

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MANJEEV SINGH PURI, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION ON APRIL 27, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, let me congratulate Mr. Shalva Tsiskarashvili of Permanent Mission of Georgia on his election as Vice Chair of the Committee. We welcome the reports of the Secretary-General on the three-fold activities of the Department of Public Information, namely strategic communications, new as well as outreach services. India aligns itself with the statement made by the Chair of the G-77.

Mr. Chairman,

This debate provides an occasion to reiterate the central concerns of Member States over the process of dissemination of information. For us, the defining characteristic of the work of this Committee lies in its relationship with the Department of Public Information, and the ensuing cooperative effort to continually improve upon the delivery of relevant information inputs to millions of potential users across the world.

The DPI's role is pivotal as it has to strategically communicate the message of the United Nations with the greatest public impact in a situation where the UN confronts a variety of complex challenges and opportunities. Let me illustrate this with some encouraging facts. According to the report on news services, between July 2009 and January 2010 more than 1,100 press releases containing statements by and messages from the Secretary-General and other officials and departments as well as 682 summaries of press briefings of the Secretary-General's spokesperson and other press conferences here at UN Headquarters were disseminated. This represents a quantum jump in comparison to the figures for the corresponding period in earlier years.

However, it must also be pointed out that such impressive improvements are occurring in the midst of the continuing anachronism of press briefings which remain off limits for delegates from various Permanent Missions accredited to the United Nations. In other words, this means, that while I can make a statement on the working of the

DPI here at the UN headquarters, I cannot sit in as a silent observer in a press conference at the Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium!

Mr. Chairman,

The Committee's focus has to be on how to make the work of the Department of Information as pertinent and accessible as possible to the largest number of users, making it an effective channel for the flow of information between the UN and the peoples of the world. To achieve this, the widest possible range of technologies needs to be harnessed. As many countries simultaneously span several centuries in technological terms, it is essential that the end product offered by DPI is dispensed through a wide spectrum of media channels. Thus, while the selection employed should incorporate the latest technologies, such as webcasts and podcasts, a strong emphasis must also be retained on using traditional and very cost-effective means of communication, such as radio and print. These remain of tremendous importance in reaching out to ordinary people in many parts of the developing world and must constantly be kept in sight.

We also fully support the effort to enable the emergence of a more linguistically equal world, in which information is disseminated not merely in the official languages of the UN, but also in other languages. We congratulate the DPI for now producing information in roughly 80 local languages and note with satisfaction that UN radio programmes are being made in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu, among other languages. This promotion of multilingualism by the DPI in its activities needs to be further widened and intensified, including in particular parity among the six official languages in terms of content on the website.

There is also much value in raising the level of local content and local involvement in the production of DPI programme material. Doing so will also encourage local talent and creativity to involve itself in the work of the UN. A related issue is the question of UN Information Centers, which are crucial in enhancing the public image of the UN and in disseminating its message, particularly in the developing world. We agree with the views expressed by many that our goal should be to strengthen, rather than weaken, these information outposts of the United Nations. Hub and spoke models may appeal in certain managerial contexts, but make little sense in a people-intensive sector such as the media. We would encourage the Department to work closely with host countries in these efforts. We would also support adequate budgetary resources being made available to strengthen the public outreach and ensure the effective functioning of Information Centres in developing countries. We would like to commend the useful and creative work being undertaken by UNIC in New Delhi, including in the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

The information being disseminated has to be relevant and meaningful and, to the extent pertinent, it has to be spread in a manner that makes it not only interesting but also enjoyable for the target audience. This is not easy to achieve and those working on content management must be driven by a constant yearning for further improvement. Moreover, DPI's programmes must seek to further deepen and strengthen their coverage and projection of the most noteworthy activities of the UN, in particular, those that directly impact upon the lives of ordinary people. These include humanitarian activities as also the work performed, often under extremely demanding circumstances, by UN peacekeepers in strife-torn lands.

As regards the latter, we would like to see DPI, DPKO and DFS working closely in highlighting UN peacekeeping success stories and providing accurate, impartial and timely information on the regular activities of UN peacekeepers, as also on the exceptional work that they often do that goes beyond the routine keeping of the peace and the call of duty. To provide just one example with which I am somewhat familiar, Indian soldiers serving as UN peacekeepers have consistently carved a very special place for themselves in the hearts and minds of the local population in their area of operations as a result of their healing touch via enthusiastic involvement in providing medical and veterinary support, promoting local community development projects aimed at soil conservation and water harvesting, provision of free vocational training, etc. It is such stories of goodwill and down to earth cooperation that the world needs to hear more of!

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to assure you of India's full backing as you guide the work of this Committee, as well as to the DPI as it projects the UN story and builds support for the Organization and its noble aims.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)