

STATEMENT BY MR. KIYO AKASAKA
UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL
FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION
AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRTYTHIRD SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
WEDNESDAY, 27 APRIL 2011, 10:00 A.M.
Conference Room, North Lawn Building

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the Committee on Information and values of the United Nations.

We welcome you as a diplomat and negotiator, and salute you as a life-long defender of the freedom of the press and expression.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the leadership provided to the Committee by Ambassador Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima over the past two years. Ambassador Lima stated that the overarching objective of this Committee is “to collectively provide...the best possible policy guidance to the Department of Public Information (DPI) so that our Organization continues to benefit from the strong voice given to it by DPI.” Indeed, the strength of our voice depends in no small measure on the strength of this Committee’s support guidance and encouragement for which we are grateful.

The General Assembly, in its resolutions 65/103, requested the Secretary-General to report to the 33rd 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.

These reports, organized according to our subprogrammes, provide an overview of the work and results of the Department.

I would like to take this opportunity to update the substantial information contained in the reports. While focusing on new initiatives, I will also address current and future challenges. At the interactive dialogue with Member States later today, in this conference at 3:00 p.m., you will have a further opportunity to discuss and review various aspects of our work. I encourage all of you, especially those attending the Committee for the first time, to join me and my colleagues in this dialogue. I look forward to using this opportunity to introduce you to the new senior management team in the Department, to inviting our three new Directors to speak, and listen, to you.

Mr. Chairman,

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We stand in the very heart of the planned and the unplanned. And this demands of the Department of Public Information a new agility. We cannot compromise on our responsibilities, but we can better address them with creative partnerships and the enlargement of areas of collaboration, with Member States, with a broad spectrum of civil society, and within the Organization itself.

With Member States, this means taking you at your word when you state - as you have in successive resolutions - that the United Nations remains the indispensable foundation of a peaceful and just world in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are protected, and that its voice must be heard in a clear and effective manner. You have also emphasized the essential role of the Department of Public Information in this context. These

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For the past two years, have appealed to those Member States that host a UN information centre to consider either providing the UNIC with ~~free~~ premises or subsidizing its rent. This year, my appeal is more acute than ever given the pressures on the UN budget and the increasing demands on the Department. It would ask you to consider offsetting ~~the~~ pressures by offering other forms of support, such as providing DPI field offices with access to facilities to translate and print United Nations publications in national and regional languages at no cost, facilitating tax/VAT exemptions for UNICs, and, where needed, strengthening security for UN premises. For our part, we are examining ways to reduce set ~~expenses~~ by changing the ways UNICs operate and by reducing the size of our premises in some cases. We will continue to look for creative ways to ensure the effectiveness of our field offices.

In the light of the current situation and with your general ~~de~~ understanding, DPI will begin the process of reviewing the number and locations of UNICs from a strategic point of view, and will discuss this matter further with concerned Member States, ~~with a~~ aim of rationalizing and strengthening communications support ~~to~~ Member States and regions.

I know how important it is for Member States to maintain UN information centres; I have heard your strong statements. I have told you that while my predecessor made enormous changes with regard to UNICs, including for their regionalization and phasing out, I did not make further changes. I kept the UNICs as they are. But, over the years, I have asked you to ~~provide~~ rent premises and support to UNICs. Some Member States have, but others have not. I know that the budget situation around the United Nations is dire. In the months ahead, you will be addressing the UN budget, and you will see that the DPI budget will be cut, in line with that of other

The Government of Rwanda continues to provide support to our outreach efforts on the Rwanda genocide and the lessons drawn from that tragedy. The support and cooperation extended by the African Union for our commemorative activities and outreach programmes are also greatly appreciated.

On 2 May, the Government of the United Kingdom and DPI will screen "The Relief of Belsen" as part of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme. The film and subsequent panel discussion will examine the massive humanitarian relief effort by the British army in liberating the Bergen Belsen concentration camp in April 1945. We will continue to strengthen and broaden our outreach programme throughout the year.

