

Statement by by Mr. Muhammad A. Muhith, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations (2 May 2007)

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to you upon your election as the Chairman of the COI. My delegation is fully confident that under your able stewardship, the Committee will be able to lead its work to fruition. Congratulations are also owed to the newly elected Bureau members. Let me also thank the members of the previous bureau, of which I was a rapporteur, for their contributions to the work of this important Committee.

I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Kiyo Akasaka on his appointment as the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. We thank him for his candid and very informative briefings. My delegation assures him of its full support and cooperation.

It would be remiss of me if I fail to pay rich tributes to both Ambassador Mihnea Ioan Motoc, the immediate past Chairman of the COI and Mr. Shashi Tharoor, the former USG for CPI for their leadership and invaluable contributions to the advancement of the COI.

My delegation sincerely welcomes the new members — Thailand and Dominican Republic to the COI family. These new memberships, making the total at 110 from only 46 in 1978, bear the testimony of the very importance and relevance of the COI in the UN system.

While I align myself entirely with the statement made by the distinguished Acting Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of Group of 77 and China, let me make a few additional points.

Mr Chairman,

In the present day world, information is growing at an exponential rate. But at the same time it is becoming harder to access for those who are not resourceful. The DPI is giving a crucial service here. It is striving to disseminate the information for the benefit of the un- and under-privileged, through its outreach programmes and other means. Its role is indispensable in conveying the work and purpose of this great organization to the widest possible audiences in order to achieve the greatest public impact. My delegation therefore, finds it worthwhile to support the work of this pro-people department of the United Nations.

We note with appreciation the fact that the DPI has adopted a more strategic approach to its work. Much of it owes to the changes introduced over the past five years as part of its major structural overhaul. We are pleased to note that the DPI is now focused on setting well-defined communications goals, identifying target audiences, assigning roles to various actors and re-disseminators and establishing ways to measure the impact of its activities. In this connection, we commend the quality of the reports, clustered around three thematic areas, as produced by the DPI, which are now before us for consideration.

Mr. Chairman,

We are convinced that the DPI is now playing an essential role, more effectively than ever, in order to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations. I will refrain from listing the wide range of activities undertaken by the Department. I would however, single out one very important element, which is the integration of the system of evaluation of its activities and products at all levels. It is the result of a three-year pilot project carried out in conjunction with the OIOS. We believe that greater emphasis on evaluation will give the DPI an edge in terms of improving its output in the ever changing situations and needs.

We fully subscribe to the view, which has been shared by other delegations, that UNICs are key to the work of the DPI, giving its global work a local accent. We are appreciative of the fact that the DPI has developed its communications strategies with clear goals. The UNICs have an important role in implementing those. We are however of the view that the development of such strategies should be exercised as an evolving process rather than a one-time event.

My delegation wishes to express its satisfaction for the exemplary manner in which UNICs Dhaka has been continuing to operate. Surviving on a shoe-string budget, and operating without a Director for almost two decades, the Centre's national staffs have earned greater recognition for its active promotion of the UN priority issues. We applaud their creative efforts and complete dedication. The Centre's Bangla-language website and weekly newsletter have been proven as important vehicles for communicating global issues in a local flavour. It is also undertaking various outreach activities involving civil society, academia and NGOs. Particularly laudable is its effort to develop a network among UN and other international libraries in the country. We encourage the Centre to expand this network and to include major educational institutions and their libraries. The Centre's own library is also very useful and is frequented by many students and local journalists.

The UNICs Dhaka has been successful in securing additional air-time from Radio Bangladesh for the UN Radio Bangla programme which is heard all over the country and enjoys a wide audience. We are disappointed that the two weekly programmes have now been reduced to one. We wonder what is the criterion for producing radio programmes in non-official languages. We note that some have daily programmes and regular staff where information from multiple sources are abundant, while others with wider audience have only weekly programmes with no regular staff.

Indeed, UNICs, like UN Country Teams, are the UN's local operational arms. To borrow an expression used in this forum, they are DPI's local megaphones. The DPI does not operate in a vacuum. It has to form an integral part of the overall effort of the UN agencies at the country level. Unless a clear synergy is developed between UNICs and UNCTs, the voice that will emanate will sound discordant. It is also important for the UN family, including UNICs, to address national priorities. The local population needs to share the ownership of the UN programme, or this will lose relevance.

We commend the Department's initiatives, as stated in the report A/AC.198/2007/2, to make the UNICs more effective and relevant through realignment of resources, upgrading their technological infrastructure, building partnerships at local and regional levels, and through regular interaction with Headquarters. We would encourage intensifying these efforts. In this regard, we would like to emphasize the need for additional resources and devising ways to mobilise them to better equip the UNICs across the globe in general and in the developing countries in particular.

Mr. Chairman,

As we all are aware, the UN Peacekeeping has evolved significantly over the past years as the needs for such operations continue. Today it has also morphed into peace-building to achieve a state of societal equilibrium where new disputes do not slip into violence and war. It is now important to let the world know the remarkable success of the UN in the fields of peacekeeping and peace-building in order to rally their support behind such efforts of the UN.

While DPI does its work with DPKO and other UN entities to focus attention to global peacekeeping issues, it is vitally important that the role of national UN peacekeepers be highlighted both locally and internationally. Bangladesh is among the largest contributors of peacekeepers. Its soldiers continue to risk their lives in support of UN ideals. My delegation would like to see peacekeepers from Bangladesh are given due recognition of their role in the UN's global effort to keep peace and international security. We consider the DPI's role invaluable in these efforts.

We were heartened to note that UNifeed has started distribution of at least two video stories on UN peacekeeping every week to international TV networks. My delegation would indeed be very interested to obtain a compilation of such stories pertaining to peacekeepers from Bangladesh for airing them on national TV outlets.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation sincerely commends the DPI for the excellent performance of the UN website team. The good team work, innovative ideas and praiseworthy professionalism have resulted in the success of the website. We have noted the improvement made in the website; especially the new web-page of the COI is laudable. We appreciate the progress made in making the UN website accessible by disables. We, however, look forward to a re-designed website of the UN that would be more informative and further user friendly.

Before closing, Mr. Chairman, let me commend the performances of the DPI staff for their dedication, hard work and sincerity. My delegation believes that the staffs are the most valuable asset of the UN. The DPI staffs have once again proved that with their valuable services to the UN, through whom we get to know that the people in conflicting zones would sleep peacefully from tomorrow because of UN operation, an HIV victim in Africa would now live longer and safer because the UN intervention and a boy in a remote part of the world would never have polio because of the vaccine provided by the UN!

I thank you Mr. Chairman.