

**STATEMENT BY MR. MAHER NASSER
OFFICER-IN-CHARGE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION
BRIEFING TO THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON THE REVITALIZATION
OF THE WORK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2015, 10:00 A.M.
ECOSOC CHAMBER**

**Chairpersons, H. E. Ambassador Vladimir Drobnyak and
H. E. Wilfried I. Emvula,**

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

**I am honoured to be with you today, on behalf of the
United Nations, to participate in this discussion on the role
and authority of the General Assembly.**

**My name is Maher Nasser, and I am the Director of the
Outreach Division of the Department of Public
Information, and the Officer-in-Charge of the Department
this week.**

**The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and
Public Information, Cristina Gallach, is travelling on
official business and sends her regrets that she is unable to
join you and take part in today's discussion.**

The General Assembly, as the premier policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations, is the voice of the 193 Member States and, through them, the peoples of the world. Its decisions shape the planet where we live and, more directly, provide the mandates and priorities for the Organization.

DPI helps to fulfil those mandates by spotlighting the work and decisions of the Assembly – whether in the plenary, through its committees, or via working groups such as these – and raising its visibility. This is an essential element of our wider efforts to “tell the UN story”.

Our aim is to explain the work of the Assembly to as broad and global an audience as possible. It means using as many different platforms as possible, from radio and television to social media, and from infographics to promotional campaigns.

It also means telling the story in as many languages as is feasible – not only the six official languages, but many local languages as well thanks to the worldwide network of 63 UN Information Centres, or UNICs, spanning from Antananarivo to Asunción and from Yangon to Yerevan.

This year our communications task takes on a special resonance as it is the 70th anniversary of the United Nations and thus an opportunity to reflect on the extraordinary record of work of the Organization in general, and the General Assembly in particular, and to consider the key challenges ahead.

Throughout our work, the Department is guided by members of the Committee on Information, with whom we enjoy a close and collaborative relationship. Next month's meeting of the Committee will provide DPI with an opportunity to directly hear from Member States and to present to them the plans and activities in relation to the 70th anniversary, for which the slogan is *Strong UN, Better World*.

The Department has continued to intensify its partnerships with Member States, from outreach and educational programmes – such as those on the transatlantic slave trade, the Rwanda genocide, the Holocaust and the Question of Palestine – to social media content and joint campaigns in support of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, climate action, financing for development and disaster risk reduction.

Tomorrow we are filling the General Assembly Hall with young people in an educational event led by the award-winning musician Pharrell Williams that connects climate action with the International Day of Happiness.

Next Wednesday, the 25th of March, we are honouring the memory of the estimated 12 to 15 million people who crossed the Atlantic Ocean as slaves by marking the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

A Permanent Memorial to those victims, entitled *The Ark of Return*, will be unveiled at a special ceremony at the Visitors Plaza here at UN Headquarters – it will offer a visual testimony to the tragedy and help ensure that we never forgot those who endured its horrors. It will also remind us of the importance of being vigilant against contemporary forms of slavery.

Distinguished delegates,

Our support for the Assembly is year-round. In one example, ahead of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in September 2014, UNICs – working with the Office of the President of the General Assembly – organized expert briefings for journalists operating in countries with significant indigenous populations.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library offers swift and precise information research services, with priority given to supporting Member States' UN work.

The support includes providing information about voting history, accessing a speech made to the Assembly, or obtaining documents at the plenary and committee levels. The staff of Permanent Missions also receive tailored training on how to access UN documents and information.

Model UN gatherings, held year-round and worldwide, are a highly effective tool for engaging young people around the goals of the UN. The Department has developed a guide for organizing Model UN simulations of the General Assembly that more accurately reflect the processes and spirit in which decisions are made, thereby raising the profile and understanding of the Assembly among students.

I would like to add that the Department provides specific support to the Office of the President of the General Assembly. Each year a DPI staff member is seconded to support the OPGA communications team in order to maximize coverage of the activities and initiatives of both the Assembly and the President.

DPI helps to update the President's website, provide social media support, and produce and disseminate the annual press kit of the incoming President.

Our news media platforms – Television, Radio, Photo and News Centre – provide daily coverage of Assembly activities, with public demand higher than ever during the most recent General Debate in September 2014. A UN Information Centre also offers communications support to the President whenever he or she visits a country where a UNIC operates.

The Department raises the Assembly's visibility by webcasting all of its formal plenary meetings, as well as the open meetings of its six main committees and the thematic debates convened by the President each session.

To further increase awareness, late last year DPI launched two new smartphone apps that aim to make the work of the Assembly accessible to the general public and the media around the world.

The UN Audio Channels app provides live audio feeds from the General Assembly, in addition to the Security Council and to on-demand playback of UN Radio programming. The UN News app provides up-to-the-minute articles from the UN News Centre in all six official languages.

Distinguished delegates,

The UN's 70th anniversary represents a timely opportunity to reflect on the UN's history and take stock of its many achievements. This milestone also offers a moment to highlight where the UN – and the international community as a whole – needs to redouble its efforts to meet current and future challenges across the three pillars of its work: peace and security, development, and human rights.

The Assembly, since it held its very first session in Westminster Hall, London, in January 1946, has always been at the heart of the UN system's efforts to make a positive difference in the lives of people worldwide.

DPI is taking the lead in coordinating activities and project to mark the anniversary. A special website on UN-70, produced in all six official languages, will be online within days. This site will detail the history of the UN, including the Assembly, and offer a space to detail Member States' activities related to the milestone.

The quarterly journal *UN Chronicle* will include a special double anniversary issue later this year in which experts and prominent world figures examine the Organization's landmark achievements and identify future challenges.

DPI is issuing a special edition of the UN Charter in all six official languages, to be available in boxed sets packaged for the anniversary.

The Library has produced an online exhibition that will be rolled out across the course of 2015. Entitled *70 years, 70 documents*, the exhibit features milestone documents marking the development of the Organization, including a significant number of Assembly documents.

Our social media team is already active in promoting the anniversary – the hashtag #UN70, for example, has been seen by more than 13 million people on Twitter so far since it was launched towards the end of last year.

Each and every UNIC is being encouraged to mark the anniversary in conjunction with the UN system and local partners, especially Member States. Many countries have already reached out to us with their exciting plans for commemorative activities, ranging from concerts to colloquiums and from film screenings to rallies.

These are just some of the ways in which we are marking UN at 70. As we go forward in 2015, the Department of Public Information will work ever more closely with the rest of the UN system, the General Assembly, the Office of the Assembly President, and Member States to both commemorate the milestone and to continue to inform the global audience about the work of the Assembly as effectively as possible.
