

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Ajai Malhotra, Acting Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations (25 April 2006)

Mr Chairman,

At the outset let me express my deep satisfaction upon having you preside once again over the deliberations of the Committee on Information. You can be assured of my delegation's full support as you guide our work. I would also like to join others in conveying our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor for his comprehensive and skilful presentation of the 'balance sheet' of the performance of the Department of Public Information [DPI] over the past year. His leadership has contributed to a transformed DPI, with a new focus, direction and purpose. I would also like to associate my delegation with the statement made by the distinguished representative of South Africa, as the G-77 Chairman.

The United Nations has recently been receiving a concentrated dose of media attention as a result of the 2005 World Summit and its follow up. Despite its image being affected by scandal-driven media coverage, the UN remains a pivotal global institution. The UN presently stands at the threshold of a new era, with a variety of opportunities and threats on its horizon. The DPI has a pivotal role to play at this sensitive stage, since it is the conduit for the flow of information between the UN and the peoples of the world. We welcome the DPI new strategic approach that combines realignment of resources and achieving greater effectiveness in its communications work through targeted delivery, enhanced use of information and communication technology, and the building of new partnerships with civil society organizations. This is particularly so, since the DPI will *per force* have to meet its goals with limited resources while functioning in an often unhelpful environment.

Looking ahead, the DPI must further intensify its efforts to meet the concerns and special needs of the developing countries in the field of information and communications technology. The 'digital divide' remains vast; huge segments of populations in developing countries continue to be deprived of the benefits of the information and IT revolution. Traditional means of communication, including radio and print, retain tremendous relevance for disseminating the UN message in developing countries. In this context, we welcome the recent initiatives undertaken by United Nations Radio through integration of new technologies, which has broadened the scope of its broadcasts and expanded its outreach. DPI must continue to expand its partnerships with local and national broadcasters, especially in the developing world.

Core economic development and social issues remain the overriding priorities of developing countries. We welcome DPI's focus over the past year on priority issues such as HIV/AIDS, Human Rights, New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Millennium Development Goals, Palestine, etc. We support DPI in its efforts to do even more to highlight such issues and the work of the UN in addressing them.

We also favour a strong relationship between DPI and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO]. We welcome the two major guidance projects for the public information components of peacekeeping missions that have been recently completed. We would also

encourage DPI and DPKO to devise and implement a comprehensive communication strategy that highlights success stories of peacekeeping and the role of peacekeepers in their areas of operation. An example would be to bring out the humanitarian activities being undertaken by a peacekeeping mission such as the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea [UNMEE]. Using resources voluntarily provided by Troop Contributing Countries such as Jordan, Kenya and India, UNMEE has been successfully implementing a focussed 'Winning of Hearts' programme by which it has sought to apply a healing touch via undertaking soil conservation and water harvesting activities, supply of drinking water and medicines to the locals, holding of nearly 500 free medical camps and 300 free veterinary camps, organising free vocational training in auto repair, carpentry, and basic handling of computers for the local population, improvement of tracks, clearance of war debris, construction of sports fields, restoration of schools and hospitals, promotion of mines awareness, distribution of school bags and books, etc. Such initiatives could be beneficially highlighted by the DPI, both locally and internationally. This is one of those stories that the world needs to hear more about via the DPI's outreach initiative!

The United Nations Information Centres [UNICs] are crucial in enhancing the public image of the UN and in disseminating its message, especially in developing countries. If the DPI is the UN's bullhorn, then it is the UNIC mechanism that gives its voice a local resonance. Adequate budgetary resources must be reassigned to secure effective functioning of UNICs in developing countries. We have noted that rationalisation of the network of UNICs will continue and would encourage DPI to consult closely with host countries, other countries served by these Information Centres, as well as the concerned region, in its efforts at further improvisation and innovation. Development of websites in local languages must also remain a primary DPI concern as it seeks to provide up-to-date information in the field.

We commend the DPI on its redesigning the UN website and welcome the new Press Release Web page and daily Media Alert put out by it. The UN website's continued development is essential for user satisfaction. We support DPI's plans to modernize the website architecture so as to provide even faster access to features that users actually seek out. It is good that the past three years have witnessed a sharp rise in subscribers to the UN News Centre's e-mail service and in readership of the print and online editions of the UN Chronicle. The possibility of subscribing to the UN News Centre's e-mail service from the UN home page itself, may be worth considering.

Intermediaries like the media, NGOs, and educational institutions, help amplify and spread the UN's message to target audiences. DPI outreach services, in particular its educational outreach, contribute to promoting awareness of the role and work of the UN on priority issues. We welcome the Global Teaching and Learning project and accompanying CyberSchoolBus website, by which DPI has promoted innovative approaches to learning about the UN. We also favour DPI efforts to strengthen its focal point role for interaction with civil society and commend its efforts to improve the quality of information available to NGOs.

DPI will have to constantly appraise and adjust its activities in a timely manner to fast changing international challenges. Accordingly, assessing and reassessing the effectiveness

of its actions must underpin its efforts and a systematic "culture of evaluation" guide its work. Training of staff to constantly review the impact of their work is a natural follow-up to this emphasis on evaluation. It is good that DPI is constantly exploring new ideas in this regard.

The DPI's challenge is not simply to make the UN's voice heard loud and clear, but to simultaneously deliver a message that is easily understood, appreciated and assimilated. In doing so, it will need to constantly improvise, modernise and re-invent, seeking to tell the UN story in an effective and efficient manner. I would like to convey our support to the DPI team in tackling the formidable tasks before it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.