

Statement by Mr. David A. Traystman, United States Advisor (19 April 2005)

The United States congratulates the new Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Motoc of Romania, and the other members of the bureau on their election. The United States welcomes Mr. Tharoor's comprehensive statement of April 18th and would like to thank him for his able leadership of the Department. My delegation commends all members of the Department for their hard work during this past very busy year. I pledge United States support for the Department's efforts. My delegation looks forward to working with all members of this committee in a constructive manner as we consider the important issues before us.

On Tuesday, May 3rd, World Press Freedom Day will be commemorated at headquarters and at other UN offices. A cornerstone of American democracy is freedom of the press, enshrined in our Constitution's Bill of Rights. We strongly believe that a free press is fundamental for true democracy. For this particular body — the Committee on Information — it is important that we recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' affirmation in Article 19 that "everyone has the right to freedom of expression. this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The United States is very gratified to note that the international community, in the Declaration of Principles adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003, reaffirmed Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an "essential foundation of the Information Society" and the international community's "commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, which are essential to the Information Society." My delegation looks forward to the international community's reiteration of its commitment to Article 19 during the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society being held in Tunis in November of this year.

Mr. Chairman,

I would now like to comment on several of the issues before us.

My delegation commends DPI, particularly the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's (DHL) management team, for the informative and thought provoking report on "modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries: new strategic directions" (A/AC.198/2005/4). We are impressed with the scope of the changes being undertaken which will affect all aspects of the work, not only of the DHL, but of all UN libraries. This excellent report sets the stage for the far-reaching "cultural" changes envisaged. As stated in the report, the role of UN libraries is being redefined — from independent repositories of information (collections) to proactive facilitators of effective decision-making through the provision of essential information services to its diverse clientele (connections).

We look forward particularly to the provision of direct support services aimed at helping staff and delegations carry out their duties, especially in this information environment in which all participants are faced with information overload caused by the ever-increasing number and

complexity of issues. We are pleased to note that the role of library staff is being redefined and broadened to allow them to work more closely with users in their daily work; not only by ensuring that the most relevant and appropriate information is delivered to them when they need it but also by advising users on which tools to use to address their various information needs and on how to use them.

The United States is confident that the UN libraries' knowledge workers will effectively carry out their redefined responsibilities since they bring to the table broad knowledge of a wide range of issues and are experts at finding, evaluating, organizing, disseminating, and storing information. This new model will enhance the important role librarians play since they will be positioned to better assist their clients or partners in finding relevant, authoritative and up-to-date information — the key ingredient in effective decision-making.

My delegation stands ready to assist the Dag Hammarskjold Library and all members of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations libraries in implementing these important initiatives.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is surprised that the impact of the integration of the Official Document System (ODS) with the UN web site is not assessed in the report on "the United Nations web site: progress towards parity among official languages" (A/AC.198/2005/6). As recognized in paragraph 27 of resolution 59/126 B adopted on the report of this committee on its 26th session: "Integration of the Official Document System with the United Nations web site, scheduled to take place during the fourth quarter of 2004, will significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the site by providing free, public access to all UN parliamentary documents in the six official languages." The public at large is now freely able to conduct searches in the six official languages, including by using the new "Global Search" full text search engine, and retrieve the full texts of all documents issued since 1993 and all Security Council, General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and Trusteeship Council resolutions adopted since 1946. My delegation commends DPI and the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD) in the Office of Central Support Services for working diligently to make the massive contents of the ODS available to the public.

While noting that the overall number of pages viewed on the UN web site increased by almost 26% in 2004 over 2003 and that such statistics are given in Table 1 of the report and that the upward trend in the use of the web site has been consistent among the language sites, it would have been useful for the report to contain a statistical analysis of the number of pages actually viewed, sorted by official language, as contained in corrigendum 1 of the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information (A/59/221 and Corr.1) and not just the "percentage" increases in the number of pages viewed across language sites as contained in Table 2. As stated in the report: "tracking and analyzing site usage is a key tool in improving navigation and usability of a web site." While recognizing the inherent equality of the official six and, in fact, of all languages, Member States must be provided with the information and analysis necessary to facilitate assessment of the web site and other UN tools, products and services. My delegation would like to ask DPI to circulate to the members of this committee

statistics on the number of overall page views of the UN web site in 2003 and 2004, sorted by official language, as well as the number of page views of the News Centre page and other sections of the site on which language parity has been achieved, such as the General Assembly and Security Council pages, also sorted by official language.

Commenting further on the UN web site, my delegation commends the Department for ensuring that persons with disabilities, including those with visual and hearing disabilities, are able to access the top layers of the UN web site. My delegation would like to ask the Department to clarify which pages are considered top-level pages. For instance, are all press releases accessible to persons with disabilities? My delegation would also like to know the status of the project to establish a United Nations portal — an inter-agency web site and search facility encompassing the public web sites of all UN system organizations.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation commends DPI for continuing to endeavor to increase the effectiveness of the UN information center system. The overall goal remains: to help fulfill the substantive purposes of the UN by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. My delegation is not convinced that the regionalization/rationalization process would have continued to move forward to the extent necessary to effect real change even if the UN information center budget had not been cut and would like to point out that the decision to reduce the budgetary allocation to the UN information center system was willingly agreed to by all participants in the negotiations. Notwithstanding these and other recent developments, for a variety of reasons the information centre system continues to be in need of further rationalization. My delegation commends the Department for taking steps with a view to strengthening the centers operations. We also commend DPI for establishing local communications groups at the country level to coordinate a unified communications effort of the UN country team as a whole.

My delegation believes that in addition to these and other steps taken by DPI, the Secretary-General's recent reform report: "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005) points the way forward. As noted in Part V, Section D of the report on "system coherence" there is significant duplication of mandates and actions between bodies within the system and significant shortfalls in necessary funding. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report, he is introducing further improvements in the coordination of the UN system presence and performance at the country level, based on the simple principle that at every stage of UN activities, the senior UN official present in any given country — special representative, resident coordinator or humanitarian coordinator — should have the authority and resources necessary to manage an integrated UN mission or "country presence" so that the UN can truly function as one integrated entity. My delegation is confident that when it comes to implementing the information component of this process, DPI will apply its considerable expertise in working with the other UN system organizations at the headquarters and at the country level and take the steps necessary to create a unified UN image that will result in the UN system speaking with one voice at the country level. In this regard, we would also like to refer to Mr. Tharoor's role in guiding the UN Communications

Group (A/AC.198/2005/5). We note that representatives from 36 UN agencies attended the Group's annual meeting in June of 2004. As one of the key vehicles for inter-agency decision-making on the communications challenges facing the Organization, the United States looks forward to the Group's full involvement in the process of implementing the Secretary-General's reform proposals.

My delegation would also like to commend DPI for:

- Timely distribution of digital images of UN meetings and UN events;
- Live webcasting of Security Council meetings and the General Assembly's general debate, and for;
- Working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in ensuring the effective deployment and ongoing functioning of public information components in peacekeeping missions.

In closing Mr. Chairman, the United States notes that the Department has a number of important campaigns on its agenda, including the Millennium + 5 Summit and the Observance of the 60th Anniversary of the UN. We wish all members of the Department well in carrying out these and other important responsibilities.

Thank you.