

Statement by Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (30 April 2007)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address, for the first time, the annual session of the Committee on Information. At the outset of my address, please allow me to take this opportunity to welcome the newly-elected Chairman, Rudolf Christen, and the members of the Bureau. I am grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind and encouraging words addressed to me. I look forward to working closely with you and with other members of the Bureau.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing chairman, His Excellency Mr. Mihnea Ioan Motoc, and the other members of his Bureau, for the outstanding support and cooperation they extended to the Department over the past two years.

I would also like pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, for his stewardship of the Department over the past six years.

Having joined the UN only a few weeks ago, I am still learning and observing, but I am keenly aware of the important role this Committee plays in guiding DPI in its work and helping it to become more effective.

Later today, my senior DPI colleagues will join me in this room for an interactive dialogue with you, about the work of the Department. I have been told that this dialogue is particularly useful for delegates who are new to this Committee and are not familiar with the work of the Department. As someone who is also new to the Department, I am looking forward to learning from this exchange.

Mr. Chairman,

The General Assembly, in its resolutions 61/121 A and B of 8 December 2006, requested the Secretary-General to report to the twenty-ninth session of the Committee on Information on the activities of the Department and on the implementation of its recommendations on questions relating to public information. Through consultations with the Bureau of the Committee, it was decided that the information requested in the above resolution would be grouped into the three reports listed in your agenda (A/AC.198/2007/1).

Taken together, these reports provide a comprehensive picture of a Department that has reoriented itself, both structurally and programmatically.

We must build on the gains made in the past, while remaining attentive to the demands of the

DPI's mission is to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. As the reports of the Secretary-General to the Committee demonstrate, the Department has made steady progress in meeting its mission. Allow me to share with you some of the highlights and conclusions.

First, I will explain how DPI's activities are now more strategic.

DPI is also working with the General Assembly President's Office to promote the upcoming informal debate in the General Assembly on "Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace." The meeting will provide an opportunity to highlight the General Assembly as an ideal venue for promoting tolerance and respect for diversity across cultures.

Mr. Chairman,

DPI's integrated approach also has an impact on how the UN story is told. For example, following a public information training workshop for peacekeeping missions organized by DPI

challenge to present the actions of the United Nations coherently and show how they are relevant to people's lives — that is, to the lives of ordinary men and women.

In the area of news and media services, the immediate task before us is to maintain the current level of quality coverage and to eliminate gaps. We will do this by building on our existing strengths and finding ways to further engage with external partners and other UN system entities.

There are a number of other operational objectives as well. We are actively planning to put UN audio and video on the web to provide broadcasters with round-the-clock material on demand. This will finally put us at par, technologically speaking, with major (as)-2 (t)ge e(s)-2 (r)-1.3 (at)3.6-n (i)1.4

As outlined in the report of the Secretary-General, we have taken measures to further strengthen UNICs and to integrate them within the overall communications strategy of the Department. These measures include the realignment of resources; upgrading of the use of information and communications technologies; building partnerships at local and regional levels; and the provision of regular guidance from Headquarters on key thematic issues.

I am pleased to report that every UNIC now has a fully functional website, and that these websites mean that information is available in 31 languages.

We have also developed a new work plan template for UNICs. This template, a working tool that will help our field staff plan and monitor their progress, as well as evaluate programmes and derive lessons from them, is available on a new internal digital network we have instituted called StratCom.

We have strengthened our presence in major media hubs, such as Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria, with the aim of maximizing the impact of their limited resources. These centres — now better staffed and better resourced — have been given a coordinating role at the regional level. For example, UNIC Cairo and UNIC Mexico have taken the lead in creating regional UN Communications Groups, bringing together existing communications resources in their respective regions.

In Europe, our offices in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna are using innovative networking tools to join hands and coordinate their communications tasks. They are now talking to each other more often, sharing their resources whenever possible and undertaking joint exercises. UNIS Vienna has also assumed the responsibility of providing strategic guidance to our UNICs in Bucharest, Prague and Warsaw. It is still early days, but we are already seeing benefits of these new synergies. Whether in Africa, Latin America or Europe, by working together at the regional level, UNICs are better able to provide information and inspire discussion on UN issues that resonate in their respective regions.

This has encouraged us to explore the possibility of strengthening UNICs in other regions or sub-regions. DPI places great importance on the role of the UNICs at the country level, as a key member of the UN Country Team. Let me assure you that as discussions relating to System-wide coherence continue, and with "One UN" pilots underway in a number of countries, we are very aware of the need to ensure the viability and effectiveness of UNICs, and to ensure that they add value to the efforts of the UN system at the country level.

Mr. Chairman,

Speaking of the UN system, our experience at the global level shows that the UN system is at its best when it *speaks* coherently. The UN Communications Group, which at the global level brings the communications focal points of the entire UN system under one umbrella, can also be an effective tool at the local level. With UNICs in the lead, local chapters of UNCG have already been created in some 60 countries. We hope, in the next 12 months, that UNCGs will be created in every country where UN system organizations function.

I have been with the DPI only for a few weeks, but my association with the United Nations