

Statement by H.E. Ms. Philomena Murnaghan, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, on behalf of the European Union (26 April 2004)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania, the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Lichtenstein and the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro align themselves with this statement.

Mr. Chairman,

Please allow me to begin by congratulating the Department of Public Information (DPI) for the timely presentation of its reports to the Committee on Information (COI). The set of concise and detailed reports which they have provided will help us all to fully understand the work of DPI, and will assist us in our deliberations. We fully acknowledge the Department's determined efforts to meet the complex demands of a challenging, efficiency oriented and productivity-targeted environment.

The European Union and the countries aligned with this statement also express their appreciation for the constructive interaction between the DPI and the members of the COI. This engagement is essential to ensure that we meet our shared objective of providing a quality and focussed information service to the UN family, and to the wider public. In the deliberations which follow our open session, I would like to assure you that the EU is committed to working closely with the other members of the committee to reach a shared view of the way forward for all our benefit.

The EU remains fully supportive of the important role that DPI plays. We are convinced that the United Nations should continue its efforts to enhance the provision of information to the peoples of the world about its aims and activities. The new strategic direction embraced by DPI offers an important opportunity to further rationalise and optimise its activities, to maximise the efficient use of its resources, and to enhance the visibility and impact of its operations.

The EU would also like to pay a special tribute to Madame Thérèse Gastaut, the Director of DPI's Strategic Communications Division and the Secretary of this Committee and Ms. Phyllis Dickstein, the Head Librarian at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, for their significant contributions to the work of the United Nations and wish them both well in their retirements.

Reorientation of UN activities

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased that the process of the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications is continuing, as set out in the Report of the Secretary General. The EU is convinced that those activities should encompass a strong support for and the widest possible cooperation with the national public awareness campaigns conducted by the Member States with the view to bring to the societies a better knowledge of UN activities and its achievements. We commend DPI for its efforts to meet the various challenges that it faced in 2003, and also its efforts to develop a more strategic approach to promoting global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the UN in priority areas. We urge DPI to continue the ongoing process of reform to enhance the effectiveness of its work.

The EU welcomes the broad based restructuring of DPI which has now been completed. With a new organisational structure, mission statement and operating model, we believe that DPI has the tools that it needs to carry out its activities in a focussed and effective manner. In this regard, we welcome the proposed biennial programme plan for DPI's activities for the biennium 2006-2007. This should be an important tool in helping DPI fulfil the substantive aims of the UN in its task of strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the organisation to achieve the greatest impact.

At the heart of DPI's work is its mission statement. The EU is pleased to see that the DPI's mission statement echoes the guiding orientation set out in the Millennium Declaration and focuses on key priorities such as poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the fight against international terrorism and the needs of the African continent. We believe that the revolution in information technology and the advances in communications must be harnessed to enhance our shared goal of social development and economic growth.

As regards DPI's new strategic approach, we welcome the focus on a new client-oriented approach; greater system wide coordination and the embedding of a culture of evaluation into the work of the Department. These three reference points bring a new focus to the work of the Department.

The introduction of a concept of Secretariat departments as clients, which identify their own priorities, and DPI as a service provider, should make the work of the Department more responsive and targeted.

The EU also believes that effective system-wide coordination is essential to develop a coherent approach to the delivery of the UN's message. As outlined in the reorientation report, better coordination also needs to extend to the field presence of the UN. In this regard, it is a welcome step forward that the heads of UN Information Centres have become fully-fledged members of the UN country team in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The EU also believes that the activities of the UN Communication Group remains central to the aim of having a more coordinated approach, and we welcome the detailed report by DPI on the activities of the group.

We are also pleased to see that DPI notes the importance of a culture of evaluation. We welcome the development of an annual programme impact review to systematically evaluate DPI's products and activities. We share the view that the continuing promotion and refinement of a culture of evaluation and performance management should be an integral part of the reorientation of the DPI. The EU believes that self-evaluation and performance management are essential for the success of a large and complex organisation such as DPI. This results based framework, similar to that of the programme budget, should be part of the daily work of programme managers. We encourage DPI to continue its efforts to deepen the culture of evaluation in every aspect of its activities.

We also support the approach taken by DPI in developing a cooperative framework with international professional organisations in the communications field. The use of partnerships and intermediaries will help DPI leverage its activities and maximise their public impact. In this regard, we commend the innovative efforts of DPI to outreach to NGOs through a live web-cast of the DPI/NGO Conference on "Human Security and Dignity".

With regard to the functioning of the Official Document system (ODS), the European Union welcomes the progress which has been made in upgrading the existing proprietary system to a new open system. We note that this is due to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2004. We encourage the efforts which are underway to identify and fill gaps in the ODS to ensure that the system becomes a more complete multilingual repository of United Nations documentation. We look forward to hearing more details from DPI on progress in this regard.

