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## Committee on Information

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Substantive questions

### Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications

#### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly encouraged “the Secretary-General to continue the reorientation exercise [in the area of public information and communications], while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States” and requested him “to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session in May 2000”. The General Assembly emphasized that, “through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications”.

2. In resolution 54/250, part VII, on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, covering section 26, Public information, the General Assembly provided further guidance to the Department relating to priority areas of its future activities.

3. In considering the issue of reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and

communications, the Committee on Information should take into account the information provided in the previous report of the Secretary-General on the same subject (A/AC.198/1999/2) and in the latest report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/54/415). The present report avoids, to the extent possible, duplication of information contained in those earlier reports and should be read in conjunction with the other reports on specific aspects of the Department's work, which are also being submitted to the Committee at its twenty-second session.

4. The current report will emphasize the most recent measures taken to develop further the conceptual framework and operational priorities for the reorientation of the Organization's communications and information policies, as elaborated in detail to the Committee at its twentieth session (A/AC.198/1998/2).

#### II. Background

5. In March 1997, with the knowledge that the future of the United Nations depends on the ability to communicate its message effectively, the Secretary-General stated that the activities of the United Nations must be related with more vigour and purpose and to

greater effect. He stressed that the reorientation of public information policies and activities must be designed to reach out to the media, non-governmental organizations and other redisseminators, utilizing the latest media technologies; offer more direct support to the activities of the substantive departments; and re-focus resources to the country and regional levels. In pursuit of his commitment to enhanced communications as a key element in the reform and revitalization of the United Nations and in his plans to build support for it, the Secretary-General appointed a high-level task force to recommend steps to reorient United Nations public information activities. The group's report (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1) called for a consolidation of communications efforts within the Secretariat and for making communications an integral part of all programme and policy decisions taken by the Organization.

6. In the conceptual framework for the reorientation that has followed, the central objective of all public information activities is to build broad-based global support for the Organization by projecting it as an open, transparent and public institution capable of meeting the goals of the Charter. Other strategic goals of the new orientation are the need:

(a) To place communications and information functions at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization;

(b) For overall direction and coordination of a unified communications strategy;

(c) To develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization.

The Secretariat has made considerable progress in this direction.

7. In order to translate these priorities into an operational framework, the Department of Public Information is actively taking new steps and making important progress in the following key areas: policy and strategic direction; the Internet and new technology; reaching the media; radio and television programming; information activities in the field; development of thematic programmes; building global partnerships; publications; and provision of library resources.

### III. Policy and strategic direction

8. The Department of Public Information is developing a unified message in all of its activities and materials which will inform people everywhere of the continuing relevance of the United Nations in their daily lives. The theme of the millennium promotional campaign leading up to the Millennium Summit and Assembly is "The UN works". The objective is to reflect a vision of an Organization that will connect with the people of the world and work on the issues affecting their lives in the twenty-first century. The year-long campaign will be implemented by the Department under the guidance of the Deputy Secretary-General and will culminate with the Millennium Summit itself, positioning it as an integral part of the Organization's global effort to find solutions to the world's most pressing problems. In accordance with a request of the Bureau of the Committee on Information, a detailed report on the millennium promotional campaign (A/AC.198/2000/10) will be considered by the Committee at its twenty-second session.

9. To help achieve the communications goals of the Organization and promote a culture of communications as a priority objective for all senior officials and their departments, a number of innovations, including structural changes, have been introduced in the Secretariat over the past two years. The Secretary-General has indeed placed the information and communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization, and as a result, a user-oriented, demand-driven communications culture is steadily evolving. There have been new initiatives, such as the media guidelines for United Nations officials issued by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Heads of departments and their representatives are being encouraged to reach out to the media to project the Organization's point of view. In order to develop an advanced professional communications programme for senior officials, the Department of Public Information is currently working with the United Nations Staff Training College in Turin, Italy.

10. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information has continued his active participation in the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group, to which he brings the communications perspective to the forefront. At the

same time he receives constructive feedback useful to the Department of Public Information. In the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Director of Communications and Special Projects helps to develop an overall communications strategy for the Organization, including shaping the messages of the Secretary-General on the priority concerns of the United Nations, and coordinates the various parts of the Secretariat engaged in communications activities with a view to ensuring coherence and clarity in delivering those messages. To that end, he convenes regular meetings of a communications group which also includes representatives of the funds, programmes and offices of the United Nations system.

