



General Assembly

Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
22 December 2004

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 20 October 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Calderón. (Ecuador)

Contents

Agenda item 78: Questions relating to information (*continued*)*

Agenda item 109: Programme planning (*continued*)*

* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 78: Questions relating to information
(*continued*) (A/59/21 and A/59/221 and Corr.1)

Agenda item 109: Program planning (*continued*)
(A/59/6 (Program 23: Public information) and A/59/16, chap. II, sect. C, prog. 23)

1. **Mr. Romeiro** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that decisions on the rationalization of United Nations information centres should be taken on a case-by-case basis, in the light of lessons learned from grouping the Western European information centres into the Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels. Use of the savings realized, and, most important, the impact of consolidation on the quality of information services must be analysed before the rationalization process was applied in the developing countries. The Rio Group reiterated the need to study other options for reform as well.

2. The Rio Group attached importance to the principle of multilingualism in the dissemination of information, particularly on the United Nations web site, which should be accessible in all six official languages. It emphasized the need to make the United Nations web site available to persons with disabilities and, in that connection, welcomed the inclusion of a story on the preparatory work on the Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities as part of the project entitled "Ten stories the world should hear more about".

3. The Rio Group value the role of traditional means of communication, particularly radio, as access to more technologically advanced means of communication was still limited in the developing world. It shared the view of the Committee on Information that the Department of Public Information (DPI) should enhance its coordination with other United Nations entities and establish a closer working relationship with the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

4. Voicing the Rio Group's dismay at the widening digital divide, he reaffirmed the importance it attached to the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and its expectations for the second phase to be held in Tunis in 2005. Lastly, the Rio

Group noted with concern the discrepancy between public perceptions of United Nations peacekeeping operations and the reality on the ground. He therefore commended the participation of DPI in the planning of peacekeeping operations and hoped that it would strengthen its coordination with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

5. **Mr. Oshima** (Japan) said that, in an era of new threats and challenges, protecting the public image of the new, reformed United Nations was more crucial than ever. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to that end and stressed the need for support by Member States. The priority Japan gave to United Nations information activities was reflected in the assistance it provided to the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo. Despite severe budgetary constraints, his Government had allocated \$350,000 in assistance for the Tokyo Centre in 2005, a 40 per cent increase over its 2004 contribution. The Tokyo Centre was the only one to provide information on the United Nations in the Japanese language, a vital service at a time when Japanese citizens were questioning whether their Government's sizeable contributions to the Organization were justified.

6. His delegation welcomed the activities of the United Nations Communications Group, in particular its proactive efforts to promote greater awareness of African development, a priority of Japanese foreign policy. Convinced that human security was essential to nation-building in Africa, Japan contributed to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security and sponsored bilateral human security grant programmes. Within the framework of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), it would host the TICAD Asia-Africa Trade and Investment Conference in early November.

7. His delegation hoped that DPI would include the issue of sustainable development in one of its thematic communications campaigns. Japan was the largest contributor to the water and sanitation pillar of the Millennium Development Goals, and its former Prime Minister was Chairman of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. In January 2005, it would host the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, which had been severely damaged by an earthquake in 1995. In conclusion, his delegation hailed the success of the multilingual United Nations web site and believed that it should continue to be

upgraded within the limits of the Department's existing resources.

8. **Mr. Ali Ahmad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation attached great importance to the establishment of a new world information order which would be fairer and more in keeping with the principles of the United Nations and with the aspirations and cultural values of people throughout the world.

9. The United Nations, and in particular DPI, was responsible for making the voice of the Organization heard, explaining its objectives and making its activities better known throughout the world in both the developing and the developed countries. The United Nations was also expected to reflect the positions of its Members on major current issues. The subjects on which resolutions had been adopted, particularly those of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies, figured largely in the information activities of the Organization. Matters of particular concern were foreign occupation, poverty, disease and the mobilization of the international community to address those evils.