The UN web-site is becoming an increasingly important information resource for the UN family, and for the wider public. It continues to register an increasing number of hits, reflecting the relevance of the UN's work, and the wide public interest in its activities across the globe. We welcome the efforts which DPI has made to make the web-site more relevant, through the use of innovations such as live web-casts of important debates and meetings. We also welcome the efforts of DPI to improve the accessibility of the web-site, through the equitable redeployment of a number of posts to enhance the language capacity of the web-site section and to consolidate design, programming and presentation.

We commend the efforts of DPI to expand the UN's language capacity, and urge the department to continue its good work in this field. However, we note that only one department other than DPI has made its content on the website available in all six official languages. We recognise that the responsibility for achieving greater language parity on the web site should not fall to DPI alone, and urge all programme managers within the UN to intensify their efforts in this regard.

The EU also draws attention to the importance of the provision of public information on UN Peacekeeping activities. The EU believes that DPI should play a central role in enhancing public awareness of this crucial UN activity. We welcome the efforts of DPI to develop a strategy to publicise new peacekeeping missions, particularly in Africa. We also welcome the efforts underway to effectively deploy public information components in new peacekeeping missions, and encourage DPI and DPKO to further enhance their co-ordination in this regard.

UNICs

Mr. Chairman,

The EU supports the restructuring of DPI, including as stated in action 8 of the Secretary General's Report on the strengthening of the United Nations, through the implementation of the rationalisation of the network of UN information centres around regional hubs in consultation with concerned member states.

As outlined in the Secretary General's report on the Rationalisation of the network of UN Information Centres, the establishment of the Regional United Nations Information Centre (RUNIC) in Brussels is of particular significance to Member States of the European Union. The centre was officially inaugurated on 30 January 2004, and will serve as the principal source of information on the UN for the countries of Western Europe. We welcome the proposed new model for the regionalisation of UN information centres, as set out in the Report on the Rationalisation of the network of UN Information Centres, as providing a good basis for further rationalisation that builds upon the progress which has been achieved through the establishment of the RUNIC in Brussels, while recognising the need to adapt the model to the geographic and cultural characteristics of each region. We offer full support for the implementation of this process in order successfully to meet the Secretary-general's deadline for completing regionalisation in 2006. We should be interested in seeing a firm timetable in due course for the various stages of implementation in different regions. The EU believes that this reform should also be an opportunity to reinforce multilingualism in the communications activities of the United Nations.

Radio

Mr. Chairman,

The use of radio broadcasting as a means of disseminating information about the UN and its activities remains the most cost-effective and far reaching traditional media available. We believe that DPI should continue to build partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters to extend the UN message to all parts of the world. It should also continue to focus on enhancing all six official languages, as well as Portuguese, in order to meet the needs of an ever-increasing listenership.

Libraries

The EU welcomes the report on the "Modernisation and integrated management of UN libraries and an in-depth review of library activities" which has been provided in accordance with resolution 56/253. This report will be a useful tool in helping the Committee to evaluate the effort to enhance the work of UN libraries.

The EU also appreciates the information set out in the report in relation to the work of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of UN Libraries. We believe that this committee is central to efforts to develop and implement strategies which are

intended to achieve a more modern, efficient and accessible library system within the UN system, as an important step in the reform process. We note the achievements to date, including progress in the UN's archival collections; bibliographic control of UN documents and collaborative reference services as set out in the Secretary General's report. We look forward to hearing more details of progress in such areas as developing a common web-site for UN libraries; further collection development and inter-agency collaboration.

World Press Freedom Day

As we prepare for World Press Freedom day on 3 May, it is important to reflect on the challenges which journalists and media workers have faced over the last year. The European Union would like to reiterate its commitment to a free press and its important role in a free society.

Regrettably, once again in 2003 many journalists died in the course of their work across the globe. As well as remembering all those who have died, we also recall the loss of a young member of DPI, Reham Al-Farra, who was killed along with 21 other United Nations staff in the attack on UN HQ in Baghdad last August. It is fitting that the Department's training programme for broadcasters and journalists for developing countries commemorates Reham al-Farra. Her death, and the loss of many other talented and committed media personnel and journalists, is a sobering reminder of the cost of freedom of expression. We mourn those journalists who gave their lives, and express our sympathies to their families.

It is a cause of profound concern that in many countries press freedom does not exist, and the dissemination of information is controlled and limited. We would like to remind the Committee that the freedom of opinion and expression is a right set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right includes the "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

We strongly condemn the use of violence to hinder the activities of journalists, and also condemn attempts to control or influence the media by distorting or suppressing information or opinions. We believe that the freedom of the press is essential for a democratic and open society. The establishment of a free press is also one of the indicators of the transition from conflict to a post-conflict society. Indeed it is a crucial tool in preventing the resurgence of conflict.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to underscore the commitment of the European Union and of the countries aligned with this statement to conducting our deliberations during this 26th session of the Committee on Information in the constructive and co-operative manner which has been exhibited in the past, aimed at seeking consensus.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.