

Statement by Mr. George Talbot, Chargé d' Affaires a.i. at the Permanent Mission of Guyana to the United Nations, on Behalf of the Rio Group _ (24 April 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Rio Group, in this General Debate of the United Nations Committee on Information. In so doing, allow me to express our Group's appreciation for the in depth reports provided by the Secretary-General as well as the comprehensive and insightful analysis on the work and challenges of the Department of Public Information (DPI) as presented by the Under-Secretary-General Mr. Shashi Tharoor. It is our view that the reports complemented by the presentation provide an adequate basis for the Committee's consideration of the issues slated for discussion.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department of Public Information continues to play a crucial role in the provision of comprehensive and timely information to the public on the work of the United Nations. In spite of the political and financial constraints faced, in addition to negative press coverage regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the United Nations, the DPI has consistently worked towards promoting a better understanding of the principles and work of this organization. We particularly commend the Department's efforts in raising global awareness on issues such as HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, threats to international peace and security, human rights and matters concerning development and encourage similar efforts with respect to the process of reform of the UN.

Over the past few years initiatives have been undertaken to maximize the use of the Department's resources to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. While the Rio Group is supportive of reforms to improve the working methods of any Department, including that of the DPI, we are nevertheless convinced that the regionalization of operations is not a viable option for enhancing the UN information and communication mechanism. As the recent analysis of the rationalization of the UN Regional Centre for Western Europe as contained in document [A/AC.198/2006/1](#) has illustrated, "the dramatic change in pattern of doing business and of serving the media and civil society in a large and distant geographic area from a centralized location..." has had the adverse effect of reducing the organisation's visibility. We would therefore urge that the lessons learnt from the rationalization of the Regional Centre of Western Europe serve to guide future action. Clearly, the successful rationalization of UNICs necessitates increased dialogue with host countries and greater sensitivity to the unique needs of specific regions. An issue which requires particularly urgent attention is the existing gaps in information and communication technologies among developing countries and between developing and developed countries.

The Rio Group is closely monitoring developments with regard to the realignment of resources, use of technologies and the expansion of partnerships, in keeping with the more strategic communicational approach, to accord UNICs broader programmatic functions and support of strategic communication to other offices in the region. We have noted the efforts

being undertaken to address the staffing needs of UNICs, including the appointment of a Director in the UNIC Office in Mexico City. We anticipate the early deployment of an Information Officer, whose duties would include the enhancement of services within the region, in particular to those countries outside the scope of the existing network of UNICs. The Rio Group understands that this is the first step in the rationalization process of all UNICs and reiterates that such efforts in no way constitute a preparatory measure to resume the regionalization of UNIC Offices, a process our region considers to be over.

Mr. Chairman,

This Committee continues to focus attention on parity among the official languages of the United Nations. In spite of the constraints faced, it is the view of our Group that multilingualism must be respected and applied in the dissemination of information on this Organisation. The report of the Secretary-General [A/AC.198/2006/3](#) has clearly highlighted the incremental access and use of the UN website, which makes the availability of information in all the official languages of the UN even more imperative. We urge that additional resources be allocated to accelerate action with respect to parity among the official languages of the organization, as well as the adoption of long-term strategies to strengthen governance on coherence. Elimination of the existing disparities among the official languages on the UN website could also be facilitated through greater cooperation between the DPI and academic institutions, in addition to continued collaboration between that Department, the Working Group on Internet Matters and content providing offices.

The Rio Group appreciates the efforts of the DPI to improve on its use of traditional means of communication such as radio, TV and print materials given the recognition that digital gaps still exist between Member States. We have noted that the introduction of new information and communications technologies has resulted in an expanded outreach of UN Radio broadcasts, which is now reaching a larger audience, including Spanish and Portuguese language speakers.

The Rio Group commends the United Nations libraries for the progress made in better supporting the work of the organization and the streamlining of the traditional library processes, in keeping with its new strategic directions. We also acknowledge the added knowledge sharing component of their work and consequently is inclined to consider favourably the proposal to change the official name of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre to reflect the new focus.

As stated on previous occasions, the Group attaches much importance to ensuring accessibility to the UN website by persons with disabilities, in particular those with visual and hearing disabilities. We appreciate the measures taken so far by DPI in that respect, and encourage the Department to continue working with the Inclusive Development Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and through that Section with experts in the field, for progress in this area.

Even though we are aware that the DPI has taken action to improve coordination with the Offices of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the Department

of Peacekeeping Operations, the Rio Group encourages continued coordination between the DPI and other Departments of the United Nations. The guidance projects prepared by the DPI for instance, on public information components of peacekeeping missions have already proven to be instrumental in promoting a better understanding of peacekeeping operations.

In closing, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to express the Rio Group's support for Thailand's request for membership of this Committee and to reiterate our readiness to cooperate fully with other States to ensure the successful outcome of this meeting and the strengthening of the DPI to effectively carry out its mandate.

I thank you.

**Note: The Member States of the Rio Group are as follows: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela.*