

Statement by Mr. Elmer G. Cato, Second Secretary at the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations (25 April 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

Allow us to start by commending you, Mr. Chairman, for your outstanding leadership during the 27th Session of the Committee on Information. The Philippine Delegation reaffirms its trust and confidence in you and the members of your bureau as you once again steer the work of the committee during our 28th session.

The Philippines would like to express its appreciation to the Undersecretary General for Communications and Public Information, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, for his usual exhaustive presentation on the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI) during the past year. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our delegation's gratitude to the Undersecretary General for his invaluable assistance during the Security Council Summit held under the Philippine Presidency in September.

The Philippines aligns itself with the statement delivered yesterday by the distinguished representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

In the past two sessions of the Committee, the Philippines had expressed its serious concerns over the damage inflicted on the image of the United Nations by such controversies as the Oil for Food Program and the cases of sexual exploitation and abuse involving peacekeepers.

It is thus heartening to learn from no less than the Secretary General that this year would be a slightly different story thanks largely to the tireless efforts of the men and women of the DPI to provide the peoples of the world with a better appreciation and understanding of the organization and its work.

Although we could never expect the UN to be immune from media criticism, our delegation is nonetheless pleased to note that the DPI has, to a certain extent, made significant progress in dealing with the image problem that has hounded our organization during the past two years. We have seen how during the past months the proactive efforts of the DPI, under the leadership of Undersecretary General, have succeeded in inviting media attention towards more positive developments as the 2005 World Summit and other undertakings.

We are also delighted to hear about the successful efforts by the DPI to raise awareness, particularly of key issues affecting the UN such as the seminars on Unlearning Intolerance that were undertaken in collaboration with partners in the UN system and the Ten Stories The World Should Hear More About that gave focus on underreported events that are of significant global interest.

Mr. Chairman,

The Philippines is convinced that the DPI would be in a much better position in the coming months to further project a positive image of the UN before its various audiences as a result of the culture of evaluation it has inculcated within the department as well as its avowed desire to reach out to more and more people through, among others, the use of new technologies, improved coordination, and partnerships.

We welcome the efforts of the DPI to improve its quick response mechanism as part of the lessons learned from the Oil for Food controversy. As a result, the UN could now identify and respond to negative criticism much faster than it used to. We are encouraged by its continuing efforts to work with media by providing the necessary services and at the same time entering into linkages with various news organizations worldwide.

We support the DPI's efforts to involve children and youth in the issues and concerns of the organization in collaboration with educational institutions worldwide. Towards this end, the Philippines would like to encourage the DPI to consider discussing with ministries of education of member-states the possibility of including a subject on the United Nations as part of the school curriculum.

Mr. Chairman,

In the coming months, the Philippines would like to see the DPI further improve its coordination with other substantive offices and agencies of the United Nations, particularly the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We are pleased that steps have been taken to help address the pressing issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in UN mission areas.

We would like to take note of the conclusion of two guidance projects for the public information components of peacekeeping missions. We are also encouraged by the positive media coverage of peacekeeping missions resulting from a more proactive approach the DPI has taken with the media in the host countries. We also would like to see the DPI play an active and important role in molding public perception as the UN starts to give shape to its peace-building capacity.

The Philippines joins other delegations in their call for more efforts to bridge the digital divide. We commend the DPI for its impressive work in utilizing the worldwide web in reaching out to a much larger audience. We also support its efforts to further improve the UN website in all the official languages and urge it to address the concerns of member-states over the disparity in the treatment of official languages. We support the allocation of additional resources for UN information centers, especially those in least developed countries.

The Philippines commends the DPI for its efforts to reach out to the peoples of the world, particularly those in Asia and Africa. We urge the DPI to tap media at all levels of society, most especially in least developed countries, in order for it to tell the UN story more convincingly. Traditional media should also be employed where it is most effective. We also congratulate the DPI for the improvements in the delivery of services offered by UN libraries.

Allow us to close Mr. Chairman by reiterating the commitment of the Philippine Delegation to assist in the successful outcome of our session and to support the ongoing as well as future efforts of the DPI to more effectively deliver the UN story to the widest audience possible.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.