We are grateful to the Government of Turkey for its support for our coverage of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul next month.

In July, the Government of Hungary will host this year's International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in Budapest. The seminar will examine the current status of the peace process, including against the backdrop of the conflict in Syria.

Government of Germany and the City of Bonn, and will serve as a rallying point for civil society as we prepare for the UN conference in Rio.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to our work with Member States, we continue to deepen our collaboration and improve our coordination with UN system partners.

Local UN Communications Groups, inter-agency bodies chaired by DPI, are providing UN Country Teams with strong communications support through joint communications strategies and coordinated media and public outreach activities. In June, when the principals of the UN Communications Group met in Geneva for their 10th annual meeting, concrete steps to bolster UN system-wide communications are expected to be adopted.

As part of the overall strategic communications support the Department provides to UN peace and security activities, DPI works closely with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Support and Political Affairs in shaping UN response to crises and rapidly unfolding events, including most recently in North Africa and the Middle East. UN information centres across the region are monitoring local media to see how UN messages are affecting the changes underway, and have provided valuable guidance on how UN messages can be amplified coherently throughout the region and beyond most effectively. Our UNICs have also served as media focal points for UN missions in the region. Their language skills and knowledge of local media help to enhance the communication of the UN message. Meanwhile, UN social media accounts managed by DPI helped to explain the UN's role, the humanitarian situation and the work of the Security Council in developments in the region.

The Department responded to the post-electoral turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire by providing communications support to the United Nations peacekeeping operation in that country, which itself became a target of direct attacks and a hostile media campaign. This support included the management and coordination of public messaging with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, and UNOCI, and the creation of

was especially important when the local UNOCI website was intermittently 9(e)3() 88 Tm [(n2gcr-22()-10

hubs and its member institutions have, through an efficient process of discussions, contributed to the high level meeting of the Economic and Social Council which will take place tomorrow on the question of education. The Academic Impact will serve as a means for universities and other institutions of research to contribute to the organization's awareness and thinking in critical areas.

Earlier this month, the third annual "Envision" MDG-inspired documentary film

violence against women. We are using these tools to inform and update journalists about key events at the UN and to build better informed and more inclusive online communities and coalitions for change.

To this end, our radio and television outreach activities have continued to expand with encouraging results. The UNifeed distribution system, which makes short videos of UN activities at headquarters and in the field, nearly doubled the number of its daily pickups of news packages in 2010; and more than three million audio clips of meetings and UN Radio programmes were downloaded from the multimedia website in the same period. We have a strong showing on Youtube, where our videos have been viewed more than 2.5 million times, and on Flickr where our photographs have recorded a million views since the page was launched two years ago.

The Department has also made further progress in leveraging existing technology to expand the availability of United Nations publications. United Nations e-books were included in an increasing number of mobile distribution services including for the Kindle, the Apple iPad and the Sony ebook Reader. And for the first time this year the United Nations Yearbook is also available in a version for mobile devices.

I believe that our expanding partnerships and collaboration with Member States, civil society, and UN partners, as well as our effective use of traditional and new media, demonstrates our determination to use our available resources in the most strategic manner possible. We will do our best to comply and meet your and the public's growing expectations of the United Nations. And as I stated at the outset, we look to you, our Member States, to provide us with the means and mandate to achieve our collective goals.

Mr. Chairman,

I should like to conclude with a word about this year's World Press Freedom Day, which will be observed as an event at the United Nations with the Secretary General and the Director General of UNESCO on 4 May. We believe that this Committee has a special responsibility to promote and defend the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression in media print, broadcast, and online. This year which marks the 20th anniversary of the Windhoek

Declaration, we have seen both old, and new, challenges to the freedom of expression. We look forward, with you, to using the occasion of the Day to draw attention to the need and responsibility of all States to defend these fundamental human rights as the basis for peace,