

Statement by H.E. Mr. Philip Sealy, Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations (28 April 2004)

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor in this Committee on Information at this Session let me say how pleased I am to see you once again chairing this Committee. We are sure that under your able guidance and leadership the Committee will continue to discharge its responsibilities effectively.

I must also at the outset express my delegation's deep appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor for his detailed introductory presentation of the several substantive reports that are before the Committee at this session. While my delegation feels that each deserves separate Consideration, we trust that their collective analysis will serve to highlight the interconnection of the very important issues addressed in each one of them.

Speaking so late in this general debate, there is little that can be added to what has already been said by previous speakers. My delegation fully associates itself with the position as outlined by the Permanent Representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77 and China at the beginning of the general debate as well as by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica who spoke on behalf of the CARICOM States that are members of the Committee on Information.

As Trinidad and Tobago is host to one of DPI's Information Centres worldwide, I would wish to confine these brief remarks to the matter of the strengthening of the role of United Nations Information Centres to enable them to carry out the functions assigned to them.

The Secretary General in his Report in Document A/AC.198/2004/3 points out that, notwithstanding that many UNICs in the global network are inadequately staffed and resourced, yet they are mandated to be the official voice of the UN and its Constituent Agencies, Funds and Programmes in the field, and must, in addition, assume the weighty task of bringing to the attention of policy makers, technocrats, academics and to the public at large the full range of activities in which the Organisation is involved.

In order to secure the desired outcomes of this outreach programme, the UNICs require the capacity to interact in a more pro-active manner with the mass communication media in all our Countries. The Caribbean boasts a comparatively high level of literacy, and newspapers, journals and other publications, both daily and weekly, abound. In Trinidad and Tobago alone, a country of a mere 1.2 million inhabitants, the media industry comprises twenty-two radio stations, four television stations, three daily newspapers and several weekly newspapers and magazines. Yet too little information is seen or heard in the media about the work of the UN.

As is noted in the Secretary General's Report, media operations in developing countries are either already web-ready or taking measures to incorporate the new technologies, but perhaps, given the plethora of information sources available on the world wide web, they appear to be oblivious to the various media services and products that are available from DPI

and which can be reprinted or broadcast with proper attribution. News editors of radio stations which are widely listened to throughout the Caribbean and programme managers and news editors of television stations probably find themselves in a similar situation.

All of the foregoing leads my delegation to enquire whether it might not be possible for UNIC Directors as part of their annual work plans, to mount workshops in their areas of jurisdiction targeted at providing key players in the print and electronic media with hands-on information about how they can access the media services and products available from DPI. Perhaps one can envisage, as a result of such workshops, newspapers devoting one page a week to UN information where, for instance, op-ed articles on current topical issues and on other broad thematic issues could be printed.

The whole question of the regionalization of these UNICs has become one of the central elements of this current general debate. We have noted the proposal in paragraph 63 of the same Secretary General's Report to convert the UN Information Centre in Port of Spain into a Sub-regional hub to serve the needs of the English speaking countries of the Eastern and Southern Caribbean and to assign national information staff to Jamaica to serve the information needs of the English speaking countries of the Northern Caribbean. Even if this conversion were to take place, one can immediately see the need for adequate human and financial resources to enable that one office to cover perhaps some eight or nine countries and, at the same time, bring effectively to the attention of their Governments and peoples an increased level of awareness of the activities of the UN. Regionalisation in and of itself is not the complete answer.

The provision of adequate financial resources for DPI's field offices is a matter which requires further attention by the General Assembly. It is regrettable that US\$ 2 million was in fact cut from the savings which had been brought about by the closure of nine Western European UNICs and the subsequent creation of the Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels. The understanding reached at the time was that the monies released would be used specifically for improving multilingualism on the UN website, for assisting UNICs in developing countries and for evaluation of DPI's activities. My delegation accordingly is of the view that, given the importance of the role of DPI and its field offices in disseminating effectively and efficiently the work of the UN in the priority areas established, some way must be found to restore unconditionally to DPI the full savings of US \$3.6 million.

Freedom of the press is among the fundamental human rights and freedoms recognized in Trinidad and Tobago's Constitution, and for this reason, among others, we continue to have an independent, very diverse and active media in Trinidad and Tobago. In recognition, perhaps, of our commitment to a free press, the Commonwealth Association of journalists has recently decided to establish its headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago and its official launching will coincide with the holding of a three day Conference beginning on 3rd May, 2004, which is World Press Freedom Day.

Access to objective, balanced and timely information on global events is a prerequisite for an informed global public opinion and DPI's field offices must continue to play an essential and integral part in the exchange and flow of information globally. Every effort must therefore be

made to ensure that this vital function of projecting the work of the UN in the field can be performed through the provision of adequate human and financial resources.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.