

Closing Remarks by Mr. Maher Nasser, Acting Head, Department of Public Information (25 April 2012)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to start by thanking you for affording me the opportunity to address the Committee as you conclude your general debate for this 34th session. I thank all the delegations for their kind words addressed to me and for commending the work of the Department of Public Information and its staff. I have great appreciation for the support that you have provided to me as the Acting Head of the Department.

I also take this opportunity to thank all those delegates who have expressed their gratitude for the work of Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, the outgoing Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. In the preceding five years, Mr. Akasaka oversaw DPI's transformation into a modern communications outfit, capable of confronting new and evolving communications challenges. Please be assured that your kind words and best wishes addressed to Mr. Akasaka will be conveyed to him as soon as possible.

I would now like to respond to some of the specific questions and comments that have been raised over the course of the Committee's general debate.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Public Information and all my colleagues, I would like to thank the many delegates — including the distinguished representative of Algeria, on behalf of the G77 and China — who have spoken so highly about the work of the network of UN Information Centres, Offices and Information Services and the need to ensure that they are provided with adequate resources to conduct their work. Several delegates identified UNICs located in their respective countries and singled them out for the critical communications activities that they continue to carry out on behalf of the United Nations. We are grateful for this positive feedback, and we will share it with our colleagues in the field, who I am sure will greatly appreciate it. Having served twice in the field, I know how important it is to get feedback.

I would especially like to thank those Member States who continue to provide support to the Information Centres, either through rent-free premises or voluntary contributions and hope that others will be inclined to follow suit.

I thank the distinguished representative of Pakistan for his interest in restoring full services at UNIC Islamabad, and we are looking forward to a new full-time director taking up the post shortly.

I thank the distinguished representative of Belarus and appreciate his proposal for turning the UNIC in Moscow into a training centre for communications staff and journalists covering the region. This is a proposal worth further study, and will be pursued by DPI.

We also welcome the interest in the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists Fellowship Programme and are pleased to acknowledge the appreciation expressed by delegates about the programme and the desire to see it expanded. Any expansion of the programme — either in terms of its duration or increase in the number of participants — will obviously have budgetary implications. Since 1981, DPI has sponsored this annual fellowship programme for junior and mid-level broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries with economies in transition at UN Headquarters in New York. More than 470 journalists and broadcasters from more than 160 countries have participated in this programme since it began. And what we would like to do is through social media be connected with the alumni of the programme.

We take note of the importance attached to DPI's role as a convening forum for ideas that promote global unity and understanding. In this context, we are grateful to the Committee on Information for joining hands with the Department and with the Permanent Mission of India to co-host a special event to celebrate the International Jazz Day on 30 April. The event, taking place under the overall theme of “unlearning intolerance,” will focus on the role of Jazz as a Force for Education and Dialogue.

The prevention of genocide is, as the distinguished representative of the G77 and China noted and many others confirmed, among the issues where the Department has had continued public awareness campaigns. We acknowledge with thanks the positive remarks by distinguished representatives on various DPI outreach programmes and I want to assure the members of this Committee that the Department will continue to work vigorously to support the General Assembly mandate to help prevent future acts of bigotry, racism, hatred and prejudice.

We also note with appreciation comments made by the distinguished representative of India and others about the United Nations Academic Impact for its role in improving awareness about the goals, priorities and concerns of the United Nations and strengthening international support for the role and activities of the world body. Indeed, as the distinguished speaker underlined, the United Nations Academic Impact is not just about education; it's also about the practical application of education to the realization of UN — and hence universal — needs.

We share the views expressed by the distinguished representative of Spain on the importance of radio as a vital means of communications and welcome her proposal to observe the International Day of Radio in a befitting manner. For this year's observance of the Day, I am pleased to inform you that UN Radio produced special multimedia programming in eight languages (the six official UN languages, as well as Portuguese and Kiswahili) and a promotional campaign through Facebook. The special programming included the use of historic UN Radio interviews from the archives, and these features were well received by our radio partners and by our audiences. We will continue to highlight the Day with special programming. We can do so at no additional cost.

Several speakers discussed the importance of achieving linguistic parity in the work of the Department, particularly on the UN website. As I have emphasized before, multilingualism is

one of the cornerstones of our work and we continue to look for every opportunity to expand our multilingual coverage.

Several delegates have emphasized the need for issuing the press releases in all official languages in a cost-neutral manner. I want to assure the distinguished delegates that the Department will continue to explore creative mechanisms that would not require additional human and financial resources. We have met with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conferences Services to see if there was some way to share resources. However, the Department's human resources and mandates are such that there would be no consistency in timing, capacity and availability of staff to create any kind of workable formula.

We have also explored translation mechanisms — rather than original rendering of meetings and conferences as with English and French — via computer software and pro bono agreements with universities. The options have not proven viable for press releases, given the need for fast turn-around, and for high-quality drafting and editing on complex subjects. Translation software produces materials that require significant editing, which in turn requires skilled staff. Pro bono translating arrangements continue to be an effective mechanism for increasing parity amongst the six official languages, but such agreements do not result in the very timely delivery of materials, and require editing upon receipt.

As you know, meetings coverage press releases are — with rare exceptions — published on the day of the meeting, and almost always within two hours of the conclusion of the meeting.

The Department believes that the human resources and skills required to expand the press releases from the working languages for meetings coverage (English and French) to the six official languages, or to one language at a time on a rotational basis, would have significant financial implications. Obviously, we will continue our consultations with Member States and relevant budgetary bodies to arrive at a satisfactory decision.

The Department of Public Information is dedicated to communicating the ideals and work of the United Nations to the world; to interacting and partnering with diverse audiences; and to building support for peace, development, and human rights for all. Your support will only strengthen our determination to "Inform, Engage and Act."

Though the formal debate has now come to a close, my Department looks forward to continuing its dialogue through the Bureau of the Committee. I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations over the coming days and to the strategic direction and guidance that the Committee will provide through its recommendations to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

Thank you. Shukran.