10. He welcomed the efforts of DPI to promote the web site of the United Nations and noted the information in the Secretary-General's report (A/59/221) concerning the steady increase in the number of visitors to the site. However, notwithstanding the efforts of the Department, the United Nations web site had not yet achieved full language parity. The Arabic pages, in particular, still needed to be improved, and he called for greater efforts to ensure equal treatment for all six official languages through the allocation of the available human and financial resources on a more equitable basis.

11. His delegation noted the proposals of the Secretary-General concerning the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres. Those centres were of the greatest importance, particularly in the developing countries, in making the voice of the United Nations heard and explaining its role. Each centre should be considered individually, in consultation with the country concerned.

12. His delegation noted the tendency of DPI to make increased use of partnerships, particularly with the information media, the private sector and NGOs, to spread the message of the United Nations. While supporting the efforts of the United Nations to address wide sectors of world public opinion, his delegation

was concerned that the use of such partnerships might serve the interest of outside media bodies, and it was not convinced of the desire or ability of such bodies to transmit the voice of the United Nations accurately and objectively.

13. With regard to the strategic framework for the period 2006-2007, he expressed his delegation's willingness to engage in constructive dialogue to achieve the objectives of DPI in accordance with its mandate. He thanked the Department for its concern for the Palestinian people and urged it to continue its implementation of the information programme relating to Palestine and to allocate the necessary resources for that purpose. In conclusion, he said that, in the view of his delegation, one of the major tasks facing the United Nations in re-orienting its activities in the field of public information was the elimination of the digital divide between the developing and the developed countries. His delegation hoped that the new structure of the Department would help to achieve that end and that the reform process would continue within a transparent manner in coordination with the Member States.

14. **Mr. Alaoui** (Morocco) stressed the vital role of the United Nations information centres and the pressing need to spread the message of the United Nations in the Arab world, where its image had deteriorated to an alarming extent. According to a Zogby International survey, only one third of the Moroccans interviewed had a favourable opinion of the United Nations.

15. Referring to paragraph 21 of the report, he said that the rationalization of United Nations information centres in various parts of the world should be based on consultations with the States concerned and the report to be submitted to the Committee on Information on the Western European experience.

16. His delegation welcomed the Department's focus on the situation in Africa, including its peacekeeping and conflict resolution needs, and the assistance it had provided to the Economic Commission for Africa and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa in establishing media contacts and increasing their international visibility (A/59/221, para. 10). Turning to the question of Palestine, he praised the series of International Media Seminars on Peace in the Middle East, held most recently in Beijing in June 2004 on the topic "The role of civil society in promoting peace and

justice in the Middle East". In view of the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, his delegation attached particular importance to strengthening the special information programme on the question of Palestine.

17. Neutrality of tone and parity among the official languages must be vital components of the Department's very successful and effective press releases. In conclusion, he expressed his delegation's support for the reorientation of the Department's activities.

18. **Mr. Trepelkov** (Russian Federation) said that, in implementing its new communications strategy, the Department of Public Information should focus on the crucial issues of the day, including threats and challenges to security, particularly international terrorism. In late September, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, had stressed the importance of multilateral efforts in that area at the World Congress of News Agencies: "Information: Challenge XXI", held in Moscow. Those challenges were also being very effectively addressed by the Department's "Unlearning Intolerance" seminars, the first of which, "Confronting anti-Semitism", had been a tremendous success. His delegation looked forward to the seminar on Islamophobia, to be held in December. It noted with satisfaction the Department's progress in establishing and maintaining partnership agreements with NGOs and private enterprise, and its involvement in joint projects, including those sponsored by the United Nations Foundation, Inc. More targeted and coordinated efforts by the Department as a whole — as opposed to the NGO Resource Centre alone — would eliminate duplication of effort and economize on material resources and manpower.

19. While his delegation supported the incorporation of the United Nations information centres into integrated regional hubs, it believed that the process should take into account the opinions of the countries affected. Savings should be used to strengthen information centres in the developing countries and address other priority information activities. The Russian Federation was pleased that the Department's leadership had noted the steady and efficient work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, which had considerably strengthened its partnership with other United Nations institutions there and coordinated their various outreach activities.

