

Statement by H.E. Mr. Patrick Kennedy, United States Representative for United Nations Management and Reform (23 April 2002)

The United States extends its appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee and the other members of the bureau for their continuing efforts. The United States welcomes Mr. Tharoor's statement of April 22 and its initial thoughts on the revitalization of the Department of Public Information (DPI). We are currently in the process of carrying out a very important exercise — that of helping DPI better position itself to more effectively carry out its mandates in an ever-changing information environment. This is indeed a difficult and complex task.

I pledge United States support for the Department's efforts and my delegation looks forward to working with all members of this committee in a constructive manner as we consider the many important issues before us. I commend DPI for preparing the reorientation report. Its preliminary outline of the principal issues and findings provides useful information for discussion during the session.

Mr. Chairman,

As the comprehensive review is still in process, my delegation believes that the Committee should meet in a resumed session later this year to consider the final report, as well as the pending report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the UN information centers, and the report on the overall review of UN system library services. Nevertheless, my delegation feels that it is appropriate to comment in a preliminary way on the outline presented.

We agree with the Secretary-General in his Millennium Report that the UN "should adopt the best management practices and technologies available and concentrate on those tasks that reflect the current priorities of Member States." In order for the people of the world to receive the maximum benefit possible from all UN programs, all UN activities must be carefully reviewed, rationalized and prioritized. The comprehensive review must contain far-reaching recommendations and decisions with accompanying commentary which provide us the information needed to both understand the decisions being made by the Department and to make informed judgments. Program managers must tell us, as stated in the reorientation report, "which programmes should be maintained, expanded, or eliminated." Moreover, we stress to DPI as we do with all departments, that it is the responsibility of program managers, pursuant to regulation 5.6 of the PPBME rules and regulations, to review mandates on a regular basis and to make recommendations on activities suitable for termination.

We are pleased to note the Department's intention to focus on the effectiveness of program activities and on the means to measure such effectiveness. We commend the Department for undertaking, as mandated by the principles of results based budgeting, the task of defining the goal of each activity and developing indicators to evaluate whether it is achieving that goal. My delegation also agrees with the Department's assessment that to successfully re-set its priorities, certain low-impact activities will need to be discontinued. And, likewise, we support the Department's efforts to eliminate the duplication and fragmentation of its

functions, to more effectively coordinate within the Secretariat, and to refine the substantive content received from other Secretariat Departments rather than create its own content.

With this in mind, we believe we must take a close look at the UN Chronicle. What is its impact? How widely is it read on a regular basis? To quote from the Secretary-General's report: "The world is already suffering from information overload; the sheer volume of the material that assails the public, from newspapers, radio, television, and now the Internet, means that we are seeking to be heard amidst a cacophony." We must ask if the professional time and other costs involved in producing this publication are justified in relation to its readership and impact. Unlike the Yearbook of the United Nations, which is a comprehensive and authoritative review of all UN activities and the main reference work of record of the Organization, the Chronicle generally contains information that readers can easily find elsewhere, and, in our view, the human and financial resources in question should be reprogrammed towards other DPI activities, perhaps, for example, to enhance the multilingual nature of the UN web site.

Mr. Chairman,

Concerning the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, my delegation is pleased to note that a reprioritization of functions is being contemplated. In our view, the Library's technical services functions, including cataloging and indexing, should be automated and rationalized and the considerable professional expertise present in the Library should be devoted to priority Secretariat-wide information support activities. In this regard, I would like to commend the Library for working with other UN system libraries in upgrading and expanding the reach of UNCAPS — the web-based catalog of UN system library holdings.

On the question of UN conferences, my delegation is pleased to note that the Department is looking at ways to better coordinate its activities with the substantive Departments concerned. We also note that DPI managers have been actively working in the United Nations Communications Group to develop and coordinate joint inter-agency communications strategies on priority issues, often in preparation for major conferences and other events. I commend the Department for agreeing to coordinate establishment of a central Internet portal for the United Nations which will encompass all web sites of UN system organizations, with a view to developing a system-wide search facility.