11. The Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of the Department of Public Information (ST/SGB/1999/10), issued on 30 June 1999, details structural changes made, including the new orientation of its three major Divisions: Public Affairs Division, News and Media Division, Library and Information Resources Division. These structural changes were made as a direct response to the task force's recommendations.

#### **IV. New technology**

12. Within the context of the new information age, the use of the Internet as a major communications tool now makes it possible for the Department of Public Information to envision a future in which the Organization will be able to address a world audience directly, without relying exclusively on the traditional redissemulators. The United Nations web site has a vast outreach, with 260 million accesses a year. Studies indicate that there is a growing number of Internet users in developing countries, and that this number is expected to continue to increase dramatically.

13. The United Nations is rapidly expanding its multimedia presence on the Internet. The United Nations web site, established as a pilot project in June 1995 in English, has since grown at an enormous pace and become a key component in the Department's work. Following the introduction of French and Spanish sites in 1996, a Russian site was created in early 1998, and Arabic and Chinese sites in late 1998.

14. The challenges presented by the explosion of Internet publishing at the United Nations have placed considerable demands on the Information Technology

Section, established two years ago in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information to manage the Internet operation within existing resources. The Section remains under the overall supervision of a staff member at the D-1 level and the policy direction of the Under-Secretary-General. The Department works in consultation with the entire Secretariat to improve the United Nations sites, making them more user-friendly and avoiding unnecessary duplication. It also coordinates and chairs the interdepartmental group on Internet matters. Successful Web pages for the United Nations and civil society, the United Nations and business, and the Millennium Assembly are operational, as are the recently developed cartographic page in English and French and the page on decolonization in English. As requested by the General Assembly, the Department is now developing new web pages on Bethlehem 2000 and for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001). Aware of the need to provide overall policy guidance in this important area, the Publications Board, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, will issue guidelines for Internet publishing.

15. So far, a number of posts have been redeployed to the Information Technology Section from within the Department to bolster the management of the United Nations web sites. To standardize the management of the web sites in all official languages, by its resolution 54/250, part VII, the General Assembly decided to convert the positions of coordinators for the web sites in Arabic, Chinese and Russian to established posts. The Department has now begun the recruitment process to fill the newly created positions.

16. While the Department will build on the momentum provided through the rapid development of the new technology, it should be understood that, in order to reap the full benefits, investments in human and other resources will be required over the course of the next few years to establish a firm foundation for the maintenance, enhancement and enrichment of the web sites.

#### **V. Reaching the media**

17. The information media are the principal redissemulators of the United Nations information to the public. A key component of the reorientation strategy is the creation of a new, integrated fully-

fledged United Nations news service, cutting across all media and delivering a regionally oriented daily package of news directly to the media worldwide.

18. The Department has continued to reinforce its close working relationship with the resident correspondents at Headquarters. The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General conducts daily press briefings and, in addition, uses Internet technology to reach a broader audience. Daily briefings are broadcast live on the Internet, and archive files of earlier briefings are also available on demand. A detailed summary of the daily briefing is posted on the Web by the early afternoon. In addition, through the in-house television channel, delegations can follow the daily noon briefing live in a viewing room reserved for that purpose. These arrangements are a direct response to the requests of Member States for full and direct access to the briefings by their representatives and for wider outreach of the outcome of such briefings.

19. Central to the strong efforts to both deepen and broaden direct links with news media worldwide, as well as with other key public opinion makers, the Department has established a daily news service on the United Nations web site. It is designed to facilitate reporting on the United Nations around the world by disseminating quickly, in an accessible news-focused style, coverage of the entire range of United Nations activities. Decisions by intergovernmental bodies, major speeches by senior officials and other United Nations news can be made available almost instantaneously and backed by a news alert of upcoming events. Efforts are also under way to integrate news stories directly from United Nations offices in the field into the United Nations news service, which will further broaden its range and the speed at which it can make material available to the media. News stories are also linked to press releases, statements and to other relevant United Nations sites. The enhanced United Nations News Centre site, featuring the news service, provides a one-site access to all the significant news sites throughout the United Nations system and to audio-visual services and online magazines. The news service, which is available in English and French, will increasingly combine text-based audio and visual material in its dissemination of news on the Web as the technology becomes more widely available.