20. His delegation supported the work of the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries and noted its successful efforts, as well as those of its secretariat, in reorganizing and coordinating the activities of the Organization's libraries. Both the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/59/373) and the Committee on Information at its twenty-sixth session had highlighted the need to introduce a new library policy in United Nations agencies and to finance the activities of the Steering Committee and its secretariat. Referring to the move from "collections to connections" in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, with a view to systematizing knowledge management within the entire Secretariat. He requested a detailed plan of the restructuring and possible reorganization of library services at Headquarters, which, according to his delegation's preliminary estimates, could entail significant operational and financial consequences involving both delegates and Secretariat staff and might affect productivity in the regular services.

21. Multilingualism and parity among the official languages, including on the web site, should be continually reflected in the practices of the Organization. He commended the Department's concrete actions to ensure language parity on the web site and called for a responsible attitude by all Secretariat divisions in preparing materials for the web site in all six official languages. He drew attention, in particular, to the successful functioning of the Russian version of the United Nations web site and of the United Nations News Centre in the Russian language.

22. The international broadcasting services of the United Nations Radio exemplified multilingualism in United Nations activities. The United Nations Radio programmes in the Russian language, one of the Department's most successful innovations, were rebroadcast by his country's largest national radio station, "Voice of Russia", to about 40 million listeners weekly. His delegation also welcomed the Department's initiatives to introduce some radical changes to the *UN Chronicle* in all six official languages, and to make it available on the United Nations web site.

23. **Mr. Atsavapranee** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), noted with satisfaction the comprehensive restructuring and revitalization of DPI within the larger framework of

the reform of the United Nations. Affirming the importance of the public's perception of the Organization, he said that DPI should focus on issues of public interest that were also priorities of the United Nations, such as the Millennium Development Goals. That would be particularly important in the lead-up to the review of the progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. The Department would also have to tell the world about major reforms being implemented to help the United Nations cope more effectively with the threats, challenges and changes in the new millennium. In order to reach the widest possible audience, more information about the work of the Organization should be disseminated not only in the six official languages, but also in local languages.

24. ASEAN welcomed the efforts of the United Nations Communications Group to strengthen a culture of communications and enhance coordination between DPI and the substantive departments, particularly the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In that connection, its member States believed that gender mainstreaming in the information component of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions would help strengthen the United Nations response to gender-based violence resulting from conflict situations. It also commended the Department's workshop for the Middle East and North African region, held in New York in September 2003, with a view to strengthening the Organization's outreach in the Arab world.

25. As for rationalization of the United Nations information centres, the ASEAN countries believed that it should be based on a careful assessment of the needs and capacities of the various countries in a particular region following consultations with the countries concerned.

26. Welcoming the continued progress in the Department's new services and the availability of the new updated United Nations News Centre online, he expressed the hope that the United Nations News Service would soon be made available in all official languages without incurring extra cost to the budget. Consideration must also be given to ways and means of enhancing the accessibility of the United Nations web site for persons with disabilities, in keeping with recognized industry standards. Parallel with the growth of its web site, the Organization should continue to reach out to its global audience through traditional

means, particularly radio, which remained the most accessible source of information and entertainment in many developing countries.

27. In conclusion, the ASEAN countries stressed that the international community must confront the irony that information and communication technology (ICT) intended to bridge gaps was actually widening the digital divide between developing and developed countries. In that connection, they looked forward to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunis in 2005, and hoped that DPI would continue to publicize the assistance provided by the Organization in the field of information and communication.

