

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Stafford Neil, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (29 April 2003)**

Mr. Chairman,

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

I have great pleasure in congratulating you on your election as Chairman of this Committee. CARICOM is confident that under your astute and able guidance, the deliberations of this year's session of the Committee will have a positive outcome. I also wish to express my appreciation to Ambassador Milos Alcalay, for his admirable chairmanship of the Committee during the previous two sessions.

Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information, should be commended for the timely submission of the reports before the Committee for its consideration. The Department of Public Information is to be congratulated for the quality of these reports which will be useful to the Committee as it seeks to fulfil its mandate in providing direction and guidance to the department. I also wish to thank Mr. Tharoor for his comprehensive overview of the current work of the Department which was provided to the Committee at its opening session.

CARICOM delegations align themselves fully with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. CARICOM would wish however to elaborate on a number of issues which are of special significance to us as a region.

## **Reorientation**

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM delegations have noted with interest the report prepared by the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications contained in document A/AC.198/2003/2. We observe that the process of restructuring of the DPI continues to be incremental and builds on previous efforts whilst ensuring that the work of the Department continues to be focussed on its primary goals and mandates.

The focus of the DPI has been summarised in its Mission statement which outlines the two fold nature of its mandate namely that of communication and outreach. We support the new structure which has been developed for the DPI, namely Strategic Communications,

Outreach, News and Media as a useful framework within which to orient the work of the department.

CARICOM notes that the work of the department will continue to be based on the key message of the Millennium Declaration namely, the eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the fight against terrorism and the needs of the African continent. CARICOM reaffirms the importance of these areas as the main priorities for the work of the DPI and notes that other important areas of focus include the preparation of media materials for such upcoming international events as the current International Year of Freshwater and the World Summit on the Information Society. We also hope that similar media material will be prepared in connection with the Barbados plus 10 international meeting to be held in Mauritius in 2004.

We attach particular significance to the indication that the DPI is seeking to be in a position to respond to the unpredictable and fast-moving events around the world by providing information services on UN action in critical situations. This is a development which we welcome.

CARICOM also notes the intention of the DPI to incorporate gender mainstreaming into the design of public information products and activities. It is to be hoped that such a welcome focus will be of added value to the work of the Department and we would wish to be advised of specific steps the Department intends to take in this regard.

CARICOM also supports the goal of the DPI to disseminate the message of the United Nations using both traditional and modern means and notes that the resources allocated to each function will be subject to continuing review. As stated in previous interventions made by CARICOM before this Committee, these reviews should continue to target the numbers as well as the impact of these functions on their primary users.

The establishment of the Strategic Communications Division is a welcome development and that this division is expected to provide a coherent and coordinated approach to the communications function of the DPI.

One of the areas of concentration in this new division will be that of information provided on peacekeeping operations. The value of information in consolidating peacekeeping and peace building cannot be overemphasised. CARICOM is of the view that information, with significant local content, plays a considerable role in improving the public information capacity on peacekeeping and field missions. This exercise can also contribute to the prevention of further conflict.

In terms of the consolidation of the outreach component of the Department, CARICOM notes the involvement of civil society in this area. Additionally, we continue to support the holding of exhibitions as important tool in portraying the UN message. These exhibitions should be mounted through the use of creative approaches so as to take into account financial and other resource constraints.

## Radio

Mr. Chairman,

The recent survey on the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations has indicated that these programmes reach approximately 133 million people. Of this figure approximately 1.5 million listeners are from the Caribbean region. This would seem to highlight the importance of radio as a universal, accessible medium. CARICOM therefore advocates the continuation of this project and urges that resources continue to be devoted to this activity.

We are pleased with the programming provided by the Caribbean Radio Unit of the DPI through the United Nations Radio in the Caribbean. The use of improved technology and linkages has increased the speed and access of radio programmes to the Caribbean. Additionally, the keen interest exhibited by listeners in the Caribbean has meant that radio stations continue to request this programme. We note that radio stations in other Caribbean countries are also requesting access to the radio programme and we support the work of the Secretariat in facilitating these requests.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM is gratified to learn that since January 2003, there have been positive efforts by the DPI to broadcast radio programmes in Creole to Haiti as mandated by resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983. CARICOM takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to the DPI for its work in this area.

At the same time, CARICOM continues to call for at least one more additional programme on the Caribbean and urges that the requisite human and financial resources be made available for this purpose.

## Libraries

Mr. Chairman,

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continues to provide an invaluable service and we are satisfied with the level of support offered by this institution to delegations particularly through the training programmes which are of immense benefit in equipping staff of the Permanent Missions to make effective use of its research resources and facilities. We have noted with interest, the establishment of a Steering Committee for the modernisation and integrated management of United Nations libraries which aims to "blend traditional library functions with advanced technologies". It is noted that the primary aim of this Steering Committee will be to promote and expedite projects to provide instantaneous electronic access to the libraries holdings. In providing this electronic access, CARICOM attaches importance to the continued use of the hard copy format as stated in resolution 57/300, as this provides a useful archival resource.

Additionally in noting the improved management of the library's resources as well as depository libraries, CARICOM wishes to underscore its support for the regional training programmes for depository librarians in developing countries.

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

Mr. Chairman,

As part of the process of UN reform, steps are being taken to rationalise the network of UN information centres through the creation of regional hubs so as to better serve the needs of the Organisation and provide for more effective use of resources.

While such rationalisation is intended to take place following consultations with the concerned countries, CARICOM reiterates that the establishment of such regional hubs take place on a case-by-case basis, sensitive to the unique needs and interests of the region involved.

The UNIC, in many cases, remains a vital link between the UN Organisation and the people it serves. It is in this regard that CARICOM reaffirms the importance of the United Nations Information Centre in Port of Spain, Trinidad and calls for timely attention to its staffing and other requirements.

CARICOM also reaffirms the importance of the establishment of the enhanced information component in the UNDP Multi-Island Office in Kingston, Jamaica to serve as a complement to the UNIC office in Port of Spain. We look forward to the early completion of this project.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to make mention of the important role played by journalists both in live broadcast and in the print medium in the communication and dissemination of information. Events over recent months have brought to attention the extent of globalisation in the field of public media and the dominance of certain networks and organisations in the presentation of news and information. Concern has been expressed from a number of quarters about objectivity, impartiality and balance in the way news is currently reported and presented in the public media. National perspectives are obviously exerting influence over news presentation and there is therefore continued need to ensure diversity in sources for news and information.

The United Nations which has both an objective approach and a broad international perspective should spread its impact as wide as possible to assist in making available greater accuracy and balance in news and information dissemination and in becoming a model for promoting equity in the global information order.

Mr. Chairman,

In concluding, I wish on behalf of CARICOM to welcome Saudi Arabia to the Committee on Information and to express our support for the applications of Switzerland and two fellow CARICOM members, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname for membership in the Committee.

Thank you.