20. Backing the news services on the Web, the Department will shortly launch a more proactive

electronic mail/facsimile-based version which will go directly to the news desks of media around the world as well as to other important target audiences, such as non-governmental organizations. This service will provide news "alerts" of breaking stories and upcoming events and links to further sources of information. It will also permit subscribers to select news items by theme and region. A pilot project, based on African media and organizations, is currently under preparation and will enable the Department thoroughly to ascertain the needs of its target audiences before the launch of the service on a global basis.

21. The Department has continued its coordinated placement of op-ed articles and other material by United Nations officials. This effort has been backed with briefings by senior officials to key media on priority issues before the Organization. Two intensive programmes of briefings, featuring the participation of almost all New York-based heads of departments, programmes and funds, were held at Headquarters last year with participation of influential media representatives from the United States of America, resulting in widespread and very favourable in-depth coverage. As a direct outgrowth of the briefing programme, the Department has helped to organize, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund, coverage of African issues and Africa-based United Nations projects by a group of influential United States editorial writers.

22. The Department continues to promote and publicize its audio-visual products. For example, a cooperative pilot partnership was undertaken with an international television production and distribution company to notify editors of the availability of the Secretary-General's millennium message. As feedback of the success of such partnerships is received, the Department will decide whether such mechanisms could be tapped for wider publicity of audio-visual materials.

23. Research is under way to explore the possibility of the development of a pool of field "stringer" correspondents for radio, print, photography and television so that timely and relevant raw materials may be gathered to enrich United Nations news stories.

24. The Department's training programmes for young journalists from around the world have received wide support from Member States. The 1999 annual training

programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries brought together 20 media professionals at Headquarters for a six-week period and provided them with in-depth knowledge of the work of the United Nations. The Department continues to look into expanding this programme to provide valuable training opportunities to additional participants from both the developing countries and other countries with special needs, including countries in transition. In addition, six Palestinian journalists participated in 1999 in the Department's annual training programme for Palestinian journalists.

## VI. Radio and television

25. In addition to changes already initiated, the Department is undertaking a comprehensive review of its radio and television operations. The goal is to produce and deliver news materials in a format that can be quickly adapted for use by the media. Key to this will be the utilization of new communications technology which will allow the Department to take advantage of the speed and cost-effectiveness offered by the growing convergence of radio, television and Internet media. Work is therefore under way to engage a team of consultants to undertake a comprehensive review of the medium- and long-term technology needs of the Department in view of the convergence of traditional radio and television with the Internet. The review will cover the cycle of production to dissemination, and the integration of all media. The design of radio and television studios and the telecommunications infrastructure to meet the requirements of the digital age will form part of the review.

26. The review will focus in particular on how to strengthen the ability to reach the broadcast news media with materials that they find useful and useable. A synergetic, integrated multimedia approach is being formulated, with particular attention given to how best to use the Internet as a medium to reinforce traditional radio and television and how best to have the radio and television contents channelled to the conduit of the Internet.

27. The General Assembly has recognized that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information. Taking advantage of its unique linguistic diversity and multicultural outreach to far-flung

audiences all over the world, United Nations Radio has continued to use new technology to expand its news-gathering and dissemination capacity to achieve timely delivery and optimal impact. In a major effort to establish a daily news operation, United Nations Radio has been studying programme reorientation and streamlining and has also created a news development group to look into all aspects of this project, including promotion, monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

28. In accordance with the requests outlined in resolutions 54/82 B and 54/250, part VII, the Department has proceeded with the preparatory work for a pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations. A separate report on this matter is being circulated for consideration by the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session (A/AC.198/2000/6).

29. With regard to television, the Department is investigating new ways in which to provide greater public access to television material produced by the United Nations system. In the long term, the convergence between television and the Internet media promises the possibility of relatively inexpensive global distribution of United Nations-produced television material in digital video. Video is increasingly becoming an indispensable part of the Internet, and efforts are under way to introduce United Nations video stories in different languages onto the United Nations web sites, as server capacity permits. Particularly suitable for this form of dissemination is the "UN in Action" series of three-minute news magazine items.