28. **Mr. Chew** (Singapore) said that his delegation was pleased that DPI had been comprehensively restructured. He saw three broad challenges confronting the Department: convergence, competition and resources. As for convergence, advances in technology had not yet produced products that could do everything; the news world in particular was still primarily devoted to news. The real convergence was taking place mostly in the heads of consumers. He commended the Department for maximizing its outreach efforts by making better use of new ICT, in particular, the Internet, while not abandoning traditional means of communication, such as radio and television. On the subject of competition, he said that there were many competing sources of information and misinformation, and the United Nations could easily be drowned out; messages needed to be clear, concise, accurate and credible. As for resources, his delegation supported legitimate requests by States members to continue to upgrade the United Nations web site and was pleased that DPI continued to respond to those requests. Yet, the budget of the United Nations was limited and could not be stretched ad infinitum. His delegation was nevertheless confident that, guided by its new mission statement and able leaders, DPI would rise to the occasion and meet such challenges head on.

29. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation applauded the progress made by the Department in reaching out to more people of the world and urged it to continue its endeavour in promoting multilingualism. In particular, he wished to note the bilingual web site (in English and Bangla) that had been developed by the United Nations Information Centre at Dhaka, which had been praised for its rich content and creative design, and which reached

250 million people in Bangladesh and elsewhere. The Dhaka Centre had also taken the lead in bringing together the country's library system into a single network, which now included all the major libraries in the country and all the reference sections of the United Nations system. That was a good example of what centres could do to disseminate information about the United Nations and to create conditions for cooperation among national and international bodies under a common programme. His delegation advocated the strengthening of that network, and proposed that the Department could assist by providing the staff of the Dhaka Centre with proper training in network promotion and library management.

30. Having served in 28 peace missions, including 12 that were ongoing, Bangladesh deeply appreciated the Department's initiatives to publicize United Nations peacekeeping activities and urged it to continue to do so. It was saddened to know that budget cuts had hit United Nations information centres hardest, and looked forward to working with all concerned to redress that situation. The centres were vital for promoting public awareness in the developing countries, where information technologies were still at a developmental stage. Although Bangladesh understood the rationale for creating a western hub, the same model could not be applied in the developing world. The lack of technology and infrastructure, as well as the geographical and linguistic differences, justified maintaining and strengthening information centres in those countries — in particular if the United Nations wished its budget cuts to be rational. At a time when the world was dotted with conflicts, the measured and objective voice of the United Nations could be of immense help.

31. **Mr. Chaliha** (India) said that his delegation endorsed the new mission statement of the Department, welcomed its new organizational structure and was confident that its new format would be effective.

32. India had wholeheartedly supported the proposal to restructure United Nations information centres by reorganizing them into regional hubs and then to plough back the funds released into priority activities. The establishment of a Regional United Nations Information Centre (RUNIC) in Brussels fulfilled the first part of the proposal; the second part must also be fulfilled or otherwise it would be viewed as merely a cost-cutting exercise. Furthermore, a detailed report of

the operations of the Brussels Centre should be received before regional hubs were created elsewhere.

33. India had been gratified to learn of the initiatives taken by the Department to inform the public about peacekeeping operations. As a leading troop-contributing country, it urged that more stories should be told about the successes of peacekeeping operations, which would be a way to recognize the contributions of troop-contributing countries and to encourage Governments to respond to requests for support from the United Nations.

34. While his delegation congratulated the Department on the headway made in the development of the United Nations web site, it wished to sound a note of caution. It was important not to forget that the traditional media — print, radio and television — were the most effective in reaching the populations of the developing countries.

35. His delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to reach target audiences, such as NGOs, research institutions, libraries and academic communities, and encouraged it to increase its outreach service in the regions and to strengthen its interaction with civil society; it was also glad that the *UN Chronicle* had strengthened its educational outreach. Finally, he said that India welcomed the promotion of a culture of evaluation and performance management in the Department and was heartened by its restructuring and reform.

36. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that the Committee on Information had made significant headway in fulfilling the mandate handed down by the General Assembly in resolution 34/182. It should, however, step up its efforts in such areas as the new world information and communication order, access of disabled persons to the United Nations web site, closing the digital gap between the developed and developing countries, the informational imbalance with respect to peacekeeping operations and the rationalization of United Nations information centres.

