

Statement by Mr. Mladen Cvrilje, Minister Counsellor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia (1 May 2007)

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia aligned itself with the declaration made previously by the Representative of Germany on behalf of the EU, and is honoured to contribute to the work of the Committee with its own statement.

Croatia wishes to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election and wishes you success in conducting the work of this Committee. We would also like to congratulate the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Mr. Kiyo Akasaka on his appointment and wishes him the most of success in leading the proceedings of the work of the Committee. We pay tribute to the previous Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Mr. Shashi Tharoor, and to the outgoing Chairman of COI Ambassador Ivo Matoc, for conducting most valiantly and successfully the work of the Department of Public Information and of the COI respectively.

We wish to express special thanks to the UN Secretary-General, for providing us with three very detailed Reports (A/AC.198/2007/2, 3 and 4), which will enable us to proceed in our work, and would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information on his valuable statement made at the beginning of our work.

The Croatian delegation commends the Department of Public Information for projecting a positive public image about the Organization, by generating, through its departments and offices, the raw material for setting priorities and identifying a consistent message on issues of the greatest importance to the international community. In the last several years, these issues have been pregnant with emerging challenges, but also with new perspectives.

In this sense, Croatia would like to draw the attention to the great opportunity for the Department of telling the UN story in a compelling manner and with conviction to the widest possible audience, particularly in those countries which lacked resources to access the story.

Mr. Chairman,

A very important function of the Department of Information is to help, through the UN News Centre, the users of information in understanding the role of the UN in the world, by inserting, occasionally, brief personal stories and experiences, about the fate of individual human beings in need, who live too deeply below the surface of States and nations to be easily seen or heard.

During a UN Security Council mission to Africa, in 2003, a personal experience was transmitted by the UN News Centre of the Head of the Security Council Mission, Ambassador Jeremy Greenstock, about his experience from a trip to Kananga, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As he had driven into that wholly trashed city, out of the damaged buildings came all the children of the town crying out in French for help, thinking that the visit to the

town would bring immediate peace to their country. As he had left, those same children stood silently at the side of the road, wondering why the mission was leaving before it had restored normalcy to their lives.

The reporting about these Security Council missions adds an extra dimension to the work of the UN on peace-building and conflict resolution, and spotlights crisis situations in a way that governments concerned could not ignore, by readily explaining to the world more fully, such that it would secure commitments from the key players, vital to finding solutions to conflicts.

Another personal story had been told by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on the occasion of his trip to the DR Congo, in January 2007. While delivering a message of hope for all of Africa, the Secretary-General drew on his own experiences as a child growing up in war-torn Korea in the 1950s, emphasizing that he had seen hardship and hunger, the degradation and disease, that came with prolonged warfare. As a young boy, the UN Secretary-General had also witnessed how, through unity of purpose, his country was able to transform itself from a traumatized nation with a non-existent economy, into a vibrant, productive society, and a regional economic power. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggested that a similar unity of purpose could be invested in the development of Africa.

Personal stories about past experiences of top UN officials or friends of the UN can be informative, and call to action, but the main task of their authors is to send a consistent message, characterized by transparency and containing added quality value.

Mr. Chairman,

The systematic impact reviews conducted by the Department over the past several years were important instruments for gauging whether the UN information met the demands of its users. For many developing countries, the radio, especially, has remained the primary source for obtaining information. In Croatia, the use of the radio is still one of the most wide-spread and efficient means of communication with the population.

Every year, the Committee on Information observes World Press Freedom Day and devotes a half-day meeting to the observance of the Day, paying tribute to the many journalists around the world who risk their lives by professional choice, in their effort to assert press freedom on behalf of all members of society.

In Croatia, a special tribute is paid every year in memory of journalists who fell as victims during the Homeland war. One of them has become a pioneer and a hero of the fight for the freedom of the press, Siniša Glavašević, who had been a war reporter from the frontlines and an editor of Croatian Radio Vukovar, during the hostilities and aggression against Croatia. Months before the fall of Vukovar, this Croatian radio reporter broadcast live warm stories about human values to his fellow-citizens in the besieged city. Glavašević was captured, taken to the concentration camp Ovčara, and executed on the same day of the fall of Vukovar.

Back in 1991, for the Croatian people, who also lived in shelters and basements for months, to avoid the shelling and the rocketing of many Croatian cities, the radio was to them the only source of information. The use of the radio provided new strength to the fight for freedom and for the international recognition of Croatia. The freedom of the press proved to be a major instrument in achieving Croatian independence, and the use of the radio contributed greatly in this goal. For this reason, a part of the Croatian population is still emotionally tied to the radio.

Mr. Chairman,

In the preservation of international peace and security, UN PKOs are one of the most efficient and forceful tools. PKOs communicate directly and instruct the local population of shattered societies about the purpose of peace-building, including public information capacity.

As a country that was once the recipient of aid and a host of five peacekeeping missions, the Republic of Croatia is today an active participant in eleven (very soon to become sixteen) of a total of eighteen UN and in four international PKOs around the globe. This demonstrates the Croatian will to commit itself for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Croatia believes that the success of an operation depends not only on the more field-oriented DPKO, but, as Croatian participating troops have tried to demonstrate, on a country's trained troops for the political process. Croatia proposes to the DPI to devise a communications strategy that would highlight success stories of peacekeepers in their areas of operation.

Some developing states still need direct assistance from the international community, in dealing with problems beyond their possibilities of immediate action, such as natural hazards. Croatia gives priority to the role of the media played in disaster risk reduction, in education and awareness-raising of the population, based on a strong people-centred approach.

Information about urgent appeals for assistance to people in need and the underprivileged, should also make sure to include a message about actions taken by international donors and donor countries, under the auspices of the UN. In honouring this principle, Croatia makes many voluntary contributions to UN Programmes and Funds.

Mr. Chairman,

The information and communication technology is being used increasingly in the education system in Croatia. One of the benefits of drawing information from the domain of education comes from the teaching of tolerance and ecumenical values in the relationship among citizens of different religious or ethnic communities. A special emphasis is made on the need to reaffirm the condemnation of the Holocaust against the Jews in Croatia and in Europe, as a crime against humanity and to ensure that such events are never repeated.

Also, the users of information are reminded that the Islamic community in Croatia is represented in the state and governmental authorities, and the relationship of Moslems in Croatia with other communities has always been based on mutual trust and righteousness.

With the successful completion of a three year-pilot project, the DPI has integrated the systematic evaluation of its activities and products. In a survey of teachers, in an effort to expand and improve its outreach to young people, it has been found that a great deal of students believed that the UN materials were useful for teaching and to sensitize them to other cultures and experiences.

Croatia's specific position as a Central European, Danubian and Mediterranean country, provides added value in bilateral and multilateral contacts and experience, stemming from participation in numerous global, European and regional organizations and initiatives. Croatia is an active Member of the Organisational Committee of the Peace Building Commission, which is another opportunity to cooperate and share the hard work of the UN system of communication and information.

Croatia commends the DPI in continuing to involve UN goodwill ambassadors in its outreach activities. The Croatian Goodwill Ambassadors operating at the national level are the film star Bojana Gregoric and the singer Gibonni, who are advocates in promoting the work of the UN.

Croatia cannot accept that some countries have been less fortunate or precluded from the benefits of global information and communication systems. A continued use of a strong people-centred approach by the DPI should be preserved, in telling more brief personal stories and experiences, by means of a consistent message, characterized by accountability and transparency, but still maintaining a high level of professional ethics and tolerance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.