

Statement by H. E. Mr. Stafford Neil, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, and Chairman of the Group of 77 (18 April 2005)

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China congratulates you on your election to the Chairmanship of this twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information. The Group also wishes to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election.

The Group of 77 and China also thanks the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh, Ambassador Iftekhar Chowdhury, for his leadership and guidance of the work of this Committee during its previous two sessions.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group appreciates the detailed and informative presentation made this morning by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, who has provided a useful account of the work undertaken by the Department and the challenges it has faced over the past year. The Under-Secretary-General and his staff have made worthwhile efforts to ensure that the Department of Public Information remains alert to the changing needs in developing the communications strategy of the Organisation.

The Group notes that since the Committee on Information met in its twenty-sixth session, the United Nations has been the focus, primarily in some private media and press agencies, of inordinate attention which has sought to challenge the effectiveness and relevance of the Organisation. The wide publication of these news stories has been damaging to the public image of the United Nations. As detailed in the report by the Secretary-General on the reorientation of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2005/2), the Department has had to mobilise considerable resources in order to counter this negative publicity on the United Nations. While the Organisation should not be shielded from justified criticism, it is regrettable that this type of adverse publicity has overshadowed the other positive areas of work of the United Nations.

We are of the view that the DPI has an indispensable role in promoting a positive public image of the United Nations. The work of the DPI in this area should continue to be carried out in all Member States, particularly in the media of the host country. This is especially important for this year of major United Nations activities. Some positive work has already been done including in the provision of proactive outreach efforts in the wake of the devastating tsunami which occurred on 26 December 2004. The DPI should continue to build on this approach in promoting the positive message of the United Nations.

In spite of these additional challenges encountered by the Department, we are pleased that the DPI has maintained its regular programme and has continued to focus on the promotion of the goals and the objectives of the Millennium Declaration and on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and on issues of developmental priority such as the eradication of poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, the needs of

the African continent and the dialogue among civilisations. Attention should also be paid to the outcomes of the major related United Nations summits and conferences.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China reiterates the importance of the Department as the public voice of the Organisation and in providing accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to Member States and the wider international community on the tasks and the responsibilities of the United Nations. As part of the accountability and transparency of the Organisation, we believe that the Member States should be able to first learn of important events affecting the United Nations through the regular channels, including in particular the DPI, rather than through the private media.

The Group of 77 and China also reaffirms that the DPI is the focal point for information policies of the United Nations and that it is the primary news centre for information about the United Nations and its activities. We therefore stress the importance of ensuring that there be a consistent message between the Department and any other entities which provide public material on the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

The 60th anniversary session of the Organisation to be observed this year and the High Level Summit in September, will provide an opportunity for reform and renewal of the United Nations. In terms of the reform of the DPI however, we can agree with the observation contained in the report of the Secretary-General that the process of reorientation of the Department, undertaken since 2002, has now been completed.

The G-77 and China has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on further rationalisation of the network of United Nations information centres. This report has provided an assessment of the lessons learned from the proposed regional model and based on this, the Group endorses the conclusions of the Secretary-General that no further regionalisation is possible.

The Group reiterates that the presence of United Nations information centres (UNICS) in developing countries, in particular the least developing countries, strengthens the flow of information in these countries and assists in addressing the disparities faced by developing countries in the areas of access to information and information technology.

The G-77 and China wishes to underline that any proposal for the further rationalisation of the network of these centres must be in close consultation with the host countries, other countries served by these information centres as well as the regions involved, and must take into account the geographical, linguistic and technological characteristics of different regions. In addition, adequate resources should be allocated so as to ensure the effective functioning and strengthening of United Nations Information Centres in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

The Millennium Project Report has identified the presence of modern information and communications technology as one of the essential infrastructure services critical to improving living standards and human well-being. In this context, the World Summit on Information Society to be held in Tunis from 16-18 November of this year will provide an important opportunity to address many issues relevant, to access to and transfer of information and communications technology. The outcome of this Summit should provide for specific initiatives to be taken at all levels to assist in bridging the digital divide as well as place Information and Communications Technology in the service of development. The Group urges the DPI to continue to promote the Summit as an important international event.

Mr. Chairman,

The G77 and China supports the efforts made by the Department in strengthening the United Nations website in all official languages. The Group maintains that the main objective of the DPI in this connection should be the attainment of parity of all the official languages on the UN website. We continue to be concerned at the continuing disparity in treatment among the different official languages on the United Nations website and urge that all efforts be made to address this issue. These efforts should be in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions through the reallocation of resources and the deployment of staff to the required language posts. This should be addressed as an urgent priority.

At the same time, the G77 and China expresses its support for the continuation of the use of traditional media, including both radio and print, in disseminating the main messages of the United Nations. We have noted with interest that approximately 174 partnerships have been forged in 75 countries and that contacts have been made with additional radio stations. We are also pleased that there are added radio programmes dedicated specifically to Africa and Asia.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group continues to underscore the importance of closer coordination between the DPI and other substantive Departments in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. (DPKO). We believe that such coordination is essential in ensuring the effectiveness of the information components in peacekeeping missions and is of current relevance to the international community in the context of the surge in peacekeeping operations and allegations of abuse and exploitation in peacekeeping missions. The Group would wish however to receive specific information so as to be certain that the activities undertaken by the information components in peacekeeping missions remain under the financial responsibility of the DPKO.

The Group has taken note of the proposals put forward by the Secretariat on making the provision of library services relevant to the needs of Member States and accessible to users. It is our view that any change to the methods of operation of the United Nations Libraries should continue to respect the previously agreed mandate and General Assembly resolutions relevant to libraries as well as be subject to prior intergovernmental discussion and agreement. Additionally, the G77 and China cautions that the proposal for technological

innovations for the provision of Library Services should take into account the physical and other challenges faced by Member States in being able to effectively utilise such technology.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, allow me to assure you of the intention of the G77 and China to work constructively with other regional groupings in order to achieve a positive outcome of this session of the Committee on Information. Above all, we are reminded that the work of this Committee should be dedicated to ensuring that the DPI is made stronger and more effective so as to allow it to properly disseminate the messages of the United Nations.

Thank you.