37. The maintenance of international peace and security posed challenges wholly unlike those of the six previous decades, and the reform of the Department must take those new challenges into account. His delegation therefore supported the new mission statement as defined in paragraph 3 of document A/59/221 and endorsed the conclusion that the communications and public information challenges

facing the United Nations were best handled when its messages were strategically targeted (*ibid.*, para. 73). It was closely following the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007 and welcomed the report of the Committee on Information (A/59/21) and the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/59/221).

38. Ecuador, a firm defender of multilateralism and of the Charter of the United Nations, supported all initiatives designed to confront the challenges and advance the goals of the Organization. In that regard, more efforts should be made to optimize the web site in the official languages. Speaking both as the representative of Ecuador and as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, he said that every effort should be made to make the United Nations accessible to persons with disabilities, and he commended the Department for adopting measures to increase their access to the web site. Noting that documents should be published in a timely fashion, he said that many documents and items of information were not displayed on the web site in all languages, causing difficulties for users. In the light of the widening technological gap between developed and developing countries, he urged that the disparities between those countries should be taken into account in efforts to achieve information objectives. Most of the population of the world lived in developing countries and lacked access to the Internet; yet, it was essential for information about the Organization's tasks and services to reach them.

39. His delegation fully agreed that a public information strategy on peacekeeping operation should be undertaken, in close coordination with other departments in order to ensure that the public was promptly informed, particularly in those countries where peacekeeping operations were being carried out and in those which were contributing troops.

40. **Mr. Marsh** (United States of America) welcomed the energetic approach of the new head librarian of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and looked forward to working closely with her to make the Library one of the central information management units of the Secretariat. The Library should become a more proactive contributor to the information needs of the Secretariat; in that context, he congratulated the Library on its excellent web site, which contained a

number of important research tools, and on its excellent training programmes. CD-ROMs could perhaps be used to disseminate electronic versions of the Library's training programmes to depository libraries and staff members away from Headquarters and, since most libraries were Internet-ready, perhaps it was time to stop sending hard copies of documents to them, which would save time for librarians and allow funds to be redirected to other activities. The initiatives being undertaken by the Library should be supported by DPI, and all participating libraries should work together to develop a new vision and strategy for United Nations libraries. He looked forward to careful examination at the next session of the Committee on Information of the impact of the initiatives being pursued by the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries.

41. He expressed surprise that the Official Document System (ODS) had not been mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (A/59/221); integration of the Official Document System with the United Nations web site by the end of 2004, in accordance with paragraph 27 of draft resolution B contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/59/21), would ensure free, public access to all United Nations parliamentary documents issued since 1993. He commended DPI and the Information Technology Services Division for working diligently to make the massive contents of the Official Documents System available to the public.

42. While he commended DPI for endeavouring to achieve parity in the use of the six official languages on the United Nations web site, in particular the News Centre online portal, he noted that the six official languages were spoken by approximately 40 per cent of the world population only. He wondered if the use of human and financial resources to achieve parity among the six official languages on the web site was justified in the light of other priorities for Member States. Greater public impact in communicating the activities of the Organization might be achieved by posting the texts of important materials on the web site in languages other than the six official languages.

43. He welcomed the progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 57/300 calling for the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres around regional hubs. Following completion of that process in Western

Europe, it was time to implement the programme in other regions. Although a difficult and politically sensitive process, the organization had a responsibility to fix a system which had been comprehensively reviewed by the Secretariat and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. Rationalization of the network of information centres was also required in order to maintain a substantive and efficient field presence in the current budgetary climate, as had been stated by the Under-Secretary-General to the Committee on Information on 26 April 2004.

44. While information and communication conditions in the developing world were different than those of the developed world — a fact which the Committee on Information had taken into account when making decisions regarding the Department of Public Information's radio broadcasting programme and which should likewise be taken into account during the consolidation of the network of information centres — that rationalization process should nevertheless move forward, albeit on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the Member States concerned. There was a general understanding in that rationalization should not be a mere cost-cutting exercise but the decision to reduce the budgetary allocation for United Nations information centres had been agreed to by all participants in the negotiations. His delegation pledged to work with all delegations to provide the necessary operational funds to information centres and regional information centres as the regionalization process moved forward.

