

Opening Statement by Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (18 April 2005)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It has become an annual pleasure, but nonetheless a rare privilege, for me to address a session of the Committee on Information, and this year the occasion of your twenty-seventh session is particularly special. Taking place in this sixtieth year of the founding of the United Nations, when the Secretary-General has made renewal of the Organization a top priority, the twenty-seventh session of this Committee will act on issues which will have important long-term consequences for the overall work of the Department of Public Information.

Since its establishment in 1978, the Committee on Information has supported the Department of Public Information and helped to steer its work in directions responsive to the rapidly-changing global information environment. The interest that Member States have demonstrated in this regard is also evident from the steady growth in the Committee's membership: from 67 in 1978 to 107 today, a remarkable 40 per cent increase. Over the years, the Committee has demonstrated a clear commitment to help DPI become an increasingly effective public voice for the Organization, and this partnership has been a key factor in defining DPI's role. On behalf of my Department and my staff, I should like to acknowledge the positive contribution of this Committee, and to express my appreciation for its continued support.

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the newly-elected Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Mihnea Ioan Motoc, and the members of the Bureau. I have every confidence that under Ambassador Motoc's able guidance, this Committee will continue to make steady progress towards accomplishing the goals which the Department has set for itself and you have set for us. I am grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind and encouraging words addressed to me. I look forward to working closely with you and with other members of the Bureau, not only during this session, but in the months ahead.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, and the other members of his Bureau, for the support and cooperation they extended to the Department over the past two years. Ambassador Chowdhury chaired the Committee at a time when the Organization faced unprecedented challenges, and the Department undertook a comprehensive reorientation of its work. He was a true friend, sometimes a philosopher and always a guide, he helped steer the Department in new directions. I salute his vigour and commitment, and I will miss his energy and his sense of humour.

Mr. Chairman,

Change, as we have often been told, does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change. In the past three years, DPI has undergone structural changes

that have produced a new strategic orientation in its work — underpinned for the first time in its history by a clear and coherent mission statement. We know that this alone could not make an operation more effective. We therefore took a hard look at how and why we do what we do. We therefore took steps to devise a new operating model, and to organize ourselves accordingly to make better use of our resources, both human and financial; to set up new mechanisms to be more responsive to, and therefore better serve our clients, particularly you, the Member States. We also reached out proactively to the media and civil society, including through the use of new information and communications technologies, and, in the process, gained the support of "non-traditional" partners in spreading the UN message. We also became the first Department in the Secretariat to train our managers in results-based budgeting and to develop a capacity to measure our performance in a credible and consistent way. In the last few years, the cliché "the culture of communication" has become a widespread reality throughout the Secretariat.

So, while I refrain from referring to DPI's "accomplishments" over the last three years — since those are really for you to judge — let me say that I firmly believe DPI has made "measurable progress" as a result of its reorientation. I will explain later, why I say measurable. I will also present several examples of this progress across the range of the Department's work.

Mr. Chairman,

At a time when talk of UN reform is on the top of the UN agenda, it is useful to recall that a central element of the Secretary-General's 2002 reform proposals was to enhance public information. The United Nations has a compelling story to tell, he said, and proposed that this story be told in a manner that would bring to life the Organization's central role in working for a better world for all. In response to this challenge, and working in accordance with a subsequent General Assembly resolution, the Department undertook a comprehensive review of its work that resulted, as I just mentioned, in the introduction of a new mission statement, a new operating model and a new organizational structure. Quite appropriately, the principal annual report on the work of the Department that it submitted to the Committee on Information, like the one submitted for the consideration of the present session (A/AC.198/2005/2), was titled the "Report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications". We have now implemented those aspects of the reform proposals that are within the authority of the Secretary-General and are based on existing General Assembly resolutions and guidance provided by the Committee on Information. (The one exception is the regionalization of UNICs, to which I will return.) So I hope the Member States will consider DPI fully reoriented! Future reports of the Secretary-General on questions relating to the continuing work of DPI will no longer refer to "continuing reorientation", but will simply be reports of the Secretary-General on UN activities related to public information and communications.