30. As already reported to the Committee, United Nations Television is increasing its output of live feeds and other easy-to-assemble raw materials for use by redissemulators. The "UN in Action" series, for example, is now presented in a format that allows television stations to either broadcast the stories in their original form with United Nations narrations or to adapt them, using an international soundtrack which allows for voicing-over in local languages. Similarly, the provision of video "B-roll" compilations on thematic and historical subjects has elicited keen interest from broadcasters.

31. The Department continues to maintain a strong and fruitful relationship with television news organizations and national broadcasters. During 1999,

for example, United Nations Headquarters was host to a session of the contributors' conference of the Cable News Network's (CNN) "World Report", one of the largest global gatherings of television producers. Sessions of the Conference were broadcast live on CNN around the world. The United Nations World Television Forum has also established itself as a major venue for discussion of international broadcasting issues.

32. To enable people around the world to download United Nations photographs directly from the Web, the Department will develop and implement an integrated digital photo management system. As part of a larger three-phase plan for the development of multimedia materials, the system will also streamline photo production procedures.

33. A study will soon be undertaken to look into the ways and means of rapid deployment of public information technology to new peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. It will concentrate mainly on equipment, with a special focus on the problem of rapid procurement and the creation of a standby capacity.

## **VII. Information activities in the field**

34. Central to the reorientation of public information activities has been the strengthening of the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country level, where public opinion is formed. The United Nations information centres have contributed to this goal by helping explain the relevance of the United Nations to people everywhere. Their presence in the community and familiarity with local conditions continues to allow them to deliver the Organization's message effectively in a local context, making them not just information disseminators but true communicators. In accordance with resolution 54/82 B three reports on different aspects of the work of the United Nations information centres will be considered by the Committee at its twenty-second session, covering the issues of integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP (A/AC.198/2000/3), guidelines for the operation of integrated centres (A/AC.198/2000/4) and allocation of resources to the United Nations information centres in 1999 (A/AC.198/2000/5).

## **VIII. Thematic information programmes**

35. As an essential part of the reorientation process, the Department has strengthened its cooperation with Secretariat departments and other entities to convey more effectively the United Nations message to the people of the world. In developing strategies and planning steps for practical implementation of public information and communications campaigns in thematic areas, the Department will be guided by the new millennium promotional campaign described in section III above.

36. The Department has established a regular channel of consultation with the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention on the implementation of a public information and communications strategy leading to the Tenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders. Also, through the mechanism of interdepartmental working groups, the Department has continued to consult regularly with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to plan and coordinate public information and communications products and activities leading up to the special sessions of the General Assembly on women and on social development.

37. Building on the very successful media campaign that it undertook in 1999 to publicize the work of the Economic and Social Council, the Department has already begun to develop a similar strategy for this year's high-level segment of the Council's session, which will focus on the issue of information technology in a knowledge-based economy. As part of the strategy, the Department is assisting in developing a major exhibit with private-sector participants, showcasing cutting-edge information technologies in the service of development, to be held at Headquarters during the session.

38. The issue of globalization has been addressed from a number of different perspectives in various thematic activities emphasizing the interrelated themes of globalization, poverty eradication, employment and social justice, among others. In February, the Department provided radio, television and press coverage of the Tenth Quadrennial United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held in Bangkok, and assisted its secretariat in media outreach to promote the Conference.

39. A proactive strategy has also been elaborated to highlight and explain to the media and other opinion makers United Nations initiatives aimed at achieving greater peace and security in Africa. As part of this approach, the Department is using direct outreach to key media — particularly in Africa itself — publishing concise print materials for rapid dissemination and developing interactive materials on United Nations peace missions in Africa for posting on the United Nations web sites. While this strategy was developed prior to the Security Council's decision to give special attention to Africa during January 2000, every effort is being made to sustain and build upon the interest kindled by the Council's timely deliberations.

