becoming more actively involved in this area. It has recently approved a 63.5 million euro ICT regional program in favour of Latin America, that comes on the top of comparable programs for Asia and the Mediterranean.

As stated in the General Assembly Resolution on the World Summit on the Information Society there is an "urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration".

Both in the context of the international policy debate on ICTs and as regards the provision of operational support the EU institutions and Member States have played a very active and sometimes leading role. The European Parliament has spoken clearly on the subject, putting the new technologies in the context of poverty alleviation and the need to ensure that poor people benefit from it.

The EU continues to actively take part in the ongoing initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide. We are sure that the international community will be able to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information. In this regard we look forward to our continued work in the ICT Task Force, the results of the UN General Assembly meeting devoted to information and communication technologies for development on 17.-18. June 2002 and to our active participation in the preparation of the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

The European Union and the countries aligned with this statement take note with interest of the information activities displayed by DPI in Afghanistan, East Timor and Sierra Leone; and will seek clarification on the coordination and common strategy between DPKO and the Department of Public Information to strengthen capacity of information components in United Nations peacekeeping operations,

Mr. Chairman,

Our group gives full support for the ongoing reform process of the Department of Public Information, warmly welcoming the report on the reorientation. It builds on ideas we have put forward over the past years, regarding performance, effectiveness and efficiency. In this regard there are fundamental and important questions that require a clear answer by the Member States.

The European Union understands that the report of the Secretary General on the reorientation of activities in the field of public information and communication is an important part of the comprehensive review of DPI to be presented at the 57th session. The Committee of Information will have to bear in mind that review of DPI is a work in progress, to be followed up during the 57th session.

The EU looks forward to provide feedback to the review report of the DPI. Let me, for the sake of clarity, briefly summarize the preliminary ideas the EU wishes to table for the reorientation process. In our view a culture of public information and communications should permeate all levels and all Departments of the Organization and DPI should:

- Use the Millennium Declaration as a crystal clear guide, to orient its work toward major issues.
- Work primarily through intermediaries.
- Move towards a new " evaluation culture " of increased performance management.
- Rely on reaching the public through existing external media to a greater degree than at present.

Our group sharing the "importance of multilingualism in the United Nations public relations and information activities", underlined by Resolution 56/262 of 15 February 2002, wishes to express its view that all the possible efforts to keep the plurality represented by the adequate use of the six UN official languages and also, to the extent possible, in other available languages, in its external relations and in its public information outputs should be displayed.

The audio-visual sector is a crucial one. We want to bring to the attention of the Committee the close practical cooperation that is going on between the EU and DPI mainly in the audio-visual sector with the regular weekly broadcast of all UN TV programming through Europe by Satellite. This helps ensure that Europeans are better informed about the UN's role and activities in the world.

Our group emphasizes that UN radio and Television should take full advantage of the technological infrastructure made available in recent years (satellite platforms, ICT technology, internet etc.). In this regard we think that it will be useful to ask the Secretary General to study the feasibility of establishing a UN global satellite TV network.

Other issues as the United Nations information centres and United Nations field offices, or the way DPI should use traditional means of communication, radio, television and publications, warrant as well detailed consideration.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman I reiterate that European Union and the countries aligned with this statement are looking forward to the debate within the Committee on Information in the usual

spirit of co-operation and consensus aimed at finding the right answers to make the choices we have to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.