Let me recall here that the General Assembly, in its resolutions 59/126 A and B of 10 December 2004, requested the Secretary-General to report to the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information on the activities of the Department and on the implementation of its recommendations on questions relating to public information. Through consultations with

the Bureau of the Committee, it was decided that the information requested in the above resolution would be grouped into the five reports listed on your agenda (A/AC.198/2005/1), the most comprehensive of which would be the one dealing with the continuing reorientation of the Department of Public Information. Also, at the request of the Fifth Committee, the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of the operations and management of United Nations libraries (A/59/373) has also been included for the Committee's consideration at this session. We have made every effort to ensure the early availability of these documents for your review.

Having said that the reorientation process has concluded, you might ask: what has been achieved in the course of this process? Is DPI doing its work any better today than it was three years ago?

I would like to take the next few minutes to address this question. Of course, I will not be able to describe all, or even most aspects of the changes introduced and the progress made in the past three years. There will be an opportunity to review this in greater detail at the interactive dialogue scheduled for this afternoon, which will take place in this room from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. I would encourage all of you to attend and to raise whatever questions are on your mind.

DPI's task, simply put, is to tell the UN story. The public perception of the United Nations, like the image of any public institution, is the sum-total of views held in the public mind. These views, as Walter Lippmann once said, are somewhat like "pictures in our head." In the past two years, the pictures in many people's heads about the United Nations have acquired a negative cast, particularly as the Organization is portrayed in the international media.

Amid continuing allegations of corruption, mismanagement and a lack of transparency and accountability in some of its activities, the UN's effectiveness and relevance have been publicly and persistently challenged. While the nature of these criticisms has varied widely — from the lingering disapproval over the UN's role over the war in Iraq, to alleged wrongdoings in the Oil-for-Food Programme, to charges of sexual exploitation in peacekeeping operations — the UN's image has been badly bruised. A number of polls conducted in the past two years show that support for the Organization and understanding about its global role has significantly faltered in some parts of the world. However, these polls also show that most people around the world want a United Nations which is stronger and more capable of living up to the expectations they have of it.

In other words, people want to see the UN doing more, not less.

As London's daily Guardian recently wrote, the world needs the United Nations "not out of misplaced internationalism but out of hard-headed realism." Explaining itself, the daily noted there is no alternative to an organization that can coordinate the responses of 60 different donor countries, the military assets of 26 countries, and the efforts of hundreds of aid agencies within days after the tsunami disaster struck in South and Southeast Asia.

That is only one recent example of how the UN serves the people of the world, day in and day out.

However, there is also no denying that some people are unsure whether our 60-year old United Nations is capable of organizing and delivering collective action in support of peace and security for all. Sixty, after all, is the age at which we at the United Nations contemplate retirement. But instead, the Organization is poised for renewal. The Secretary-General, in his recent report, "*In larger freedom: Towards development, security and human rights for all*", has presented a clear blueprint for reforming and strengthening the Organization and has urged Member States to take crucial decisions at the September Summit this year.

Since the last session of this Committee, the Department has faced an unprecedented challenge in mobilizing resources to engage with public opinion on so many fronts. We were quick to strengthen our monitoring of the media around the world and to reinforce our media outreach capacity. No charge went unanswered: we unleashed a blizzard of public information initiatives to counter attacks in the media, and a crisis communications team was mobilized, which included senior staff from the Office of the Secretary-General, the Spokesman's Office and DPI. The team set a daily strategy, not only on how best to respond to particular media coverage, but also on proactive and preventive action. Guided by this strategy, arrangements were made daily for senior spokespersons to appear on major television outlets and to make our views known through opinion ("op-ed") articles, interviews and letters in high-impact print media. Similar media placements by supportive third-party spokespeople were also arranged by various civil society groups and foundations, in close coordination with our strategy team.

The network of UN information centres has also been instrumental in placing opinion articles in local media in the countries they serve. To keep staff informed of these efforts — both to boost morale and to share talking points that staff themselves can use in defending the Organization in their own sphere of influence — a website entitled "Hot Issues, Cold Facts" has been launched on the UN's intranet. Despite all these efforts, we would acknowledge that the UN's standing in many countries has never been lower. At a time when we are more conscious than ever before of the impact of our work, this is sobering news.

Mr. Chairman,

I spoke earlier of the changes we have made to ensure progress in our reorientation efforts. As you know, we followed a carefully laid out course that involved extensive consultations with Member States and closer coordination with UN system partners. Our mission is clear: to fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. To rise to the challenge, we needed to do more than tweak the existing structure and way of doing business. We needed to overhaul it.