40. The Department has continued its close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs so as to improve the public information capacity of peacekeeping and other field missions. Increased efforts are also being made to strengthen regular communication between Headquarters and those missions, in order to improve public awareness and media coverage of field operations. Regular postings to the web site of information received directly from field missions, which began in 1999 with the United Nations missions in East Timor (UNAMET, now UNTAET) and in Kosovo (UNMIK), have become regular features of the web site, which has become an invaluable channel for reaching the media that serve audiences in mission areas as well as internationally. This practice will be extended to other field missions as resources allow.

41. The Department of Public Information is participating in the Consolidated Action on Small Arms mechanism, established by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, and is working with all concerned on a proactive public information plan to reflect the decisions of Member States regarding the scope and objectives of the International Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, to be held in 2001.

42. As part of the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department will continue to organize a yearly training programme for Palestinian journalists, as well as other activities, including international seminars for journalists.

## **IX. Building global partnerships**

43. Civil society plays a critical role as the Department's partner in the redissemination of the United Nations message. As such, the Department's enhanced outreach to its global partners is a key component of the new orientation. The central partnership with the media has been discussed above.

44. At a time when civil society is giving new life and meaning to the idea of an international community, the Department is developing innovative ways to work with its 1,600 associated non-governmental organizations. For instance, to enhance the outreach of the annual DPI/NGO Conference and the programme of weekly briefings for non-governmental organizations, video conferencing technology has been introduced so that representatives of non-governmental organizations from other locations, including those in Geneva, Nairobi, and Vienna, can participate directly in those events.

45. The Secretary-General has been requested by Member States to focus in particular on educational institutions as key and indispensable partners of the United Nations in its efforts fully to inform the peoples of the world of its aims and activities. Outreach to these educational partners is an important element of the Department's reorientation, and it has continued to organize teachers' seminars, student conferences and other events. A promising new activity has been the growing relationship with Web-based educational organizations aimed at incorporating United Nations information into their classroom materials and teaching resources, enhancing considerably the Department's outreach in that area.

46. Promotion of the United Nations relationship with the private sector has been the focus of a number of activities within related thematic information programmes on development issues. Press materials on business and the United Nations have highlighted the importance of the Global Compact. The Department is working closely with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to help foster a stronger relationship with the business community. A new web site on the Global Compact, launched at the World Economic Forum at Davos in January 2000, has been extremely well received.

## X. Publications

47. Notwithstanding the progress in electronic publishing, the Department continues to attach great importance to its traditional print publications, which are a key element of its outreach. Its flagship magazine *UN Chronicle* has recently expanded the use of colour illustrations, in line with its extended use of human interest stories and in-depth articles on specific issues and themes directly relevant to the goals of the Organization. Many articles are written expressly for the magazine by prominent personalities, leading experts and representatives of international agencies and non-governmental organizations. The new editorial approach of this publication has been well received by delegations and subscribers alike. Feedback from readers has been increasing, particularly since the launch of the magazine's web site.

48. *Africa Recovery* continues to be the unique source of sustained coverage of the activities of the United Nations system in Africa. While maintaining its reporting and analysis of issues and events critical to Africa's economic progress, this publication also assists the Department's outreach efforts by encouraging influential publications in African countries to reprint modified versions of articles. For example, its December 1999 feature on the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization was picked up in publications issued in five African countries.

49. Technological innovation is greatly helping the *Yearbook of the United Nations* to shorten the time lag between the end of the year covered and the publication date. A further upgrade of the typesetting system is planned in order to facilitate and speed up the production process for the 1998 edition. In addition, the speed of the required document research has been greatly increased through the use of the optical disk system and the Internet.

50. *Development Business* stands as the major source of international project supply, contracting and consulting opportunities created each year by the world's leading development banks and lending institutions. To that end, *Development Business* has continued to forge strong partnerships with the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, African Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other institutions in order to expand its services to the growing international business community. *Development Business* launched

its worldwide Web service in January 1999, thereby expanding its market outreach and broadening the subscriber base for its electronic and print products. The publication is now engaged in aggressive promotional campaigns to ensure greater participation in global business opportunities by both industrialized and developing countries.

## XI. Dag Hammarskjöld Library

51. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is continuing to place major emphasis on Web-related activities, digitization of United Nations documents, inter-agency resource sharing, training programmes for permanent missions and for Secretariat and depository library staff, and the creation of multilingual reference tools.

