

STATEMENT BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
MONDAY, 22 APRIL 2013, 10:00 A.M.
Conference Room 2, North Lawn Building

Madam Chairperson,

Before starting, please allow me to extend our deepest condolences to the people and Government of China. Our hearts and thoughts go out to the families of those who perished and we extend our full support to all those who are suffering as a result of Saturday's earthquake.

Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege and an honour to be with you today.

Allow me to offer the congratulations of the Department of Public Information to you, Madam Chairperson, and the other newly elected members of the Bureau. With your pioneering role as a female radio and television host in Oman, Madam Ambassador, we are particularly honoured to have such a distinguished figure leading the Committee. We look forward to your insights into how the Department can work more effectively. We are sure that the spirit of constructive engagement that has marked the relationship between this Committee and the Department will continue under your leadership.

In that regard, may I pay tribute to the leadership provided to this Committee by Ambassador Eduardo Ulibarri as Chairperson over the past two years. His guidance and initiatives, within formal and informal deliberations of this Committee, have allowed us to consider the issues before us with imagination and fresh perspectives. I was fortunate to have his counsel when I joined the Department and I know that I can continue to draw on that strength.

You have before you the detailed and substantive reports on the work of the Department. I would like, this morning, to start a conversation with you, to hear your perspectives – on the United Nations, on communications, and how the two can and should work together for the benefit of us all.

Madam Chairperson,

I joined the United Nations only last August, having spent the previous three decades working for the Austrian Foreign Service at various postings around the world, including India, and the Middle East and here in the United States.

I had long been a supporter of the United Nations from afar, recognizing its value as the one truly multilateral institution that can bring together all the countries and peoples of the world to solve global challenges.

Now, heading the Department responsible for the UN's communications and public information, I get to see this value first-hand.

Whether it's bringing humanitarian aid to the victims of crises and conflicts...

Or vaccinating millions of children against infectious diseases that should no longer exist...

Or leading the fight to end poverty and hunger and fight violence against women and girls...

UN staff members are working on the frontlines, behind the scenes and in frequently dangerous conditions to make a positive difference in people's lives every day.

The role of the Department of Public Information is to tell those stories.

To share the cause for which so many so courageously have risked, and, in some cases, given their lives.

To connect the work of the United Nations to the people in whose name this Organization was established and to help understand the essential work of the institution.

To spotlight the value that the United Nations represents.

We all share in the aspirations of this institution. And each of your governments has been unwavering in their support of the United Nations. It is incumbent upon us, the United Nations Secretariat, to prove equal to that trust. Through action and message, we can together make clear its worth to your people.

We will work with you to help win the support of the people you represent and demonstrate the value of their human, of their ethical and of their financial investment in the United Nations.

For the Department of Public Information, this is not always an easy task. As a global organization, we would like to tell our story in as many languages as possible. We try to keep pace with technology, and with the new media – the story is being told in print and on radio and television, and also through social media.

At a time of economic difficulty the world over, we have to tell the story in such a way that it also does not break the budget.

And we have to connect the legislative processes in New York – the Security Council, the General Assembly, the many committees and working groups – to the day-to-day work of thousands of UN colleagues and personnel in the field.

We are optimistic about meeting these challenges. And we draw strength from our greatest asset: multinational, multilingual staff who bring exceptional talent and dedication to telling the story of the United Nations.

Madam Chairperson,

In addition to the reports before you, and the materials presented at this afternoon's interactive session, allow me to update you with some of our most recent activities along the strategic directions I have outlined:

- a. Working with you, the Member States
- b. Coordinating communications with the UN family and between Headquarters and the field
- c. Creating a UN communications capacity that is modern, that is efficient and results-driven, and that seeks improvements through lessons learned

The Department has over the past year moved to intensify its partnership with Member States as we work to fulfil the mandates that you have set.

As part of its Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations, DPI works closely every year with the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to commemorate the 1994 genocide. Through film, photos, discussions, visits to schools and other means, the Department conducts outreach and awareness-raising to help ensure that such events never occur again. Earlier this month, the Department, supported by UN

Women, organized the screening of a film produced by a genocide survivor featuring an association of widows and orphans called Duhozanye (“to console one another”). The association’s founder participated in the post-screening discussion. Just last week, DPI organized the 2013 memorial ceremony, with Rwanda’s Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo in attendance. More than 15 UN Information Centres worldwide also organized commemorative events.