In the process, we have now established four clear strategic directions:

- A client-oriented approach that enjoins DPI and the Secretariat departments as partners;
- Integration of new information and communications technologies at all levels of work that increases productivity and speeds up delivery of services;

- UN system-wide coordination that promotes collective use of vital resources; and
- Strengthened partnerships with civil society and public and private sectors that create a global outreach.

A fifth element which runs through each of the above is the institutionalization of a culture of evaluation into the work of the Department.

Let me illustrate how these new strategic choices have influenced DPI's work and produced positive results.

The new operating model that we established is based on a clear conception that content generation emanates from the other departments and offices of the Secretariat and organizations of the UN system, while DPI manages its promotion and distribution, the messaging, tools and tactics to tell the UN story to the world. Consequently, a new working relationship has been established between the Secretariat departments, who as clients identify their priorities and provide DPI with clear policy guidelines, and DPI, which as "service provider" assumes responsibility for the global promotion of those priorities.

Two years after its introduction, we can report to you that this relationship has proven practical and effective, bringing DPI and its clients in a close partnership never experienced before. Greater consultation with client offices has enabled DPI to better assess communications opportunities and "news hooks", as well as develop more realistic expectations as to the extent of coverage which can be expected. Over a dozen jointly-devised communications strategies were carried out during this period for priority issues and events. More than 80 per cent of our clients who responded to a formal client satisfaction survey included with each project report, said they were "very satisfied" with the task accomplished.

One good example of how this consultation process works in practice can be seen in the partnership between DPI and DPKO.

Although each department serviced by DPI is listed as a single client, clients are in fact divided into subsets, and DPI deals directly with several of them within a single department, each with separate requirements. Let me explain.

- For the Office of DPKO's Under-Secretary-General, DPI provides advice on strategic communications, media outreach, editorial response, and assistance in undertaking special projects;
- For its Office of Operations, DPI participates in assessment missions and mission planning for new peacekeeping operations, produces public information products and provides input on disarmament/demobilization/reintegration strategy;
- For its Office of Mission Support, it helps with mission planning, budget input, staff selection and recruitment-related issues pertaining to staff performing public information functions;
- DPI works with the Civilian Training Section in preparing its annual training course for information professionals in peacekeeping operations;

- It collaborates with the Best Practices Unit on lessons learned, policy standards for public information and on communications aspects of a variety of other issues, including sexual abuse and AIDS; and
- DPI also backstops the public information components of a dozen peacekeeping operations and provides advice and guidance to them on communications strategies, media outreach and staffing.

Of course, client consultation is an integrated process which also regularly includes other offices and agencies. Haiti provides a good illustration of this collaboration. From February through May 2004, DPI, along with other Secretariat departments, agencies and programmes, participated in pre-mandate planning and informational meetings. In March, a DPI staff member travelled to Haiti as part of the Secretariat assessment mission. The Department finalized the assessment report in cooperation with various DPKO offices and thereafter attended weekly planning meetings that continued until the end of the year.

In June 2004, peacekeeping missions were invited to judge the quality of DPI's communications work in support of UN peace missions. Requests for feedback were sent to 12 complex missions with public information components, of which seven responded. Overall, respondents indicated their satisfaction with the services they used.

Mr. Chairman,

The introduction of new information and communications technologies, and their incorporation into the global communications infrastructure, has produced significant change in the production, promotion and distribution of publicly available information. While developed countries have been the main beneficiaries of the communications revolution, developing countries have embraced the new technologies and are making a concerted effort to adapt them gradually to national and regional needs. To compete in today's rapidly-evolving communications environment, DPI's own strategic decision was to use the most appropriate communications technologies and tools to secure speed, innovation and variety in its work. The results have been impressive.

Nowhere has this innovation been more dramatic than with the Internet. In less than ten years since its introduction by DPI in 1995, the United Nations web site has become the leading tool for reaching target audiences such as Member States, media, non-governmental organizations and academia, as well as an increasing number of people directly, in all parts of the world. Consider the following facts:

- Users from more than 170 countries are viewing nearly one million pages of material daily;
- An average of 8 million accesses are recorded each weekday from 199 countries and territories;
- Accesses to the UN web site have grown from 488 million in 2000, to 2.3 billion in 2004.