45. He commended DPI for: its timely distribution of digital images at meetings and events; making its web sites accessible to users with disabilities; live webcasting of Security Council meetings and the General Assembly's general debate; effective deployment of public information components in new peacekeeping missions; its Cyberschoolbus web site; its broadcast partnerships with radio and television stations worldwide; and its leadership in coordinating communications activities with other United Nations system organizations. Furthermore, his delegation was gratified to note that the international community, at the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003, had reaffirmed article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an essential foundation of the information society and had likewise reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom

of information as well as the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media.

46. **Mr. Myaing** (Myanmar), said that DPI should pay special attention to the pressing issues facing the vast majority of the world's population, as reflected in the Millennium Declaration. Greater efforts must also be made by the international community to close the growing digital divide between the developed and developing worlds in the field of ICT so that the developing countries might avail themselves of the opportunities for economic and social development afforded by advanced technology. Imbalances in the world's information and communication resources also facilitated the dissemination of one-sided news and views, especially regarding conditions in the developing countries. The Department must therefore play a greater role in assisting the developing countries to obtain modern technology. He hoped that the second phase of the Summit on Information Society in Tunis in 2005 would adopt concrete measures aimed at closing the digital divide.

47. The developing countries themselves bore the primary responsibility for developing their information and communication policies. Accordingly, his Government was mobilizing all available resources to keep abreast of changing technologies and facilitate further development. The necessary institutional and legislative frameworks had been put in place to create an enabling environment and the private sector had been encouraged to increase its efforts. ICT parks had recently been launched to encourage entrepreneurship and provide information technology services to a growing segment of the population. Radio programming had been extended and new FM and TV relay stations had been built so that the entire population would have access to news and information. Thanks to the utilization of two satellites, viewers in over 156 countries currently had access to Myanmar TV programmes.

48. In the context of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, an ICT master plan project had been launched which included detailed programmes to link with international networks. Implementation of the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement was also making good progress with the introduction of electronic visa, passport, government portal and procurement services. The electronic government system should facilitate the more effective functioning of government departments and enterprises. An e-government implementation

committee and e-national task force had been launched and work was under way to develop information infrastructure and e-commerce and e-government systems and lift restrictions on ICT products, services and investment.

49. His delegation welcomed the restructuring of DPI in order to improve its ability to deliver effective and targeted information programmes without compromising the services rendered to developing countries. His delegation attached great importance to the role of the United Nations information centres in developing countries as valuable information resources and means of communication with host countries. It welcomed the establishment of a regional United Nations hub in Brussels but cautioned that the unique situations and needs of regions and countries must be taken into account in the regionalization process. In countries where there was inadequate infrastructure, closure of information centres could affect the flow of information. Any restructuring must therefore be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, following consultation with the countries concerned.

50. In view of the profound transformations taking place, Member States must encourage DPI to evolve a clear and strong information policy that would provide greater services to the developing countries. In that context, he expressed his delegation's deep appreciation to the Department for its invaluable activities, in particular its web site, the live webcasting of meetings and the timely posting of press releases as well as for the services provided by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

51. **Mr. Ayafor** (Cameroon) stressed his delegation's interest in the United Nations information activities as a means of increasing awareness of the goals of the United Nations and of mobilizing efforts to promote peace and socio-economic development. In a constantly changing world, however, the Organization must be able to adapt and evolve as required; he therefore welcomed the restructuring of DPI. Evaluation of the Department's work must be an ongoing process in order to ensure that it remained relevant and effective. It must also cooperate closely with other departments, in particular those responsible for peacekeeping and socio-economic development, in order to increase awareness of their activities and create support for the Organization among the peoples of the world.

