

Statement by H. E. Ambassador Dumisani S. Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, and Chairman of the Group of 77 (24 April 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China at the commencement of the twenty-eighth session of the Committee on Information. I would like to express the Group's wish for your success in guiding the Committee in the course of its work and we have every confidence that you and the Bureau will steer the Committee's work with great efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group appreciates the comprehensive and informative presentation made earlier 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. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General and his staff for their efforts to ensure that the Department of Public Information remains cognisant to the changing needs in developing the communications strategy of the Organisation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group reiterates its position on the role of the Department of Public Information in promoting the work of the United Nations. The DPI assumes the important task of projecting a positive image of the United Nations to the public, of explaining its role and showing the impact of its actions. The G77 and China appreciates the work of the Department of Public Information in promoting, through its campaigns, issues of importance to the international community, such as sustainable development, decolonization, the dialogue among civilizations and culture of peace and tolerance, the rights of women and children, HIV/AIDS as well development on the African continent. However, it urges the DPI to ensure the pertinence and relevance of each subject to the area identified by the Committee on Information for promotional campaign.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China underlines 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 work of the United Nations. Despite the negative publicity that the UN receives, particularly in the media of the host country, we commend the role that the Department is playing, notwithstanding its limited resources, to portray a positive public image of the Organisation.

The G-77 and China stresses the importance of ensuring that there be a consistent message between the Department and any other entity, which provide public information on the United

Nations. As part of the accountability and transparency of the Organisation, we believe that Member States should be able to first learn about important events affecting the United Nations through the official channels, including through the DPI, rather than through the private media. The General Assembly has a Charter-mandated role of oversight on matters affecting the Secretariat and resources of the Organization. The interaction between the media and the Secretariat does not replace this Charter requirement for the Secretariat to report to Member States through the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

The G-77 and China has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on continued rationalisation of the network of United Nations Information Centers (UNICS). We further note the recognition by DPI that UNICS have to be strengthened through the realignment of resources, and expansion in communication technologies and the building of new partnerships.

The Group reiterates its view that the presence of 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 centers must be in close consultation with the host countries, other countries served by these information centers 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 Centers in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

The G-77 and China welcomes the adoption of the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, adopted at the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis in November 2005.

The Summit provided an important opportunity to address many issues relevant, to access to and transfer of information and communications technology. The outcome of this Summit has provided 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.

Mr. Chairman,

The G77 and China notes the progress that has been made to narrow the gap among different official languages on United Nations websites. We, however, continue to be concerned at the continuing disparity in treatment among the different official languages and urge DPI to continue with its efforts to attain parity of all the official languages on the UN website in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

The Group attaches the utmost importance to the continuation of the use of traditional media, including both radio and print, in disseminating the main messages of the United Nations since traditional media remains the primary means of communication in developing countries. In this regard, we further encourage the DPI to continue building partnerships with local, national and regional broadcasters to extend the UN message to all corners of the world in an accurate, impartial and effective way.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to assure you, of the full support of the Group of 77 and China in leading the work of this session to a successful outcome. In addition, we reiterate the commitment of the Group to work constructively with other Member States in order to achieve a positive outcome of this session of the Committee on Information and produce an actions-oriented resolution.

Thank you.