



STATEMENT BY MR. KIRIP CHALIHA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 78: 'QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION' AT FOURTH COMMITTEE OF THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 20, 2004.

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to begin by complimenting Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, for his informative statement of yesterday, encapsulating the work and activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI). We associate ourselves with the statement delivered yesterday by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Qatar, on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr Chairman,

The Department of Public Information is the voice of the United Nations. Its role is critical, serving as a conduit for the flow of information between the United Nations and the peoples of the world. It has undergone a process of change over the last two years and currently stands before us transformed with a new focus, direction and purpose. We have identified ourselves with the new mission statement of the Department clarifying its goals and purposes, in particular "the greatest public impact", as we have welcomed its new Organizational structure centred around its four sub-programmes; strategic communications services; news services; library services and outreach services. We are confident that in its new format it will be able to perform an effective outreach function, not only in strategically communicating the programmes and activities of the United Nations, but also in contributing to the concretising of its goals and objectives, as set out in the Millennium Declaration.

Mr Chairman,

Without dwelling in detail on what is best left to the Committee on Information (COI), I shall restrict my remarks to two items of particular importance to the Indian delegation.

The role of the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) in disseminating information about the aims, objectives and activities of the United Nations is critical. Their proposed reorganisation, therefore, assumes considerable importance. We have already lent our wholehearted support to the proposal to restructure UNICs by collapsing these centres into regional hubs, starting with Western Europe, in order to make the most cost-effective use of ever-dwindling resources. We had been then given to understand that the proposal would be split in two distinct parts: regionalisation followed by a "ploughing back" of funds into activities that had been identified by the Department as priority. While the first part of the bargain has been accomplished in the setting up of a Regional United Nations Information Centre (RUNIC) in Brussels, the second has somewhat slipped, which is a matter of some concern to my delegation. We would insist that the second part of the deal be followed through with the same vigour with which it was introduced, or else, the entire exercise will be viewed as a cost-cutting one, undermining the Secretariat's own position. We also await a detailed report on the functioning of the Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels before replicating the procedure in other regions. This would be a useful practice in terms of lessons learned, enabling us to avoid the pitfalls as we move ahead.

The Committee would recall that, in the Committee on Information this year, there had been a detailed exchange on the policies and strategies of the DPI pertaining to UN peace-keeping operations. It was agreed then that the closing of the information gap that existed between the realities and successes of peace-keeping operations and the perceptions of the public was one of the ways to concretise UN goals and objectives, and should, as such also be one of the objectives of the DPI. We are gratified to learn that several initiatives have been taken, in partnership with the UNICs, particularly the holding of media workshops, forums and seminars, articles and brochures in major newspapers as also through radio reports, in order to achieve the desired objectives. As a leading troop contributing country, we would continue to urge that more be done to project the success stories of peace-keeping operations, both in the developed world and in the developing world from where the peacekeepers mostly come. At the very least, that could be one way of giving greater recognition to the contributions of the troop contributing countries and encouraging their Governments to continue to be responsive to the requests from the United Nations for their support.

Mr Chairman,

Some of the other important issues contained in the report of the Secretary General on Questions relating to information pertain to the UN website; outreach activities and the annual programme impact review. We should like to congratulate the DPI for the impressive strides made in the development of the UN website, an increasingly important resource-base for the UN family, and for the wider public. We shall, however, continue to sound a note of caution, as we have done before, that the new should not be at the expense of the old; even as we continue to push new frontiers in technology, we must not forget that the traditional means are often the most effective and far-reaching, in particular in the developing countries. While enhancing the non-traditional means, the DPI should continue to reach out by utilising traditional media, print, radio and TV, especially through local languages.

We laud the efforts to reach out to specialised target audiences such as non-governmental organisations, research institutions, libraries and academic communities. The DPI should continue to increase its outreach service in regions, while at the same time work towards the strengthening of its role as a focal point for two-way interaction with civil society, relating to the priorities and concerns of the Organisation. We should also like to record our appreciation for the enhanced orientation of the UN's flagship publication "UN Chronicle" towards educational outreach, as borne out by the impressive statistics contained in paragraph 57 of the Secretary General's Report.

We welcome the continuing promotion and refinement of a culture of evaluation and performance management in the day-to-day working of a re-oriented DPI. We would encourage the DPI to continue its efforts to deepen the culture of evaluation in every aspect of its activities.

In closing, Mr Chairman, we agree fully with the assessment that the communications and public information challenges facing the United Nations are best handled when it is fully equipped to do so. The DPI today is reformed and restructured and it is heartening to learn that it has both the experience, based on lessons learned as also a new-found confidence, to take on these challenges and indeed, improve on delivery. We take this opportunity to lend our full support to Mr Tharoor and his team in the practical execution of their tasks, as they attempt to bring the United Nations closer to the peoples of the world.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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