52. DPI had a special role to play in increasing awareness of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the eradication of poverty and major pandemics, which mainly affected the developing countries. In that context, he thanked the Under-Secretary-General for having organized on 3 May 2004, World Press Freedom Day, a round table on 10 factors contributing to underdevelopment which did not receive sufficient attention from the press. Such initiatives should be copied in other major capitals of the world, where the most important media organizations had their headquarters.

53. Turning to the delicate issue of the rationalization of the United Nations network of information centres, he said that a careful evaluation of the consolidation of the Western European centres in a hub in Brussels must first be carried out before that process was extended to other regions. He also expressed support for the Department's efforts to promote the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and stressed that Africans themselves must be the driving force behind NEPAD although DPI should support African domestic initiatives by using traditional media such as radio and television to reach out to the greatest possible number of Africans and keep them informed about important initiatives.

54. As globalization progressed, the digital divide between the rich and the poor countries continued to grow. DPI must establish an appropriate strategy to help the developing countries, in particular in Africa, to take full advantage of the World Summit on the Information Society, including its second phase in 2005. In that context, he reiterated his delegation's support for the Department and its appreciation for the valuable services provided to the local population and the subregion by the United Nations information centre in Yaoundé, which had received considerable infrastructure assistance from his Government.

55. **Ms. Al-Akhzamy** (Oman) said that her delegation fully supported the work of DPI and was satisfied with it, in spite of recent budget cuts. She agreed with the Under-Secretary-General that the United Nations faced many challenges, including that of delivering its message to countries in conflict. The Department played a major role in building bridges between the peoples of the world and communicating the Organization's message of peace and friendship based on understanding, unity, respect for differences and the rejection of confrontation. It must receive the

financial resources necessary to adequately fulfil its mandate.

56. The United Nations had always stressed impartiality and objectivity, and she therefore welcomed the efforts made by the Department to combat racial segregation and promote dialogue and tolerance between civilizations based on respect for the differences of others and the rejection of extremism. In that context, she recalled that the Under-Secretary-General had said that in some areas, for example the Middle East, the United Nations had difficulty making its role in the maintenance of international peace and security understood and therefore risked losing the trust of the peoples concerned. More must be done to ensure the application of international law in a fully impartial manner. In that context she stressed the important role played by the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section of the Department of Public Information, which must receive adequate funding to carry out its mandate.

57. She welcomed reforms made at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and with regard to radio broadcasting and information technologies but stressed that the United Nations web site must be available in all languages, especially Arabic. She regretted that many services and documents were still not available in Arabic; that situation must be remedied as soon as possible.

58. She echoed the Under-Secretary-General's call to use the upcoming sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations as a time for renewal for the Department of Public Information. That renewal must be based on a new vision for the Department which was both realistic and ambitious and in keeping with that noble principle of the Organization, the promotion of peaceful coexistence between the peoples and countries of the world.

59. **Mr. Suhail** (Pakistan) said that it was the prerogative of the Committee on Information to develop a comprehensive information policy. Its mandate from the international community was to strengthen the communication capacities and information infrastructures of the developing countries so as to build bridges between societies, cultures, religions and regions and generate greater understanding. Its other mandate was to oversee the performance, policies and activities of DPI in accordance with the wishes of Member States. The Committee's agenda should in no way be restricted.

60. Like other developing countries, Pakistan was concerned that the effectiveness of the United Nations information centres around the world was being unjustifiably curtailed by the creation of regional hubs. The centres played a crucial outreach role and projected the programmes and policies of the United Nations system, effectively disseminating information to the local media and catering to the requirements of different societies. New rationalization measures must not be allowed to affect the pivotal role of the centres. The requested report from the Secretary-General on the success of the experimental regional hub in Western Europe should eventually be evaluated by a panel of experts. No hasty decision should be reached on whether a similar process was warranted for other regions. His delegation also welcomed the clear statement at the previous meeting by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information that the centrepiece of the rationalization plan was to strengthen the information centres in developing countries through the savings generated by the amalgamation of centres in Western Europe.