Just a few weeks ago, with the active involvement of some 70 Member States, including many members of the African Union and the Caribbean Community, we commemorated the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Department organized a series of events worldwide to both commemorate the Day and raise awareness about the present-day consequences of the slave trade, with a particular focus on educating future generations. The events held included an interactive discussion with students in five countries; a film screening hosted by the Permanent Mission of the United States; and a poetry reading organized with Organization Internationale de la Francophonie and Bureau de la Martinique to honour the birth centenary of poet Aimé Césaire. DPI has also begun discussions with the Nantes Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery to draw on that institution’s capacity in outreach and education for future commemorations of the Day, particularly among Francophone countries.

The Department works year-round to raise awareness on the Question of Palestine. Late last year, for example, we hosted the annual training programme for Palestinian journalists. For the first time there was a focus on social media and digital journalism, and the programme attracted its largest ever number of applications to participate.

Another initiative that originated with Member States was the International Day of Happiness. The idea, first proposed by the Kingdom of Bhutan, was endorsed by the General Assembly, and the United Nations Academic Impact arranged an interactive dialogue on 20 March that included present and former ambassadors of Bangladesh,

Bhutan and Iraq, with members of academia and civil society in a discussion on the relationship between happiness and sustainable well-being.

We continue to work with Member States year-round to advance understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust. A strong focus of the work of our ongoing outreach programme is on education. We reach out to both students and educators, “teaching the teachers” and developing curricula materials in all six official UN languages and then disseminating them to schools around the world.

The Department also partnered with the Permanent Missions of Israel and the Philippines to organize activities marking World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April. This year, the subjects addressed included celebrating the abilities of people with autism, the challenges faced by young people with autism during the transition to adulthood, and the testimonies of families with young children who have been recently diagnosed.

Madam Chairperson,

Away from Headquarters, in the field, partnerships with Member States find a whole new meaning; 63 of our Information Centres provide an important local context to our global efforts, working in at least 53 languages and often directly impacting people’s daily lives. Consider one recent example.

In Kenya, UNIC Nairobi worked closely with sports organizations, private companies such as Google and other UN agencies to develop an innovative, interactive campaign called “Sports 4 Peaceful Elections”. This campaign enlisted Kenyan sports stars to host social media events promoting tolerance and non-violence in the period before, during and after presidential elections held last month.

DPI also partners with Member States in other ways. In June, in Istanbul, Turkey has kindly agreed to co-host the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. This event brings together senior UN officials, diplomats, policy makers,

academics, activists, journalists and artists from Israel, the occupied Palestinian territory and the wider Middle East region.

We work with Member States to raise awareness about press freedom and the dangers that journalists face every day around the world as they try to carry out their duties. Next week, DPI and UNESCO are working together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day with a series of events and activities around the world. They include a high-level event and panel discussion here at UN Headquarters on 2 May, and I would very much like to invite all of you to join us for that occasion.

Our partnerships are not only with Member States. We work closely with civil society, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the media, the private sector, activists, local authorities, lawmakers and others to help tell the story of the UN and to raise awareness about priority UN issues.

The Department is making particular progress with the creative community and celebrity advocates in amplifying UN issues to new audiences. Only a week ago, we met with directors, producers and scriptwriters in Los Angeles to discuss integrating UN issues into film and television projects.

We are looking forward to the realization of new, joint projects, in addition to the films and television shows already shot or in the process of being made.

On another front, the UN Academic Impact initiative, for example, is working with *The Guardian* newspaper in the United Kingdom on its contest on development journalism, which this year has a focus on the Millennium Development Goals.

Madam Chairperson,

DPI is also proud to be at the centre of a new thrust by the Organization for – and by – young people. The Secretary-General, with financial contributions from you, the

Member States, appointed an Envoy on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, who is working within DPI's Outreach Division. The Envoy will serve as both a voice for youth within the UN System, and as an advocate for the UN to the estimated 1.2 billion young people worldwide – the largest ever population of young people in history.