Mr. Chairman,

While awaiting the results of various reviews being conducted, I commend the Department for its efforts aimed at rationalizing the current ad hoc arrangement of UN information centers. The UN houses initiative coupled with the contemplated regional information center "hub" arrangement offers the potential to provide centralized and system-wide public information, educational and other outreach services to the 120 countries that do not currently host a UN information center or other DPI office. There is ample opportunity for better coordination, cooperation, and consolidation of UN system-wide field offices. I encourage the Department to work through the UN Communications Group in furtherance of these information center-related issues.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation continues to be impressed by DPI's continuing enhancement of the UN web site. We note, in particular, the creation of the multilingual "UN Action Against Terrorism" page following the tragic events of September 11 and the excellent "UN Works" page. We continue to question the need for DPI to employ an outside contractor to rationalize the web site. Web site rationalization and enhancement should be done with the in-house expertise DPI has cultivated since it began developing the UN's web site in 1995. The linkage of the Official Document System (ODS) with the public and freely-accessible UN web site and the availability of all parliamentary documents in the six official languages will significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the site and further the goals of the Organization, leading to efficiencies throughout the UN system by eliminating the duplicate formatting and posting of documents. The Department's web site team, when preparing new pages, has already adopted the practice of linking to the official versions of documents on the ODS rather than carrying out the time-consuming exercise of re-formatting and posting documents. I thank the Information Technology Services Division in the Office of Central Support Services for ensuring that the required technological infrastructure is in place to accommodate linkage of the ODS to the UN web site and also for ensuring that all six official languages will be fully supported and searchable. I also commend DPI for addressing issues of ODS content management. My delegation will be circulating a proposal requesting the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session in 2003 on the impact on the functioning of the ODS following implementation of the full multilingual support function and on the feasibility of providing free, public access to the ODS through a linkage with the UN web site. We will also call on the Committee to express its intention to decide to make the ODS freely and publicly available following the expected successful completion of the trial period.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States agrees on the need for a systematic evaluation of the international radio broadcasting project, especially given the General Assembly's approval of the project for an initial two-year period. We are pleased that the Department will ask participating stations to provide detailed listenership surveys to better facilitate DPI's evaluation of these radio programs and, in turn, to better inform the Committee's decision whether to continue the program in the 2004-2005 biennium. The Committee's application of the so-called "sunset provision" in deciding to continue the radio project for an initial two-year period subject to further Committee evaluation, should serve as a model for Committee action when considering other programs. In light of the need to reprioritize activities on a regular basis and to carry out ongoing evaluation of all activities, programs should be routinely established for limited periods of time and continued only after detailed evaluation. My delegation looks forward to the Secretary-General's report on the radio project which will be considered by the Committee at its twenty-fifth session in 2003.

Mr. Chairman,

On the question of peacekeeping, while appreciating the Department's efforts to enhance its support for peacekeeping operations and for political and peace-building missions including its promotional and other information-support activities, my delegation questions the Secretariat's request for additional resources in the support account for backstopping peacekeeping operations. It is my delegation's view that such a request for additional funding should be held in abeyance pending consideration of the comprehensive review of DPI.

My delegation will be seeking the support of Committee members in adopting language re-asserting the role of this Committee as the main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations relating to the work of the Department and emphasizing the importance of ensuring that recommendations relating to the work of the Department be considered, to the extent possible, in this Committee. The Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly concluded that, as far as possible, the same questions or the same aspects of a question should not be considered by more than one Committee. The General Assembly, in resolution 2837 (XXVI) of December 17, 1971, approved the conclusions of the Special Committee and decided that they should be annexed to the Rules of Procedure (Annex V). Over the last few years, decisions have been taken in the Fifth Committee on specific program issues concerning DPI that were not recommended by the Department or this Committee, including the recent establishment of two new posts in DPI. Not only was the recent decision to establish these professional posts not recommended by the Department or approved by this Committee, it was not considered by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Committee for Program and Coordination (CPC). It is incumbent upon us to follow established procedures. The decision to allocate such resources should have been considered by the appropriate bodies of the General Assembly and in light of priorities as established by all Member States.

Mr. Chairman,

On Thursday, May 2nd, we will commemorate World Press Freedom Day. I note that last year 31 journalists worldwide were killed in their pursuit of news stories and 120 journalists are currently in prison around the world. A cornerstone of American democracy is freedom of the press, enshrined in our Constitution's Bill of Rights. We strongly believe that a free press is fundamental for true democracy. For this particular body — the Committee on Information — it is important that we recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' affirmation that "everyone has the right to freedom of expression...this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In closing, I would like to again commend the Interim Head of the Department, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, and all members of the Department for their initial efforts, and to reiterate United States support for the Department's reorientation efforts. We eagerly await the final product, including specific prioritization recommendations as called for in resolution 56/253. It is my delegation's intention to work with all members of this Committee to ensure that the reorientation exercise comes to a successful conclusion.