61. Under its dynamic leadership, DPI had been serving Member States with distinction, and particularly useful work was being done by the Strategic Communications Division, the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit and the Multimedia Resources Unit. One of the Department's vital functions was to give Member States access to the sources of information, and its focus on specific themes such as the Millennium Development Goals or peacekeeping was most valuable.

62. Commending the United Nations Correspondents Association for its professional dedication and for serving as a bridge between the United Nations and the world at large, his delegation urged DPI to ensure that the very few media organizations from the developing world represented at the United Nations were provided with equal if not greater access than others to the sources of information. It should also support the Association's scholarship fund for journalists from developing countries which could not otherwise afford to send them and should consider expanding their orientation programmes.

63. The International Programme for the Development of Communication under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was also instrumental in training journalists and strengthening the communication capacities and information infrastructures of the developing countries, making for

a more balanced two-way flow of information. A UNESCO representative should be invited to brief the Committee on Information on that Programme at its next session.

64. **Mr. Sealy** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), observed that the report of the Committee on Information (A/59/21) covered a wide range of issues, including the reorganization of DPI and the rationalization of United Nations information centres. The CARICOM States endorsed the proposed increase in the Committee's membership. With respect to the Department's ongoing reform process, they noted that progress had been made in systematically evaluating products and activities according to measurable indicators of achievement. Under its new client-oriented strategic approach, the Department had publicized the World Summit on the Information Society, HIV/AIDS, continued its substantive collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, promoted awareness in Africa of the strategic objectives of NEPAD and improved public understanding in the Middle East of the role and functions of the United Nations. The Department should also give coverage to the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States to be held in January 2005.

65. The United Nations web site, which must continue to be a dynamic medium for dissemination of information about the United Nations, had expanded successfully, as indicated by the over 2 billion accesses in the past year and the integration of the Internet into the Department's work. However, although technology was an effective means of public information, it had to be borne in mind that computers were not readily available in societies such as those in the Caribbean, and that the United Nations information centres should, accordingly, continue to rely on traditional means of communications. Radio was still a vital medium, and the United Nations radio service had been very useful in the Caribbean and should be maintained at current levels.

66. Budget constraints had forced the Department to try to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres, with the avowed aim of channelling the resulting savings towards the developing countries, where many of the centres had become too costly to operate. Any consolidation of centres in regions other than Western Europe should be carried out in consultation with the States concerned,

taking regional characteristics into account. For instance, if the Trinidad and Tobago information centre were to be designated officially as a regional centre, it should receive more financial and human resources, while the information component in the UNDP regional office in Jamaica should be enhanced. The recent reduction of the overall operational budget of United Nations information centres had compounded the financial constraints, and Member States should see to it that the Department received the required funds to re-energize, upgrade and effectively operate the information centres.

67. **Mr. Mostafa** (Sudan) observed that DPI, under its dynamic leadership, had done more than expected, notwithstanding its dwindling resources. His delegation hoped that it would be able to adopt the innovative strategies needed to reach its entire target audience. The developing countries especially needed help to overcome poverty and inadequate development, and the Department had done well to give top priority to Africa by publicizing NEPAD and using information to promote poverty reduction and help combat diseases. The Department should develop new communication strategies to raise world awareness of the situation in the occupied Palestinian Territory and in other Non-Self-Governing Territories, so that the cause of the Palestinian and other peoples would receive fair coverage.

68. His delegation looked forward to the best use of the Library facilities under its new management. It welcomed the improved United Nations web site, and hoped that it would give the six official languages equal treatment. It was nevertheless important also to strengthen the traditional media, which were especially effective in reaching broad audiences, especially in the developing countries. The Department should also continue to sponsor training programmes for journalists from developing countries to help them polish their professional skills and learn about the activities of the United Nations and its agencies.

69. His delegation had been closely following the Department's plans to reduce the number of United Nations information centres, as had been done in Western Europe. It looked forward to hearing the Department's report on how valid that experiment had been.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.