

Opening Statement of the Chairman of the Committee on Information (28 April 2003)

May I begin stating how deeply beholden I am to you the Members, of this Committee for electing me to your Chair. You thereby do me, and my country Bangladesh great honour and place me in your debt. I should be derelict of my responsibilities were I not to, at the same time, pay high tribute to my distinguished predecessor, and good friend, Ambassador Milos Alcalay for his wise and skilful leadership over the past two years. I shall continue to count on him for support and guidance, and surely take him up on the assurances of the same that he has provided. It is our good fortune that the DPI right now should be headed by a person of such prodigious qualities as Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor. It seems to me that he is the right person, at the right place, at the right time, and I look forward to working with him to carry forward the task of transformation of the DPI in consonance with the vision of the Membership, and of the Secretary-General.

As we are all doubtless aware, this 25th Session of the Committee is taking place against the matrix of extraordinarily trying time. In many ways our resolve and commitment, that had originally led us to create and shape the United Nations is being severely tested. Yet at this time if the question is posed to the peoples of the world if we need the Organization today as much as we did when it was first set up, the response of the overwhelming majority would be a resounding "yes". In a world that will sadly continue to be riven with conflicts and turmoil, a forum for dialogue and deliberations will always be required. When great calamities occur, man made and natural, massive humanitarian aid will be needed to be reached to the victims. When human rights abuses take place, and they still unfortunately do, often flagrantly and with impunity, we will need the Organization to bear witness and to condemn them. We cannot afford to allow development assistance, as delivered by the UN without political strings, to disappear. Above all, now, more than ever before we will need the UN to bring to fruition the solemn pledges of the Millennium Declaration, to devote the first 15 years of our new Century to bringing about significant improvements in our lives by putting an end to extreme poverty and hunger, widespread illiteracy and disease.

Our meeting also coincides with an important period of reform within the Organization, the second phase, as elaborated in the Secretary General's Report entitled "Strengthening the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change". It contains a number of insightful proposals for the increased efficiency and effectiveness of the DPI. I am happy to be able to say, with a modicum of satisfaction, that I was one of the facilitators working with the President of the General Assembly during consultations on the report. The outcome was Resolution 57/300, adopted by consensus, a clear indication of the prevalent political will in favour of the reforms. Paragraph 12 of the Resolution reaffirms the role of this Committee in guiding the restructuring of the DPI and invites us to engage actively in the process.

Our peers, the Membership of the United Nations, have thus charged us in this Committee with an onerous responsibility. I have no doubt that we shall succeed in discharging it imbued as we are, with new collective thinking and inspired as we are by the spirit of progress. It is not merely change for the sake of change we seek, but a transformation of that key

department through a strong and practical action plan, to further empower and adjust it to respond to the realities and challenges of its current tasks. It is through this department that the "voice" of the United Nations will be heard and listened to around the world, through the traditional media and the latest online technologies, and in cooperation and collaboration with a wide array of international partners.

The Committee, and the DPI can play a most useful role in not only being the voice of the global Organization to the peoples of the world, but also being a conduit to the Organization of the views of the peoples from all the regions of the world. This would thus be a two-way traffic. It would enable the identification, collation and transmittal of "best practices". It would facilitate pressing into the service of humanity the positive elements of globalization such as IT that could indeed assist societies who have missed the bus of progress to 'leap-frog' stages of development. This Committee will need to pay particular attention to the concerns of the developing countries of the South. Our actions must be guided by the need to focus on the developmental goals we have set for ourselves, such as the Millennium Declaration and MDG's. Much thinking will need to be done to organize ourselves thus, but I know for certain we have the intellectual resources and capabilities to address ourselves to these tasks.

The Department is to be congratulated for the timely issuance of the five reports on the various aspects of its work. There is also the additional report, document A/57/747 prepared by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review and structure of the operations of UN information centres. These have been placed before us for our consideration and action. The report before us on the reorientation of information UN activities in the field of public has a major sector on the areas of higher priority for the DPI containing important proposals on the information centres, multilingualism, and the UN web-site, and evaluation activities. We welcome the creative approach of DPI on these issues. We must review the new strategic vision carefully and accord the Department necessary support and guidance.

May I remind you that the General Assembly will be considering the proposed programme budget for 2004-05 this autumn. In this connection, Assembly resolution 52/220 stressed the role of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, such as our Committee, in the consideration of the [narrative of the of the] proposed programme budget. It is therefore, incumbent upon us to carefully examine the programmatic aspects of the proposed budget for the DPI which is set out in report A/AC.198/2003/3.

This Committee has long registered its concern about the burgeoning digital divide between the developed and developing countries with regard to ICT. It will be our task to encourage the DPI to play a strong role in the preparations leading up to the World Summit on Information Society, scheduled for late this year, and for 2005, so that the Summit can have a positive and lasting impact.

We will, soon, hold our traditional commemoration of World Press Freedom Day. In course of doing so, we will pay tribute to journalists in conflict situations. We will do honour those journalists lost their lives in the line of duty during the Iraq war. We will also pay homage to those who relentlessly labour around the world for the sake of peace, freedom, human rights, justice, equity and for the removal of poverty and human suffering, often in the face of great

adversity, but always with courage and determination. This world would be poorer without them.

We must all aim at making this a fruitful and successful session. This will not be possible without the support and cooperation of the total membership. We are lucky to be served by a most efficient Secretary Ms. Therese Gastaut, and a set of skilled professional staff. For my own part I shall try and make my best contribution. There is no reason why through our combined endeavours we should not be able to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves. It is true our world may at times appear divided. But there is no reason we should not try to bring harmony where there is chaos and conflict, and unity where there is division, by helping the creation of universal values, by opening, as the Poet Rabindranath Tagore had urged us to do, the windows of our hearts and minds to allow for the free flow of ideas and cultures from around the world.