

## **Statement by Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (30 April 2007)**

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address, for the first time, the annual session of the Committee on Information. At the outset of my address, please allow me to take this opportunity to welcome the newly-elected Chairman, Rudolf Christen, and the members of the Bureau. I am grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind and encouraging words addressed to me. I look forward to working closely with you and with other members of the Bureau.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing chairman, His Excellency Mr. Mihnea Ioan Motoc, and the other members of his Bureau, for the outstanding support and cooperation they extended to the Department over the past two years.

I would also like pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, for his stewardship of the Department over the past six years.

Having joined the UN only a few weeks ago, I am still learning and observing, but I am keenly aware of the important role this Committee plays in guiding DPI in its work and helping it to become more effective.

Later today, my senior DPI colleagues will join me in this room for an interactive dialogue with you, about the work of the Department. I have been told that this dialogue is particularly useful for delegates who are new to this Committee and are not familiar with the work of the Department. As someone who is also new to the Department, I am looking forward to learning from this exchange.

Mr. Chairman,

The General Assembly, in its resolutions 61/121 A and B of 8 December 2006, requested the Secretary-General to report to the twenty-ninth session of the Committee on Information on the activities of the Department and on the implementation of its recommendations on questions relating to public information. Through consultations with the Bureau of the Committee, it was decided that the information requested in the above resolution would be grouped into the three reports listed in your agenda (A/AC.198/2007/1).

Taken together, these reports provide a comprehensive picture of a Department that has reoriented itself, both structurally and programmatically.

We must build on the gains made in the past, while remaining attentive to the demands of the media, to changes in the Organization's priorities, and to new and revised mandates given to us by Member States. DPI's future course, like that of the Organization itself, will therefore be guided by a policy of "reform with continuity."

DPI's mission is to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. As the reports of the Secretary-General to the Committee demonstrate, the Department has made steady progress in meeting its mission. Allow me to share with you some of the highlights and conclusions.

First, I will explain how DPI's activities are now more strategic.

Second, I will tell you a little about how DPI is working more effectively with media.

And third, I will speak a little about our outreach to opinion leaders, young people and civil society.

Being strategic means setting priorities in a manner that enables DPI not only to do what is most pressing, but also what is most achievable and where it can have the best results. This strategic approach has four basic components:

1. Use of both traditional means of communications and new information and communications technologies;
2. Targeted delivery of public information products and the systematic collection of user feedback;
3. Increased integration of the network of UN information centres in the implementation of communications strategies; and
4. Greater system-wide coordination.

An integral part of this strategic approach is evaluation. The "Annual Programme Impact Review" – or APIR – was introduced four years ago as an evaluation tool. It sets out clearly measurable indicators of achievement for each of our major activities. This tool allows DPI's programme managers to better determine the effectiveness of their activities, and also serves as a basis for greater accountability from programme managers.

All the elements of our strategic approach have been brought together in our recent thematic communications campaigns, with positive results. For example, for the High-level Dialogue on Migration of the General Assembly in September 2006, the Department collaborated with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration and Development, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This resulted in the production of a ten-part press kit, including separate fact-sheets on regions and sub-regions. An analysis of the media coverage showed that the key messages on the UN role on migration framed by DPI were picked up by journalists more than 90 per cent of the time.

Another illustration was the very successful "Stand-Up against Poverty" campaign in October 2006. Working with the Millennium Campaign Office, DPI contributed, through its UN information centres, to this global campaign that succeeded in mobilizing some 2.3 million people to express their support for the MDGs.

DPI is also working with the General Assembly President's Office to promote the upcoming informal debate in the General Assembly on "Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace." The meeting will provide an opportunity to highlight the General Assembly as an ideal venue for promoting tolerance and respect for diversity across cultures.

Mr. Chairman,

DPI's integrated approach also has an impact on how the UN story is told. For example, following a public information training workshop for peacekeeping missions organized by DPI and DPKO, UNTV started taking raw video footage from peacekeeping missions and transforming this material into feature stories for dissemination to broadcasters worldwide. UNifeed, DPI's satellite-based distribution service, now distributes at least two feature stories on peacekeeping every week.

Regarding the second of my highlights — DPI's service to the media — thanks to the integration of new information and communications technologies at all levels of our work, our capacity to tell the UN story has greatly expanded

I will limit myself to giving you a few facts and figures.

With over 50 million unique visits annually, the United Nations website is now the principal gateway to information about the United Nations on the Internet. It provides a wide range of news and information in multiple forms — audio, video and photo, as well as text — in multiple languages to users around the world. On a typical weekday, users now view more than a million pages of material in the six official languages, and more than 15,000 video clips.

