

Statement by Mr. Mansoor Suhail, Minister, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations (26 April 2006)

Please permit me, Mr. Chairman, to extend our sincerest greetings to you and other members of the Bureau on successfully conducting the work of this important Committee. Your special interest in the field of information, coupled with your diplomatic skills, contribute significantly to the efficient and smooth functioning of the Committee's work. May I avail this opportunity to congratulate the distinguished representative of Switzerland, Mr. Ruedi Christen, on his election as a Vice Chairman of the Committee to fill up the position left by our dear friend and colleague Mr. Sebastiao Filipe Coelho Ferraeira, Representative of Portugal. The Secretary of the Committee, Ms. Paula Refolo also deserves to be commended for her efficiency and deep involvement in the work of the Committee through close interaction with its members.

My delegation also wishes to join others in welcoming Austria as the new member of the Committee. The interest of the Dominican Republic and Thailand in joining the Committee is also a welcome development. We shall look forward to working closely with them as well as with other members for a successful outcome of the Committee's work.

Mr. Chairman,

Your introductory statement has very succinctly highlighted the role of the Committee on Information in strengthening the United Nations as the center piece of multilateral architecture by legislating the mandate for the DPI. The detailed but still a captivating statement by the distinguished Under Secretary General for Public Information, Mr. Shashi Tharoor nicely articulated as to how the contours of that mandate were accomplished. Department of Public Information's march forward in these challenging times owes to the leadership of Mr. Tharoor. The interactive session has evolved into an institution where Member States can easily comprehend the direction and dimensions of the Department's activities. We thank Mr. Tharoor and all the Directors for their frank discussion during the interactive session.

Mr. Chairman, we associate ourselves with the statement by the distinguished Permanent Representative of South Africa as the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China, and wish to particularly reiterate the importance it attached to the functions of the Department of Public Information as the public voice of the organization and *"in providing accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to Member States and to the wider international community on the work of the United Nations"*. The report of the Secretary General about the activities of the Department of Public Information, contained in document [A/AC.198/2006/5](#) asserted that the principal task of the Department as the public voice of the organization, is to tell the United Nations story. However, we believe that the real challenge lies in telling the story in a compelling manner and with conviction to the widest possible audience. The most daunting task, therefore, is in reaching out to the widest possible audience in developing countries which otherwise lack the resources and the technical means to access the story. There are remarkable stories and accomplishments of the United Nations which deserve to come to world's attention. We, in Pakistan, were gratified by the support and concern displayed by international community after the disastrous earthquake which

devastated northern Pakistan and Azad Kashmir last October. We appreciate the role played by the United Nations in relief and rehabilitation operations as also by the DPI in projecting that among other aspects, through the media. We have taken note of the statement by the Under-Secretary-General that coverage of the earthquake and its subsequent reporting by MTV helped in achieving expanded outreach.

Mr. Chairman, the most prominent and central source of information and news about the United Nations in a developing country like Pakistan are the United Nations Information Centers (UNICs). The Centers play a vital role in building public support for the United Nations activities and expand its outreach to the remote corners of the developing countries. As the eyes and ears of the United Nations, the Centers interact with the media, civil society and the general public. We hear a lot about Department of Public Information's performance at Headquarters. We would like to hear as much if not more about how the UN activities were being shared by the UN Information Centers with the general public and media as well as civil society in the countries of their accreditations. The Secretary General's report on the continued rationalization of the network of UN Information Centers, contained in [A/AC.198/2006/1](#) concludes that the *"United Nations stories are global but every global story had resonance in a local context"*. It recognizes that UN Information Centers are the instruments that give the voice of the United Nations a local accent. It will be useful for my delegation to understand and appreciate as to how effectively the United Nations Information Center in Islamabad is reaching out to the public in Pakistan. We would welcome specific details as to how the Department and the UN Information Center is reaching out to the general public in Pakistan.

The Department has also indicated in the Report that it kept its focus on the priority issues. Urging simplified mandate for the Department of Public Information by the Committee on Information, the distinguished Under Secretary General Mr. Tharoor also emphasized that point in his introductory statement. While my delegation agrees that such prioritization was necessary not only to secure the greatest public impact, but also to ensure the optimal use of ever dwindling resources, we would like to, nevertheless, understand as to how the Department places a certain priority on certain mandates, as against others.

