

## **Statement by Ms. Katharina Ahrendts, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, on behalf of the European Union (30 April 2007)**

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro and Serbia as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

Let me, Mr. Chairman, congratulate you and the other members of the bureau on assuming the important duty of presiding over the work of this committee. I would also like to congratulate USG Akasaka on his nomination as the head of the Department of Public Information. I wish you all success, Mr. Akasaka, in fulfilling your mission to promote the United Nations, their objectives and their activities in an accurate and efficient way. We trust that we will be able to build a strong relationship, based on confidence. Let me assure you of the full support of the European Union in your endeavours.

I would like to seize this opportunity to warmly thank Mr. Shashi Tharoor for his remarkable work. I have no doubt that Shashi Tharoor will be remembered as an outstanding head of DPI who constantly aimed at making the efforts of the United Nations better known and at enhancing its image worldwide.

The European Union expresses its appreciation for the constructive interaction between DPI and the members of the Committee. DPI plays an essential role towards our shared objective of providing a focused information service of high quality to the UN family, media outlets all over the world and interested citizens.

The public outreach activity for the United Nations is a task of great importance. Without informing the world on the UN's activities and publicising the UN's achievements globally we cannot expect to have the support of all peoples for its mission. This is also the case when the UN is seeking to improve its system-wide coherence and pursue other ambitious reforms.

### **Activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI)**

Mr. Chairman,

The European Union commends DPI for its efforts to develop a more strategic approach to promoting global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the UN in priority areas. In this regard we welcome the new communications strategy which is built on a closer relationship between the Department and its network of UN information centres and the other UN departments and offices, the family of UN organizations and a global network of over 1,500 civil society organizations. "Client orientation" is the right term to describe the strategy needed to achieve the mission of DPI: The Department has to help fulfilling the substantive

purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact.

We are convinced that successful communication rests on ever deeper knowledge of audiences and their expectations. Systematic impact reviews as conducted by DPI since 2002 are an important instrument to find out whether UN information meets the demands of the users. The EU commends DPI for its effort to target its products, services and activities even better at interested audiences, both in terms of relevance and quality. We encourage the Department to pursue and intensify its evaluation efforts and make it a common feature of its activities. In this context, the EU is pleased to see that with the completion of the three-year pilot project carried out in conjunction with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), DPI has now integrated systematic evaluation of its activities and products.

## **United Nations Information Centres (UNICs)**

Mr. Chairman,

The EU commends the Department of Public Information for the report on the activities and strategic directions of the network of UN information centres.

We appreciate the efforts undertaken by DPI with regard to the reform initiatives over the past five years. They have indeed resulted in a more strategic approach to the work of the network of UN information centres. The report mentions examples of communication campaigns, activities of the Communications Group and partnerships at the local level, especially with the civil society. We particularly welcome the promotion of model United Nations programmes in cooperation with local educational NGOs.

The EU welcomes the regionalization efforts of the department. We agree that the pursuit of regionalisation should take into account the circumstances in each region. In this regard the Western European model may not be applicable to all regions in the world. However, as we have pointed out on numerous occasions, the European Union lent its support to the Secretary General's proposals for regional hubs in 2002 hoping for real medium to long-term benefits to the UN and to the peoples of the world. This decision forced a number of European countries to take the tough decision to close offices in their capitals in order to establish UNRIC. Today, we see that these efforts are starting to bear fruit. We encourage DPI to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of UNRIC and other UN information centers, and we encourage other member states and regional groups to consider similar decisions.

The EU therefore welcomes the strengthening of the information centres in the major media hubs in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria. The redeployment of staff resources and the assignment of additional responsibilities with regard to other centres in their respective regions is an important step in the reform efforts of DPI and the UNICs network.

The European Union reiterates that the pursuit of the rationalisation and improvement process of the UNICs network could and should include in-depth evaluation and transparent budget planning. DPI should thoroughly evaluate the work of the centres, in cooperation

with OIOS, UNICs and every other valuable partner and report to all member states in a detailed way. We expect that the culture of evaluation successfully implemented within DPI Headquarters be expanded to cover the performance of all UNICs. This evaluation could highlight in particular how the resources reallocated are making a difference in those UNICs which benefited from the transfers.

## **United Nations Website**

Mr. Chairman,

The UN website is a primary source of information for the UN family, numerous stakeholders and the interested public and is growing in popularity as illustrated by an increasing number of visits. The European Union finds the UN Webcast a valuable service that provides instant information to member states and general public and promotes transparency on the work of the Organization.

We encourage all efforts aimed at improving visual and functional coherence among the numerous websites of the UN. We particularly welcome the increasing compliance with the requirements for persons with disabilities. All new web projects need to be designed to meet accessibility requirements. But also older pages should, wherever possible, be corrected to address accessibility issues.

The European Union also supports the approach taken by DPI to make use of all facets of the internet's growing multimedia-capability by including more webcasts and radio files in numerous languages in its online offer. Such innovations make the website more relevant, as does the fact that the Official Document System (ODS) as well as the Registry of Mandates as a multilingual repository of United Nations documentation, are freely available to internet-users on a global scale.

Reaching a global audience also implies making full use of the UN's linguistic diversity. We commend DPI for the efforts to accelerate the pace of moving towards parity among official languages on the website and to enhance the language capacity of the web site section. We urge the department to continue its concrete work in favour of multilingualism on the website, as well as in all its activities.

## **World Press Freedom Day**

Mr. Chairman,

As we prepare for World Press Freedom day on 3 May, the European Union reiterates its strong commitment to a free press and its important role for a free society.

It is a cause of profound concern that in many countries freedom of the press and dissemination of information are limited or inexistent. Freedom of opinion and expression is a right set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right includes the "freedom to

hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

Regrettably, once again in 2006 journalists died in the course of their work across the globe. We strongly condemn the use of violence to hinder the activities of journalists, among others in zones of conflict. In this regard, the European Union welcomes Security Council resolution 1738 of December 23, 2006 aiming at better protecting journalists in conflict zones. The European Union also condemns attempts to control or influence the media by distorting or suppressing information or opinions. We believe that freedom of the press is essential for democratic and open societies. The establishment of a free press is also one of the indicators of a successful transition from conflict to a post-conflict society and a crucial tool in preventing the resurgence of conflict.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to underscore the commitment of the European Union to conducting our deliberations during this 29<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on Information in a constructive and cooperative manner, aimed at seeking solutions by consensus.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.