52. The Library's web site was accessed 1.5 million times in 1999. A major effort is now being made to provide the Web page and a number of substantive offerings in Spanish, thus making the Library site available, to some extent, in all six official languages.

53. The Library's Intranet site has been redesigned and now includes a direct link to UNBISNET. With this new service, the Library's major databases, previously available internally within the Integrated Library Management System and externally, through the mainframe, are now installed on a Web platform. Access has been provided initially to the traditional user groups (permanent missions, some governmental offices and Secretariat staff worldwide). This year, access will be extended to United Nations depository libraries and then opened up to the general public. Through the Web, firewall restrictions are eliminated, permitting the Library to offer, for the first time, direct online access to a global audience.

54. In response to General Assembly resolution 52/214 C, retrospective posting of pre-1993 major organ documents to the optical disk system was initiated by the Library in 1998, in cooperation with the Information Technology Services Division in the Department of Management. In addition to providing digitized documents and metadata to the optical disk system on a daily basis, the Library is continuing to undertake special projects for user departments (such as the conversion of microfiche and paper documents on the Chernobyl issue for the Russian web page). Additional scanning equipment has been acquired to



enable efficient processing of hardcopy documents and of bound materials.

55. The United Nations Consortium, an inter-agency activity coordinated by the Library, continues to grow. It currently has 37 members (an increase of nine over the past year) and offers products from 13 vendors. With the recently added subscribers, certain products offered by the service now reach a potential audience of over 65,000.

56. Selective dissemination of information — the delivery of customized information to staff and permanent missions at Headquarters via electronic mail — continues to be a major reference service provided by the Library. In 1999, the total number of electronic messages was over 2.7 million, selected from 42 electronic publications and sent to more than 5,000 subscribers worldwide.

57. As of January 2000, there were 378 United Nations depository libraries (an increase of 11 over the previous year) in 142 countries and territories. Their numbers by region are as follows: Asia and the Pacific (87); Western Asia (17); Africa (55); Europe (116, with 32 in Eastern and 84 in Western Europe); Latin America and the Caribbean (49); North America (54, with 42 in the United States of America and 12 in Canada).

58. As part of its outreach to civil society in Member States, the Library has continued to conduct training seminars and workshops for United Nations depository librarians. In addition to a variety of ad hoc training seminars, four regional workshops were organized in 1999 and two more are planned for this year. In an effort to bring the depository libraries into active partnership in the dissemination of United Nations information, the Library has begun to disseminate by electronic mail the texts of important messages (such as the Secretary-General's millennium message) to those libraries with the capacity to receive them (approximately 284).

59. In order to facilitate multilingual subject access to United Nations databases, including the optical disk system, the Library has initiated the translation of the thesaurus of the United Nations Bibliographic Information System, already available in English, French and Spanish, into the remaining official languages. Preparation of the Arabic version was initiated in February, the Chinese version in May and the Russian version in December 1999.

## XII. Conclusion

60. As a result of the Secretary-General's commitment to giving communications a central role in the work of the Organization, the Department of Public Information is carrying out its activities in a more effective working environment. The reorientation of public information activities, with its emphasis on the use of new technology, and enhanced planning and cooperation within the Secretariat, and the recognition that communications play an important role in policy-making have resulted in a higher communications profile for the United Nations.

61. The reorientation of communications activities is, however, a work in progress, and more needs to be done to meet the extraordinary challenges encountered in the fast-moving world of communications. Particular areas of concern are the existing staffing and budgetary procedures which hamper the Organization's ability to respond as effectively and quickly as desired.

62. New technology is transforming the public information and communications activities of the United Nations. By enhancing the ability to deliver unified messages in a timely manner, this new technology is bringing the Organization closer to the people it was established to serve. Crucial to its continuing reorientation is the Department's commitment to developing a strategic vision linking all the components of the Secretariat in an integrated manner. To maintain the continued quality of programme delivery, the Department's work methods will be based on speed, flexibility and the use of modern technology. Moreover, enhanced feedback and evaluation mechanisms are indispensable elements of the Department's reoriented information strategy, since it will need to continue to adjust its activities in order to balance the needs of target audiences with available resources. In line with its "total quality management approach", efforts to upgrade, increase and expedite its ability to obtain quality feedback on a selective but realistic sample of its programmes will be intensified.