- The UN News Centre portal, which is being redesigned, remains one of the most popular destinations on the UN website.
- Some 5,000 journalists now receive web-based "media alerts."
- Through the Department's daily video satellite feed, UNifeed now sends video material to some 600 broadcasters worldwide, six days a week.
- As a result of DPI's increased ability for webcasting, in 2006 some 8.3 million viewers from around the world were able to view events at UN Headquarters in New York and Geneva.
- We have doubled the number of people who have access to UN Radio programmes to well over 300 million, and much of our programming is now available on the Internet.
- Our web-based accreditation system has reduced unnecessary delays in issuing accreditation to journalists who want to cover UN events. In 2006, over 5000 journalists took advantage of this on-line delivery system.

Mr. Chairman,

The third of my highlights — DPI's outreach to civil society, opinion leaders and youth — has also benefited from innovation and targeted programmes.

Conscious of the need to connect with new audiences and target groups, DPI has made some organizational changes and developed several new outreach activities initiated by the General Assembly.

The Department has forged new partnerships with public and private groups that target young people, who increasingly use the Internet to obtain information. For example, the UN Works Programme has teamed up with the MTV network and its affiliates in 179 countries to create multimedia content. This has created new opportunities to educate and engage young people on global issues.

One concrete result of this partnership is the “Water for Life” multi-media campaign, featuring a documentary about water and sanitation in Africa and a complimentary website with educational resources and ways for young people to get involved. The site received more than 2 million dedicated page views in the first month. Inspired by the documentary, a group of young students in a school in the Bronx in New York City raised \$1,500 in one month for a school in Angola.

One of several new outreach programmes is the programme on the Holocaust and the United Nations, which the General Assembly mandated in November of 2005. The programme's website, which includes discussion papers and information about film screenings and briefings, received some 30,000 page views around Holocaust Remembrance Day. The observance in the General Assembly Hall this year included representatives of various communities who were targeted during the Holocaust, as well as students who will carry their message of tolerance and hope to future generations.

The newly created Advocacy Unit, which is responsible for this outreach programme, is also exploring new ways to involve prominent individuals of talent and ability, such as the United Nations Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors, in the promotion of the work of the United Nations around the world.

Mr. Chairman,

Looking ahead, in the area of strategic communications, we are focusing on four priority themes in 2007:

- Peace and Security,
- Climate Change,
- Development and the Millennium Development Goals, and
- Human Rights

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also outlined some of key issues for this year. Chief among them is the continuation of UN reform. This topic, along with issues relating to the Middle East and Africa, as well as General Assembly-mandated activities, or unforeseen developments such as humanitarian emergencies or political crises, will be covered by our communication network. Most of these developments will fall under the umbrella of one or more of the four priority communication themes I have mentioned. It will be our collective

challenge to present the actions of the United Nations coherently and show how they are relevant to people's lives — that is, to the lives of ordinary men and women.

In the area of news and media services, the immediate task before us is to maintain the current level of quality coverage and to eliminate gaps. We will do this by building on our existing strengths and finding ways to further engage with external partners and other UN system entities.

There are a number of other operational objectives as well. We are actively planning to put UN audio and video on the web to provide broadcasters with round-the-clock material on demand. This will finally put us at par, technologically speaking, with major international networks. Another area where we need improvement is in closing the multilingualism gap on the web and enhancing access to the website for people with disabilities. Significant progress has been made in these areas, but more needs to be done.

I am fully aware of the importance which you, the Member States, attach to the traditional means of communication, such as print products and radio programmes. Let me assure you of DPI's commitment to attaining the right balance between web-based programmes and products and traditional methods of conveying information.

Developing new products while strengthening traditional media requires resources, both human and financial. This is always a challenge. Website enhancements and maintenance have also become increasingly demanding and costly, especially given the important new mandate asking us to make the web pages accessible to the disabled in all official languages.

In the area of our outreach service to civil society, the general public and the media, our thematic priority for the upcoming year will be climate change, and the role of the UN in this critical issue. It is the major theme of the 2007 DPI-NGO Conference and will also feature in resources and multimedia content developed by the Educational Outreach Section, as well as in a special issue of the *UN Chronicle*. Climate change will also be the focus of the Student Observance on World Environment Day, and will be a highlight of the briefings provided as part of the Reham Al-Farra Fellowship Programme for journalists from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

2007 will also mark the 60th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*. We are planning a seminar in November to commemorate this landmark event, with a focus on coverage in the Yearbook on how the UN dealt with environmental and climate change issues.

Climate change will also be a major theme of video-conferences with university students. Our tour guides, who are the public faces of this Organization for the half a million or so people who take the tour of the Headquarters building annually, will also draw visitors' attention to UN action on climate change. The approximately one million visitors entering the General Assembly lobby each year have the opportunity to view DPI's changing display of exhibits, and in the next twelve months at least two of those exhibits already scheduled will be on aspects of climate change and the environment.

We are also seeking to strengthen our educational outreach programmes. These programmes have been designed to take the UN outside the hallowed halls of this building into schools and classrooms, and we are now looking to them to deliver on their promise. Our Academic Initiative and Educational Outreach section, of which the very popular Cyberschoolbus website is an integral part, is building structured relationships between the Department and educational institutions, including elementary and secondary schools and centres of higher learning.