The greater use of ICT and modern communication tools has also enhanced our ability to deliver a number of new services. For example:

- Using the Internet, people in distant countries are now able to view live webcasts of meetings at the United Nations. Statements made by world leaders during the General Assembly debate or in the Security Council can be heard and seen while the meetings are in progress, as well as any time later;
- More than 10,000 video clips are being viewed daily by visitors to the United Nations web site from all over the world, on topics as diverse as peace and security, development and environmental degradation;
- Webcast technology has also allowed the Department to improve internal communications. The regular town hall meetings conducted with all staff of the Department are now webcast to DPI offices away from Headquarters, so that staff at UN information centres are able to take part in a dialogue with DPI management on issues of mutual interest;
- A different example, the new Network Interactive Content Access (NICA) system has permitted the establishment of a central photo repository, electronically accessible, with wider selection, better management, protection of the original quality of the images, faster retrieval and distribution of high-resolution images with embedded captions to frequent users in news organizations. You can literally see the results in better photo coverage of UN activities;
- UN Radio has further expanded its partnership with radio stations around the world. It is also experimenting with new and innovative ways to broaden its outreach. For example, with a one-year grant received from the UN Foundation, it is introducing "UN minutes" for distribution to stations and networks primarily in the United States, which has traditionally not been a major radio audience for the UN.

Mr. Chairman,

No less significant is the Department's increasing ability to provide, through the Internet, much needed information in the six official languages of the United Nations. The UN News Centre, a portal that provides easy access to the latest news and related resources on the work of the United Nations system, is now fully multilingual. As more and more materials are made available in languages other than English and French, increasing numbers of visitors turn to the UN web site as a resource across all official languages. This is of particular satisfaction to me, if I may say so, in my capacity as United Nations Coordinator for Multilingualism.

Another example of progress is the success of UN information centres in hosting web sites in non-UN languages. The Regional Information Centre — RUNIC — in Brussels, for example, provides information on its web site in most West European languages. Materials are also available through web sites maintained by UNICs in such diverse languages as Bangla, Czech, Farsi, Kiswahili, Malagasy and Thai, to name a few. Like a beautiful kaleidoscope of many languages, the Internet has enabled DPI to connect many cultures with a common vision. We are confident, once adequate resources are available, that UNICs will be able to host web sites in most of the principal local languages of the regions they serve.

Despite making significant strides towards multilingualism, I will be the first to admit that DPI has some way to go to achieve linguistic parity on the web. English continues to be the dominant language, followed by French. It is important to point out that providing content in all official languages on the United Nations web site is the responsibility of all content-generating offices of the Secretariat. As was noted in the report of the Secretary-General on multilingualism (A/58/363), the greatest obstacle to multilingualism in outputs is the lack of resources, for while consistent funding is available for translating parliamentary documents into the six official languages, the same is not true for publications. Meanwhile, the maintenance of web sites in various languages has been largely accomplished "within existing resources". As a result, departments have prepared their sites in the official languages selectively, both with regard to the materials and the languages covered. The Department of Public Information, as manager of the web site, will continue to encourage and assist other departments in making their content available in all official languages.

Mr. Chairman,

As the "public voice" of the Organization, connecting with the public at large and creating synergies with external partners remain vital for the Department. One of the important changes introduced as a result of DPI's restructuring was the creation of a new Outreach Division, which is entrusted with the task of taking United Nations messages and information resources to civil society, in particular, non-governmental organizations, educators, students and private sector partners, in an increasingly integrated fashion, using a variety of both established and innovative channels. The integrated nature of our outreach efforts is highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on the continuing reorientation of UN activities in the field of public information and communications. I would only like to mention a few examples of how, through strengthened UN — civil society partnerships, we have been able to reach targeted audiences with greater effect:

- The Department's partnership with over 1,500 non-governmental organizations is now one of the largest civil society outlets to the Organization. What makes this outreach increasingly effective is the evaluation of surveys that continually monitor feedback from NGO representatives. The annual DPI/NGO Conference survey has measured participant satisfaction with that event for the past eight years. A quadrennial review of associated NGOs has prompted the disassociation over the past three years of over 300 organizations that no longer meet the Department's strict criteria. Two more surveys, one on the effectiveness of the NGO Resource Centre, and the other on the impact of the NGO briefings, will be conducted this June;
- The "Unlearning Intolerance" seminar series, launched in June 2004, has brought together people of different faiths in an open forum for exchange, consultation and cooperation. Two seminars, the first, "Confronting anti-Semitism: Education for Tolerance and Understanding", and the second, 'Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding' have been organized so far. Feedback from participants indicates overwhelming satisfaction with the quality and impact of these events;