The Envoy's appointment coincides with the adoption of the first-ever System Wide Action Plan on Youth Development by the UN Chief Executives Board and his work will be carried out in line with the World Programme of Action on Youth that Member States have adopted at the General Assembly in 1995. Some of you may have already met Ahmad. And I look forward to formally introducing Ahmad to you at this afternoon's interactive session.

DPI has significantly expanded its news coverage over the past year, due to the support of Member States. For example, China National Radio airs UN Radio's Chinese-language programmes and live link-ups when there is breaking news, including in prime-time morning slots. As an upshot of this partnership, the UN Weibo account – the Chinese version of Twitter – now commands some 3.5 million followers. On Friday, we signed an agreement with China Business Network so that we can co-produce a Chinese version of the UNTV feature programme *21st Century*. Its first show will go on air as early as next week.

Our Russian-language news outlets – UN Radio and UN News Centre – have stepped up their social media presence, with new accounts on Facebook and Twitter. To reach an even wider audience, an account has been set up on V Kontakte, a highly popular platform.

As the UN aims to “deliver as one”, so does DPI. I have encouraged colleagues across the Department's three divisions to jointly participate in activities and programmes: the result is a more focused and a more effective DPI. All three Divisions, for instance, will contribute to the third international conference on Small Island

Developing States, to be held in Samoa next year; 12 of these States are members of this Committee and we particularly look forward to their creative ideas.

Another example of DPI's unified approach is our support to peace operations worldwide. Staff have provided communications advice and guidance for the various peacekeeping and special political missions, including the political mission in Mali and the recent addition to the existing operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through television, radio, photo, social media and a combination of news and feature articles on the UN News Centre, DPI produced and disseminated content about the various peace operations and the multinational staff who work for them. The Department also carried out outreach campaigns to spotlight the work of our peacekeepers, such as a recent photo exhibition at UN Headquarters that showcased the UN political mission in Libya.

A good example of how the Department is harnessing the ingenuity of our staff is the recently launched children's tour for UN Headquarters, featuring Peek-a, Ibrahim, Elena, MP3, Lei Lei and Luis – the six custom-designed cartoon characters known as UN Kids. The project started as an idea to make the UN Guided Tours more accessible to children. Visitor services and graphic design staff drafted a proposal, reached out to a focus group of local children, refined their plans and, by February this year, unveiled a really fun – and also educational – children's tour.

I encourage all of you to bring along your children or younger friends to the tour to experience the United Nations in a whole new light. Meanwhile, you will see that we are placing special vouchers on your desks so that you can enjoy, if you wish, a sneak preview of the newly renovated Visitors Centre that is currently being developed in the basement of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

DPI works to implement Member States' priorities, such as the Millennium Development Goals. Just this month, DPI supported MDG Momentum – 1000 Days of Action, which spotlighted the 1,000-day milestone in our efforts to try and achieve the

Goals by 2015. Working closely with other UN offices and departments, DPI developed a series of promotional events around the world to raise public awareness, particularly among segments of the population that otherwise may not closely follow UN issues. This included a meeting between the Secretary-General and young people in Madrid; the Secretary-General's involvement in the kick-off at a Real Madrid game in Spain; a joint public event between the UN and Member States in New York; a tree planting ceremony in Armenia; a photo exhibition in Eritrea; and a panel discussion in Bhutan; and many more events and activities.

Finally, our emphasis on greater budgetary discipline through efficiency, modernization and a results-driven approach includes the optimal use of new information and communications technologies. Being aware of the needs of its audiences in various parts of the world, DPI continues to maintain a strong focus on traditional means of communication as well. We are firm that print publications should not be consigned to the recycling bins of history but must be parent to newer forms of communication – including “apps” – while refining and improving their original formats and contents.

The Department will take a leap forward later this month when its new media asset management system (MAMS) and the new permanent broadcast facility, or PBF, become operational. MAMS will enable all of the Department's television and audio materials to be brought together on a shared digital platform and allow for production on that very same platform. It will also enable direct posting for quicker distribution and dissemination to Member States and the public across the Department's news and media online outlets.

