

## **Statement by Mr. Romain Kohn, Attaché, Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations, on behalf of the European Union (18 April 2005)**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by congratulating the Department of Public Information (DPI) for the timely presentation of a set of concise and detailed reports. These reports provide us with an excellent overview of the work of the DPI and will be of great use 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 also expresses its appreciation for the constructive interaction between the DPI and the members of the COI. We are convinced that DPI has an essential role to play in our shared objective of providing a focussed information service of high quality to the UN family, and to the wider public. The strategic direction embraced by DPI since 2002 offers in our view 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.

In the deliberations which will 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 the benefit of all.

### **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 has been continued since last year's session of the Committee on Information, as set out in the Report of the Secretary General. The European Union commends DPI for its efforts to meet the various challenges it faced in 2004, and also for its efforts to develop a more strategic approach to promoting global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the UN in priority areas. In this regard we welcome the Department's approach to focus on key messages as part of a coordinated communications strategy.

This year's discussions on UN reform are of crucial importance to the Organization's future. They aim at the preparation of the September Summit which is to review the progress made

in implementing the Millennium Declaration. The European Union commends DPI for its efforts of drawing the world's attention to the process of revitalization and reform of the United Nations.

The other crucial date this year and also another great opportunity to underline the importance of coordinated information activities, will be the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization in autumn. 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 peoples a better knowledge of UN activities and achievements.

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 share the view, expressed in the Secretary General's report "In Larger Freedom" that "development, security and human rights go hand in hand". We also believe that these objectives can be achieved only if the larger public is aware of the inter-linkages between development, security, human rights, justice and rule of law. DPI, in making good use of the revolution in information technology and the advances in communications, has a crucial role to play to communicate the necessary information to the public.

In this regard, the EU is pleased to see the continuing efforts of DPI to strengthen the culture of evaluation. We appreciate that the systematic evaluation has been reinforced through cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

The EU believes that self-evaluation and performance management are essential for the success of a large and complex organisation such as DPI. We are convinced that success with the larger public comes with the knowledge of who the audiences and what their expectations are. Systematic impact reviews as conducted by DPI since 2002 are an important instrument to find out whether UN information meets the demands of the users. The EU commends DPI for giving satisfaction to an average of almost 80 per cent of its target audiences in terms of usefulness, relevance and quality of its products, services and activities and encourages the Department to continue its efforts to deepen the culture of evaluation in every aspect of its activities. As an example, let me point to the new initiative to provide training to the staff which enables it to conduct systematic media monitoring and analysis.

The UN web site, as the primary source of information for the UN family as well as for the wider public, continues to register an increasing number of hits. We welcome the efforts DPI is making to attract further users through a redesign of the top level pages including database-driven features for an easy access to the latest developments. We particularly welcome the increasing compliance with the requirements for persons with disabilities. These innovations should make the web site more relevant, as does the fact that the Official Document System (ODS) as a multilingual repository of United Nations documentation is now open to the public at large. We commend the efforts of DPI to enhance the language capacity of the web site section, and urge the department to continue its good work in this field.

The European Union also supports the approach taken by DPI in developing a cooperative framework with civil society 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 enhance the outreach to NGOs by electronic communications via the Internet and virtual meetings with remote partners through live webcast and videoconferences.

## **UNICS**

Mr. Chairman,

The EU thanks Under-Secretary General Shashi Tharoor for the updated status report on the regionalisation process of UNICs.

We accept that the pursuit of regionalisation must be tailored to the circumstances in each region. The Western European model will not be applicable to all regions and, indeed, we understand from the report that we are still in the "lessons-learned" mode from the experience of setting up the Brussels regional UNIC. Therefore, we can appreciate to a certain extent the advantage in taking a more gradual approach on this subject for the time being.

However, a gradual approach must not mean a static one. The European Union lent its full support to the Secretary General's proposals for regional hubs in 2002 because it recognised that this was an ambitious plan which would hopefully deliver real medium to long-term benefits to the UN and to the peoples of the world. The decision to support this proposal forced a number of European countries to take the tough decision to close offices in their capitals. No-one ever expected instant results, but we did anticipate that the plan would be advanced more vigorously than we have seen. We also expected other member states and regional groups to take equally tough decisions on UNICs in their own countries if circumstances warranted it. We share the frustration of the Secretariat in light of the General Assembly's inability to agree in the context of the programme budget for 2004-05 on re-investing financial savings from the Western European UNICs. We recall that the EU, along with many other like-minded member states, were willing to do so provided that the resources were devoted to those UN information centres around the world which were to be part of the regionalisation process. Regrettably, this did not meet the consensus of the membership.

We therefore wish to restate our commitment to the pursuit of regionalisation. We strongly encourage the Secretariat to use fully the authority they have in making executive decisions on where best to focus their efforts. Where GA approval is needed to take more far-reaching decisions, we encourage them not to shy away from making bold proposals, including through redeployment, in order to overhaul the UNIC network. This should ensure that the right balance of staff, skills and operational activities are put to use in the best locations for efficient and effective outreach to the public in those regions.

## **Radio, Television**

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 this service in all six official languages, as well as in Portuguese, in order to meet the needs of an ever-increasing listenership.

The European Union also believes that DPI should continue its efforts to enhance the distribution of its video and television material through broadcasters and other outlets. Television is the most influential of the traditional media and a great asset when it comes to convey an important message, like the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations or, on a different level, the fight against HIV/AIDS. We encourage the active promotion of the Department's products through, among other initiatives, the participation in the leading annual international television programming market MIP-TV.

## **Libraries**

The European Union is pleased to see that the United Nations libraries are making "a coordinated effort to ensure that their activities and services are fully supporting the Organization's current goals and objectives", as set out in the Secretary General's report. We support the newly developed motto "from collections to connections" which integrates paper repositories with new methods of information preservation and views the UN libraries as a network of knowledge-sharing communities. We look forward to hearing more details about the internal reorganization of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, especially about the activities of the newly created Knowledge Sharing Services, devoted to provide consulting services to Secretariat offices and Permanent Missions to help their staff make better use of information management tools and methods.

## **World Press Freedom Day**

As we prepare for World Press Freedom day on 3 May, the European Union would like to reiterate its commitment to a free press and its important role in a free society. It is a cause of profound concern that in many countries freedom of the press does not exist, and that the dissemination of information remains controlled and limited. We would like to underline once again 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 democratic and open societies. The establishment of a free press is also one of the indicators of a successful 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 to conducting our deliberations during this 27th session of the Committee on Information in the same constructive and co-operative manner than in the past, aimed at seeking solutions in consensus.

Thank you Mr. Chairman