- In the two years following the 9/11 terror attack in New York City, DPI's guided tour operation faced a serious crisis. I am pleased to note today that it has made a remarkable recovery. Last year, 360,000 visitors took the tour, an increase of eleven per cent over 2003. Our last survey revealed that 8 of 10 visitors who took the tour — which is now available in 20 different languages — left our Headquarters feeling better informed, indeed more supportive, of our Organization;
- The UN Bookshop has greatly expanded its Meet the Author Programme, which has enabled it to reach out to newer audiences and in the process generate additional revenue. In 2004, it organized 26 such events, including one with Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer. In 2005, it has continued in the same spirit, and we have a session today with one well-known author, and later this week, with another well-known author, former Secretary of State of the United States, Mrs. Madeline Albright;
- DPI's role as focal point in the recent filming at UN Headquarters of "The Interpreter", a feature film to be released in New York theatres this week, is an excellent example of how we can benefit from non-traditional partnerships to get the UN message out to the general public. This is the first film to be shot inside the UN premises, and so it gives the outsider an inside view of the UN, including what goes on in the General Assembly Hall, which most people have only seen from television news reports. Our Organization has had a restrictive policy in the past concerning on-site filming, but we felt it was time to rethink traditional practice in these new times, to demystify the United Nations and make it more accessible to the public. A key factor in the Secretary-General's approval of this project (and subsequently that of the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly) was that through its script — both the story line and dialogue — "The Interpreter" helps showcase the values and principles that the UN stands for. In fact, the UN is central to the plot, and not merely a convenient backdrop — which, I might add, was the reason for turning down similar requests from other filmmakers in the past. We are not going to turn this building into a Hollywood studio, but it is important for the UN to reach people who will not ordinarily think about our Organization, but who might go to a thriller to be entertained and then return edified about the work of the United Nations.

The organizations of the United Nations are at their best when they are focused, strategic and are able to share resources. In the current media environment, failure to project ourselves as a unified team, speaking with one voice, will only weaken the Organization and open it to additional criticism. The creation of the United Nations Communications Group within the framework of the overall reorientation of DPI was aimed at giving the UN a strategic advantage by providing the organizations of the system a common communications platform. But this group is more than a forum, it is a practical tool which has led to concrete results. Again, let me give you a few examples:

- Working through a task force, the members of the Group have set up a mechanism to collect and share television news footage available for immediate use. Thanks to the efforts of this Group, the UN system was able to obtain quality video

footage on current issues such as the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the state of displaced persons in Colombia, and Chinese peacekeepers in Liberia;

- Under an agreement reached with APTN, the world's largest television news agency, DPI and its UNCG partners have established UNIFEED, through which they now distribute video material daily to over 500 broadcasters worldwide. It is a totally new initiative;
- Thanks to the coordinating efforts of the Communications Group, the United Nations is being showcased now at Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan;
- Through a unique collaboration with an international polling organization, the Group's partners spearheaded a public opinion survey related to the work of the United Nations and on the Millennium Development Goals. Based on the survey results, region-specific information programmes will be adopted;
- Through increased presence at the premier international television market MIPTV in Cannes, France, some 2,500 hours of UN content was seen last year in 60 countries by nearly 600 million viewers. I am pleased to report that at this year's MIPTV, which took place just last week, DPI was joined by a dozen UN system partners, and held discussions on new distribution partnerships.

Mr. Chairman,

An area where important new directions are being pursued is that of United Nations libraries. UN libraries, through the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, which is chaired by DPI, are redefining their role as independent repositories and are moving from building and maintaining book and periodical collections, to facilitating a knowledge-enabled environment and the exchange of information among stakeholders — moving from collections to connections.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library itself has undergone a significant change of focus, from looking inward and serving the Secretariat, to reaching out to meet the needs of Missions and the UN's global client base. The Secretary-General's report on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries: new strategic directions (A/AC.198/2005/4), explains the pursuit of new strategic directions for UN libraries in great detail. The report, the product of discussions and consultations over the past year, points out how this new approach will transform the UN's library services. Here are a few examples:

- The libraries will produce electronic collections of external materials and provide them on demand, irrespective of where they are physically located;
- The libraries will work to help delegations and staff deal with a large volume of information and constantly-changing technologies through direct support services;
- The physical structure of work spaces in UN libraries will be redesigned to better serve the larger, more flexible and interactive working environment;
- Specialized paper-based collections will be maintained and better preserved by using modern, climate-controlled compact shelving, storage and retrieval systems. However, paper-based collections of external collections will be reduced. New arrangements for secure electronic storage will be put in place.