Mr. Chairman,

The report of the Secretary General on the continued rationalization of the network of the United Nations Information Centers contained in document [A/AC.198/2006/1](#) elucidates the steps taken by the Department of Public Information for further rationalization of the UN Information Centers. The report explains that the Department is focusing on placement of sufficiently senior level personnel in the 54 UN Information Centers to enhance their performance. It appears that the UN Information Center in Pakistan, which needs attention in view of its importance and role in advancing UN goals, has not received that kind of attention for the appointment of adequately senior professional but also in judicious utilization of the National Information Officer.

The report of the Secretary General on "Assessing the Effectiveness of UN Public Information Products and Activities: the Result of a Three-year Evaluation Project", as contained

in [A/A.C.198/2006/4](#) indicates very useful results. We could not agree more with the Department's Senior Managers who understand that assessing the impact of the effectiveness of UN communication activities constitutes the foundation for remaining responsive to the needs of worldwide audience. My delegation believes that such evaluation and assessments must be carried out on the basis of perceptions in societies and countries around the world, and not just in those countries where negative news about the UN results in its poor ratings.

The Secretary General's report on modernization and integrated management of UN Libraries with update on its new strategic directions, contained in document [A/AC.198/2006/2](#) provides a detailed review of how UN libraries were becoming key players in the field of knowledge sharing and content management. My delegation would be keen to see as to how the wealth of knowledge contained in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library can be made available to people in developing countries such as Pakistan. It would be appropriate to consider ways and means as to how a degree of mobility can be achieved with regard to the library for greater utilization.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan has been calling for greater coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peace Keeping Operations which constitutes a success story of the United Nations. The Department can appropriately project the objectives of Peace Keeping Operations in different societies to obtain and report understanding which can go a long way in creating goodwill and better image of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

President Pervez Musharraf outlined the concept of "Enlightened Moderation" during his address to the General Assembly in September 2004. The General Assembly also adopted a resolution sponsored by Pakistan on the promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation. The current state of affairs in the world calls for steps, particularly by organizations like the United Nations, to build bridges between societies and cultures. The Department of Public Information can play a constructive role in this regard through its campaigns to avert incidents of apathy and lack of understanding of each others' beliefs and religions, such as the one noted on the issue of caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) published by some European papers.

Mr. Chairman,

Several delegations have emphasized the importance of utilizing the traditional media in disseminating the UN message. We agree that such an approach is imperative due to continued reliance of general public in developing countries on traditional media outlets, such as radio, TV and newspapers. It is in this context that we call for the strengthening of UN Radio broadcasts in Urdu language which reflect considerable room for improvement. We also call for speedy dispatch and dissemination of video coverage of UN activities to Member States. We express our appreciation to the Media Liaison and Accreditation Unit for facilitating large numbers of journalists. My delegation also calls upon the DPI to take definite

steps to further improve cooperation and coordination with the journalists of developing countries, in particular those based at the UN Headquarters. Since the journalists from developing countries lack financial and technical resources as compared to their counterparts in the developed world, the DPI should consider facilitating them and providing them office space on priority basis. The UN Correspondents Association should also be extended full professional assistance, particularly in view of their commendable ongoing activities which are instrumental in expanding outreach of the UN message in the best interest of the organization.

Mr. Chairman,

The genesis of the Committee on Information was rooted in the resolve of the General Assembly to establish a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information ([Res. 34/182](#) of 18 December 1979). After 27 years, we continue to reflect the spirit of that resolve in part A of the Resolution which we adopt every year based on the Recommendations of the Committee on Information. However, the implementation of that noble goal remains little known. By strengthening the communication capacities of the developing countries a better balanced flow of information between the developed and the developing worlds could have been achieved. There can be little doubt that there is need to create greater harmony and understanding in the world by building bridges. We therefore, urge greater focus on such aspects of our resolution. UNESCO can, indeed, play a significant role in that regard. Its International Program for the Development of Communications (IPDC) was specifically designed to strengthen the communication capacities and infrastructures of media in the developing world. By reporting progress on these matters to the Committee on Information, the UNESCO can help strengthen the resolve of our members to rally behind those efforts. We therefore, call upon the UNESCO to report to the Committee on Information on the progress in achieving the objectives of this Resolution.

In conclusion, my delegation expresses its full support and willingness to work for adopting the Recommendations of this important Committee by consensus.