Another area where positive changes are taking place is in the information services offered by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Knowledge Sharing Centre. DHLINK has already undergone a fundamental change, shifting away from the traditional role of a library as a collection of publications, to a knowledge centre that connects stakeholders with tools and resources available globally.

As part of this new outreach focus, DHLINK is working with partner institutions and the over 400 depository libraries worldwide, to identify new innovative approaches to disseminate information and knowledge.

Last year, DHLINK launched a consulting service called Personal Knowledge Management (PKM). Its aim is to help staff and permanent missions of Member States to take advantage of the array of information resources available to them. This service assists individuals or groups through personalized coaching and training sessions on how to access information and other knowledge management issues. In the coming months, this service will be expanded and diversified. I encourage you to contact DHLINK staff and to find out more about this and how you might benefit.

At this point, I would like to draw your attention to a major concern that will affect many of our outreach activities. The Capital Master Plan will have a serious impact on our services, especially on DHLINK, on the guided tours, on the organized group programmes, and on the UN Bookshop. Activities will be drastically reduced during the renovation of the Headquarters complex. I will follow up with the CMP managers on these issues and seek to uncover ways to minimize the damage.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, let me share with you some thoughts on the future direction of the network of UN information centres. A good communications strategy by itself is of limited value unless it reaches the audience for whom it is intended. When we talk about a global audience, we are really referring to a collection of local audiences.

The network of UNICs is one of the main vehicles through which we can reach these local audiences, including schools with few educational tools, civil society groups that serve underprivileged groups, and media outlets that have limited resources and sometimes no access to the Internet. They give our global messages a local accent — and as a result they bring the UN closer to the people it serves.

As outlined in the report of the Secretary-General, we have taken measures to further strengthen UNICs and to integrate them within the overall communications strategy of the Department. These measures include the realignment of resources; upgrading of the use of information and communications technologies; building partnerships at local and regional levels; and the provision of regular guidance from Headquarters on key thematic issues.

I am pleased to report that every UNIC now has a fully functional website, and that these websites mean that information is available in 31 languages.

We have also developed a new work plan template for UNICs. This template, a working tool that will help our field staff plan and monitor their progress, as well as evaluate programmes and derive lessons from them, is available on a new internal digital network we have instituted called StratCom.

We have strengthened our presence in major media hubs, such as Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria, with the aim of maximizing the impact of their limited resources. These centres — now better staffed and better resourced — have been given a coordinating role at the regional level. For example, UNIC Cairo and UNIC Mexico have taken the lead in creating regional UN Communications Groups, bringing together existing communications resources in their respective regions.

In Europe, our offices in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna are using innovative networking tools to join hands and coordinate their communications tasks. They are now talking to each other more often, sharing their resources whenever possible and undertaking joint exercises. UNIS Vienna has also assumed the responsibility of providing strategic guidance to our UNICs in Bucharest, Prague and Warsaw. It is still early days, but we are already seeing benefits of these new synergies. Whether in Africa, Latin America or Europe, by working together at the regional level, UNICs are better able to provide information and inspire discussion on UN issues that resonate in their respective regions.

This has encouraged us to explore the possibility of strengthening UNICs in other regions or sub-regions. DPI places great importance on the role of the UNICs at the country level, as a key member of the UN Country Team. Let me assure you that as discussions relating to System-wide coherence continue, and with "One UN" pilots underway in a number of countries, we are very aware of the need to ensure the viability and effectiveness of UNICs, and to ensure that they add value to the efforts of the UN system at the country level.

Mr. Chairman,

Speaking of the UN system, our experience at the global level shows that the UN system is at its best when it *speaks* coherently. The UN Communications Group, which at the global level brings the communications focal points of the entire UN system under one umbrella, can also be an effective tool at the local level. With UNICs in the lead, local chapters of UNCG have already been created in some 60 countries. We hope, in the next 12 months, that UNCGs will be created in every country where UN system organizations function.

I have been with the DPI only for a few weeks, but my association with the United Nations and multinational bodies spans well over 20 years. My work with WHO, GATT and WTO, and recently with OECD, took me to places far and near. At each place, I discovered amazing stories of people striving to make lives better. Behind those stories often lay the light footprint of the United Nations and its staff. I always admired the commitment and dedication of those people — the unsung heroes — who stood guard between enemy combatants, built tents for refugees, vaccinated children against deadly diseases, and brought food and water to the needy.

Now I have the opportunity to tell the story of the United Nations to the whole world. It is an amazing opportunity and a remarkable challenge. Together with you, and with the support of our UN system colleagues — including DPI's staff here at Headquarters and in the field — I will strive to ensure the voice of the UN is heard loud and clear.

For me, a new journey has begun, and I am very pleased to have you as my fellow passengers.

Thank you.