In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to the Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of the operations and management of United Nations libraries, (A/59/373), forwarded to this Committee for its review by the Fifth Committee. The OIOS report is essentially a review of the prior operations and management of United Nations libraries. DHL has taken into account the report's recommendations in developing the new strategy for UN libraries I just summarized, and has addressed its recommendations to develop a new United Nations library policy that takes account of the opportunities for collaboration amongst UN libraries through advanced technologies and the Internet. I hope the new strategy will meet your approval, and will be reflected in the draft resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

You will recall that, at the beginning of my statement, I had suggested using the term "measurable progress" instead of accomplishments, to describe the changes brought about by the reorientation of DPI. Now, let me explain why. In the past, DPI managers could say that an activity had been carried out with great success. They may still do so, and I hope they will, but they must now also provide concrete evidence of this success.

You must have noticed that in the reports of the Secretary-General submitted for your consideration, and in my own statement, each major DPI activity has been supported by statistics and/or other clearly-defined indicators of achievement. One way of gauging changes in public perception about what we do and how we do it is through opinion surveys. This yardstick has also been used and referred to in my statement.

This has all been part of the new culture of evaluation we have been trying to incorporate across the Department, indeed across the Secretariat. DPI has now entered the final year of its three-year project of collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, in order to establish an internal mechanism for self-evaluation through the Annual Programme Impact Review (APIR). The emphasis on assessment is not limited to trying to measure the success of our work. This new direction has also underlined the importance of regular feedback from DPI's diverse audiences on the usefulness, relevance, and quality of our products and services, making us more responsive to *their* needs.

Our emphasis on performance management also includes the work of the UN information centres. Last year, as part of the Annual Programme Impact Review, we asked our information centres to conduct a comprehensive pilot survey to gauge the usefulness of their library, media and public outreach services, as well as their capacity to raise awareness of the work of the UN amongst local audiences. In response, sixty-three UNICs gave survey forms to their audiences. On average, 80 per cent of those responding expressed satisfaction with the products and services of UNICs. Their briefing programmes were considered to be particularly effective, with nine in ten participants indicating that their knowledge of UN issues had improved as a result.

The fact that DPI staff have readily taken on new responsibilities where evaluation of their work is concerned, should not be underestimated. DPI field staff succeeded in obtaining feedback on the quality of products and activities without sacrificing programme delivery —

and they did this without having had access to training programmes in evaluation techniques, which, for the time being, are only available to staff at Headquarters. Therefore, an important priority for us is to provide UNIC staff with the necessary tools, for example through online training modules, to enable them to assess the results of their work.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to the question of the further rationalization of the network of UN information centres, the subject of a report of the Secretary-General now under your consideration (A/AC.198/2005/3). This report takes into account the new realities and presents some new thoughts. Let me give you a quick run-down.

Last November, at the Fourth Committee, I spoke candidly about the reality facing DPI's rationalization plan. It is one of insufficient resources and rising costs. The rationale behind regionalization was to consolidate our limited resources into a critical mass in a smaller number of locations, and thereby make a greater impact. But two developments have undermined our original proposals. First, our experience in closing the nine UNICs in Western Europe taught us that it is more costly, at least in the short term, to close centres than to keep them running. In fact, it has so far cost the Department about \$3 million to close the above centres, taking into account liquidation requirements and the payment of termination indemnities to staff. To make matters worse, the unexpected decision by the General Assembly to cut nearly 25 per cent of the operational budget of UNICs — \$2 million — two years ago, followed by increased expenditures for security in the field, coupled with the fall in the value of the US dollar, has resulted in a situation where the centres, after paying fixed costs for these premises and maintenance, have little money left for outreach and programmatic activities. As a result, consolidating them no longer generates enough funds to create a credible regional centre. Simply put, with its current resource base, DPI is in no position to open fully staffed and resourced new regional hubs.