The use of digital technology is benefiting DPI in multiple ways. Consider the case of the Networked Interactive Content Access (NICA) project that allows processing and distribution of photographs to archive and make them available online. With several UN agencies partnering in this project, DPI is now able to offer a more diverse collection of photographs in the United Nations Photo website and in the Photo Library to the media, to Member States and to the public. Through cost-sharing with

partners, DPI is also able to recoup some of the costs towards running and maintaining the system.

The Department was able to intensify its communications with UN Information Centres and become more cost-effective by switching to WebEx, an affordable online video conference tool to interact with field office colleagues, hold meetings and briefings, conduct interviews and provide remote technical support.

Madam Chairperson,

I have found the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to be a “hidden treasure” within DPI. Not only does it serve to safeguard history of the Organization through the preservation of parliamentary documents, but it is also a source of valuable knowledge and reference services aimed to assist you, the Member States, and UN staff in performing their responsibilities. The Library must be an information hub. With this aim, we are in the process of addressing long-standing issues of strategy, of structure, of processes and services, where previous reform efforts may not have yielded sufficient results.

The aim is to refocus the service on effective information research support for Member State delegations and on organizational priorities, achieving significant improvements within existing resources. Feedback from clients, including delegations, is being sought and will feed into a review of services to ensure the best-possible fit with Member State needs. Library activities and work processes will be reviewed and streamlined to free resources for higher-value work. Team-building and the creation of a faster, lighter organization are core elements of the envisaged reform.

At the more operational level, we are developing new online services and tools for the users of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, which will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered. A digital repository that can preserve and make available UN documents, online information and multimedia resources is being developed. When fully implemented this will help preserve UN knowledge and also

make diverse and hard-to-find information more accessible for you, the Member States, as well as for researchers and others.

Recently, we have begun a complete assessment of our media monitoring and analysis services being carried out across the Department with an aim to improve, streamline and strengthen DPI services in this area in accordance with client needs and to maximize their beneficial impact to Member States.

We have embraced the PaperSmart initiative of the Secretary-General. This will be the first Committee on Information session that will use the Integrated Sustainable PaperSmart Services of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. With support from DGACM, you as COI delegates can download documents on your mobile devices or tablets. Documents will also be available via flash drives. Print-on-demand copies will also be made available upon request. We are confident that this initiative will improve efficiency and, in the process, reduce our environmental footprint. And, on this note, I would like to wish all of you a happy International Mother Earth Day today.

Indeed, thanks to partnerships with publishers around the world, many UN publications are now available through print-on-demand – reducing the financial burden on the Organization and ensuring that copies are still available to clients whenever they may need them.

Madam Chairperson,

I would like to share some thoughts on communicating the UN story in different languages. At last year's COI, you the Member States asked us to come up with a strategy to produce press releases in all six official languages on a timely and cost-neutral basis. We can report to you that we are running a pilot project with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management where DGACM will make available in Spanish the press releases for the Commission on Population and Development, which is meeting this week. Following the pilot project, we will share

with you the results of this pilot. This is a first step, and we are continuing to explore cost-effective ways to expand our multilingual reach.

We are also conscious of the impact that communicating in different languages has on you, the delegations of the Member States. As someone who has been a diplomat myself, I am aware of the need to access information readily and swiftly. When the information is available in a language that is immediate, the task of actively participating in the workings of the United Nations is much easier – particularly when one is trying to keep pace with the range of meetings being held. For this reason, we are looking at how we as DPI and the UN as a whole can do a better job of making that information available in the six official languages.

I am looking forward to our interactive dialogue this afternoon, to learn from you and to hear your thoughts, your commentaries, your criticisms, your observations for how DPI can do a better job. I would like to invite all of you, especially those attending the Committee for the first time, to join my colleagues and me in this dialogue.

Madam Chairperson,

I count on the wisdom and guidance of this Committee to protect and enhance the responsibility assigned to the Department by the General Assembly to “remain the focal point for coordination and implementation of information activities of the United Nations.” It is a responsibility that we have sought to address and nurture from the very foundation of this Organization, and we look forward to continuing to work hand in hand with you, the Member States and the Committee, to achieve those ends.

Thank you very much.
