

Statement by the Representative of Brazil, on behalf of the Rio Group (27 April 2004)

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honor to pronounce this statement on behalf of the 19 member states of the Rio Group: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.

At the outset, we wish to extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the preparation of the reports that will serve as the basis for our debates on the agenda items for this session, as well as for the presentation made by the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Shashi Taroor.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Rio Group attaches great importance to the work that the Department on Public Information (DPI) develops, in that, in accordance with its mandate, it divulges the purposes and actions of the United Nations to a public which, if it were to depend solely on the commercial media, would tend to be deprived of access to precise information about our Organization.

We believe it is necessary to work to improve the dissemination of information about the United Nations, so as to raise awareness about the work performed by our Organization, in respect to the maintenance of international peace and security, the furthering of development and the promotion of human rights, among others.

In this context, and keeping in mind the mandate established for the General Assembly by this Committee to make recommendations in regard to the work of the DPI, we avail ourselves of this opportunity to present the Rio Group's vision relative to some of the items of the agenda on the 26th session, with a view to contributing to a greater effectiveness of the system of public information and communications of this Organization.

First of all, we refer to the proposal of regionalization, contemplated in report A/AC.198/2004/3. This subject has generated resistances on the part of several delegations and, for this reason, we feel it is important to clarify our position.

The Rio Group is in favor of any reform that can make the work of the DPI more effective, particularly in disseminating public information and establishing links to civil society in developing countries, which are the ones that most need it. However, it is not clear that regionalization is the best form to achieve this goal. The first regionalizing experience, which resulted in the creation of a Western European regional center in Brussels, is still too recent to adequately evaluate its results. It is also not evident that this exercise can serve as an example for other regions, with very different socio-economic and technological realities.

We acknowledge that the model of regionalization proposed by the Secretary-General for developing countries differs from that which has been implemented in Europe. The regionalization model proposed for developing countries would consist of the creation of several "Regional Centers", and the maintenance of a UN presence in those countries that would have their UNIC's closed down.

However, we do not believe that a process such as the one described should be initiated, without first contemplating other options.

Thus, it would be of crucial significance for the design of a program applicable to developing countries to know the results of regionalization in Europe; if it has made possible substantive savings; in what way the freed resources have been utilized; and, most importantly, if the quality of the information services has been affected.

It is indispensable to know and approve the criteria employed to determine which centers should be absorbed by Regional Centers. In some cases, eventual deficiencies might easily be overcome with small administrative adjustments or increments in resource allotments.

Upon taking a decision regarding the destiny of a center or its placement, the economy of resources should not be the only factor to be considered, but also, and most importantly, the improvement of the information mechanisms of the United Nations, with a view to the greatest possible public impact, in the most efficient manner.

Although we all understand that the resources at the DPI's disposal are scarce, it does not seem apparent to us that the best way to save is by closing small UNIC's in developing countries, where in some cases the installations are provided for by the local governments.

In this sense, upon analysis of the possible reduction of expenses generated by the closing down of a UNIC, the amount of savings should be considered in comparison with the amount that would be necessary to improve its functioning.

In this line, one could arrive at the conclusion that the improvement in the quality of services intended with the expansion of the regionalization process could be much greater if, instead of closing small UNIC's, one were to restructure or habilitate them with more resources, freed by the rationalization and consolidation of large UNIC's in the developed world, a process which — indeed — offers the possibility of great savings.

In concluding our remarks on this item, the Rio Group supports the careful study of all the reform possibilities within our reach, so that the DPI — always in consultation with the Member States and within the limits established by the General Assembly — can change its functioning in such a way as to, effectively, improve the public information and communications services of the UN in the world.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Rio Group attaches great importance to multilingualism and, therefore, could not fail to mention the need for this concept to be respected and applied in the dissemination of

information by this Organization. Especially with respect to the UN website, it is necessary to perform the constant work of making all documents available in the six official languages.

We wish, as well, to emphasize the need to double our efforts so that the UN website may be made accessible to persons with disabilities, especially given the relevance that the subject of disability has taken on lately in the United Nations. We encourage the DPI to systematically request the various offices to present their subject matter in accessible formats, as a part of the efforts to create a new conscience in the Organization regarding this issue.

The Rio Group also wishes to manifest its appreciation for traditional forms of communication, in particular radio, which remains an effective and far-reaching media form, especially in developing countries, where access to advanced technologies is many times still limited.

In regard to the ways in which the DPI can contribute to enhance awareness of the work of the General Assembly, we coincide in that it would be useful to establish a closer and more effective working relation between the office of the President of the General Assembly and the Department, as well as between the spokesperson of the President and the office of the spokesperson of the Secretary-General.

Lastly, in regard to the information component of UN peace-keeping operations, the Rio Group notes with concern the gap that exists between public perceptions and current reality, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report A/58/694. Especially if, as indicated in other instances, there exists the possibility that for this reason peacekeeping operations may find themselves undervalued.

As long as this gap exists, we remain indebted to all the people who risk their lives in these operations and still more to those who have sacrificed themselves in service of the most noble ideals of this Organization.

The preparation and dissemination of a message on UN peace-keeping operations, including the conceptual framework in which they are carried out, must be part of the DPI priorities and must be undertaken utilizing all available resources, in an opportune manner and within close and effective coordination with the principal actors involved.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.