Our revised plan therefore takes into account these realities and presents some new options. Let me point out a couple of key features:

- DPI proposes a recalibration, or realignment, of the rationalization plan, giving some UNICs a greater coordinating role in providing strategic communications guidance and support on a regional and sub-regional level. These offices would, as far as possible, be headed by DPI Directors at the D-1 or P-5 level, in some cases supported by a P-4 or P-3 Information Officer;
- The other UNICs within the purview of the above offices would either remain as they are or would be led by National Information Officers (NIOs). Many of these UNICs benefit from rent-free premises, and they cost on average \$42,000 a year for non-staff costs. In those cases where the rent consumes a significant share of the budget, Governments would be requested to provide rent-free or rent-subsidized premises; otherwise, consideration will have to be given to closing them. I have already approached certain host governments in this regard, and will continue to pursue these efforts. In addition, to enable the Department to recruit and retain the highest calibre of national professionals, DPI will seek the approval

of OHRM to introduce the NIO "C" level, to provide them with career development opportunities and to bring the NIO scale in line with that of other UN system partners in the field.

Our hope is also that if Member States agree to provide rent-free premises, additional funds would be available to strengthen the outreach and programmatic activities of UNICs. There is already some movement in this regard. We have been encouraged by the decision of the Government of Australia to provide rent-free premises to the centre there, and by the generous financial support by the Government of Japan towards the cost of the premises of UNIC Tokyo.

As you will recall, the *raison d'être* behind the Secretary-General's rationalization plan for UNICs was to enhance their effectiveness, thereby strengthening the UN presence at the local and regional levels. Closing centres was never meant as an end in itself. We believe, through these measures to recalibrate these offices, those goals can be met within the constraints you have imposed upon us.

We also hope to learn from RUNIC Brussels how rationalization works and what — if any — adjustments to that model are needed. Although it is still early for a full assessment of its impact, some of the advantages are obvious. RUNIC Brussels has already emerged as a highly desirable launching pad for many UN reports and initiatives. The centre is also able to coordinate directly with regional organizations on a wide range of priority issues. However, the RUNIC experience also serves as a reminder that there is value to maintaining a presence on the ground, particularly where a centre can provide a variety of information services and amplify the UN's voice at the local level. The fact that several of the Western European governments where centres were closed in 2003 are now providing and funding information staff in their countries to fill the void created by the closure of UNICs, only lends strength to this argument. The case is even stronger in many developing countries, where information centres are housed in rent-free or nominal-cost premises, with modestly-remunerated staff proficient in local languages. We will, as many of you have requested, conduct a fuller review of RUNIC Brussels with a view to drawing conclusions for our approach in the rest of the world.

This is the bare outline of our plan, but of course we want to hear your views on this and other matters and look forward to our consultations during our two-week session. Those of you who are interested in statistics will find enough of them in the report of the Secretary-General. I will be happy to provide additional details and respond to your queries at the interactive dialogue this afternoon.

It should be noted that UN information offices around the world, including RUNIC Brussels, also rely on the support of our civil society partners, especially UNAs (UN Associations), to help deliver a sustained UN message. This has led to initiatives at the national level, where local UNAs — with the substantive support of RUNIC and UNICs — initiate high-profile outreach events or provide translation of key information materials. But there is a long way to go before we can speak of an effective network of UNAs integrated with the UN.

Mr. Chairman,

I really have transgressed on your patience and that of the Committee. I do want to conclude by quoting Confucius who over 2,500 years ago said, "To see what is right and not to do it, is want of courage." Our decision to embrace sweeping changes in DPI's structure and operational philosophy was not an act of courage. It was a deliberate move born out of necessity. Three years later, we can say with confidence, it was also the right move.

Today, DPI's focus is sharper, its target audiences are better defined, and the tools it needs are in place. However, this renewal does not automatically translate into a success story. In one of my previous statements to this Committee, I compared DPI's reform efforts to a journey. But, as I believe the Japanese like to say, "when you have completed 95 per cent of your journey, you are only halfway through." In the case of DPI, we have come to the end of the first leg of our journey — and I am sure you will do your own arithmetic to determine the percentage of work done. We know our work has only begun. We have built the foundation, but must continue building the structure above. Throughout this process, we need to remain flexible and keep our options open. The United Nations itself is an evolving story, always confronting new challenges and crafting new responses. DPI, its voice to the world, should also remain ready to adjust itself to the changing realities.

The Committee on Information has been a close partner in this process right from the beginning. We hope it will remain so, in the years to come, as Member States take on the challenge of renewing this vital Organization. And I thank you for your leadership in making this possible.

Thank you.