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Chairman: Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia)

Contents

Agenda item 90: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 90: Questions relating to information

(continued) (A/56/21 and Add.1 and A/56/411; A/C.4/56/L.19)

1. **Mr. Johnson** (United States of America) welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/56/411). The Department of Public Information, like all departments, faced many daunting challenges, including the challenge of continually adapting to new media technologies while at the same time addressing current requirements.

2. His delegation continued to be impressed by the Department's continuing enhancement of the United Nations web site. It noted in particular the creation of the multilingual "United Nations Action Against Terrorism" page following the tragic events of 11 September, the timely web-casting and posting of statements made in the general debate in the General Assembly, and the redesign of the United Nations News Centre page. The Department's web site team was a textbook example of what could be accomplished by using existing resources when dedicated professionals applied their knowledge and creativity. He also commended the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for having developed the UNBISNET database and for its very effective training programme.

3. His delegation fully agreed with the view of the Secretary-General about the need to adopt the best management practices and technologies available, and to concentrate on those tasks that reflected the current priorities of Member States (A/54/2000, para. 367). In order for United Nations programmes to provide the maximum benefit in all areas, all United Nations activities should be carefully reviewed, rationalized and prioritized. All programmes should be evaluated regularly in accordance with existing rules. The end result of that continuing process would be to ensure that the Department achieved its goals effectively and economically.

4. In that connection, he referred to the Secretary-General's initiative aimed at ensuring that all United Nations entities in a given country, including its information centres, operated in common premises — a "United Nations House". In that context, the effectiveness of the work of the 65 information centres should be evaluated with a view to merging them with

United Nations Houses or other United Nations system offices. The sharing of common premises and services would improve effectiveness and lead to significant cost savings that could be dedicated, for example, to humanitarian aid. That initiative had the potential to provide centralized and system-wide public information and educational and other services in 120 countries that did not currently have an information centre or other office of the Department of Public Information.

5. On the question of the coordination of United Nations activities, it should be noted that several Secretariat departments, other than the Department of Public Information, carried out their own public information activities. His delegation looked forward to the report on that question requested by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). The Department also published the *UN Chronicle*, which contained current information on a wide range of important issues. He wondered, however, what impact it had and how widely it was read on a regular basis. As the Secretary-General noted in his report (A/56/411, para. 54), the world was already suffering from "information overload". It was important to ask whether the costs involved in producing that publication were justified.

6. Owing to budgetary constraints, only 12 participants had attended the Department's training programme for radio and television broadcasters and journalists from developing countries in 2001. Given the Department's effective use of its interactive videoconferencing facility in other areas, it should consider the possibility of using it to carry out that and other training programmes.

7. The linkage of the Official Documents System (ODS) with the United Nations web site, which would provide access to parliamentary documents in the six official languages, would not only significantly enhance the multilingual nature of the web site, but would lead to improved efficiency throughout the United Nations system by eliminating duplicate formatting and posting of documents.

8. He was pleased to note that 35 out of the 394 United Nations depositary libraries had replaced their hard-copy entitlements of official records and documents by access to ODS. His delegation encouraged the Department to continue its work in that direction and stressed that it would lead not only to

cost savings but also to improved access by libraries to current United Nations information. He was pleased to note that a CD-ROM containing the first 50 volumes of *The United Nations Yearbook* would soon be issued. It would be an excellent research tool and his delegation encouraged the Department to issue updated CD-ROMs as additional *Yearbooks* were prepared.

9. It was the responsibility of Member States not only to commend the Department on its accomplishments, but also to engage it, when necessary, in a frank and constructive dialogue on its shortcomings. Such a frank exchange of views would shed light on the issues and lead to improvements in the Department's efficiency. For the first time in recent years, the report of the Secretary-General under the item contained a section entitled "Observations". While it welcomed the straightforward comments contained in that section, his delegation would nevertheless like to call on the Department to include in such a section in future reports a more realistic and thorough assessment of its work. Member States should be informed of the areas in which improvements were needed and what efforts were being made to that end.

10. He quoted the following passage from the "Observations" section of the report: "We are constantly seeking to raise concern about the problems of the poor and the strife-torn in the media of the rich and the tranquil, and constantly face the unspoken question from the developed world: why should we care?" (A/56/411, para. 54). In that connection, it should be noted that the Government and people of the United States, a developed country, were participating very directly in the solution of those problems, since the United States paid the largest amount to the United Nations system. Moreover, voluntary contributions from the United States to United Nations activities, above all in the humanitarian area, totalled \$1.5 billion for the current year. Total United States contributions to the budget of the United Nations system in 2001 would be over \$3 billion, including \$1 billion for the World Food Programme alone. That did not include the far-reaching humanitarian and other activities carried out by numerous United States governmental agencies and hundreds of private relief agencies. That criticism of the developed world in the report was therefore misplaced and inappropriate.

11. In conclusion, he pledged his country's support for the continuing efforts of the Department to become more efficient, effective and modern.

12. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As the Member States began to appreciate the dimensions of the new challenges facing all of them, it was necessary to consider how best to harness the benefits of globalization for the social and economic transformation of society. Information technology was a critical component of the growing interdependence and interconnectivity in the global village. But while the digital revolution was transforming social and economic life, it was doing so in a lopsided manner and was not evident in the lives of the majority of people. The primary task, therefore, was to bridge the digital divide to achieve the vision of the political leaders at the Millennium Summit.

13. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in assigning a major role to communication and information activities, particularly in establishing the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force to address the problems facing developing countries in utilizing those innovative technologies to assist in accelerating broad-based growth and sustainable development and reducing poverty. The work of the Department of Public Information would continue to be critical to United Nations efforts in realizing such initiatives, goals and other socio-economic transformation programmes. It must therefore be given the necessary funds and resources.

14. His delegation commended the introduction by the Department of technological innovations for the dissemination of information on the United Nations, in particular the development and maintenance of the United Nations web site. At the same time, it should be recognized that, as long as the digital divide persisted, traditional means for the dissemination of information, such as radio and television, would continue to be relevant to meet the needs of developing countries. That was particularly important for Ghana, where there was a high level of functional illiteracy. His delegation therefore believed that the Department should be sensitive to the needs of developing countries when adapting the programmes disseminated through its information centres.

15. The developing countries would continue to state the case for a new, more just and effective global information and communications order that would help to strengthen peace and mutual understanding between peoples. His delegation valued the role of information in the new millennium and expected to see a genuine development of partnership between the developed and developing countries with a view to the establishment of the new information order.

16. **Ms. Thandar** (Myanmar) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the statement made by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Her delegation wished to express its appreciation for the final report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/AC.198/2001/10). It was unfortunate that, in the current age of globalization when modern information technology was developing at an amazing speed and information could travel from one side of the world to the other in a few split seconds, many people in the world still lacked access to it. It was encouraging, however, that there was at least one information medium in the world to which rich and poor had equal access — radio. For that reason, her delegation wished to add its voice to the many that had called for the continuation of the pilot project designed to establish a permanent international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations.

17. At the current stage, those who possessed sophisticated technology, especially communications technology, were able to influence world public opinion effectively. In that situation, it was difficult for small countries, which were still very much behind in communications technology, to change the distorted image of their situation painted by the information media of some Member States. In Myanmar, for instance, there had been a number of positive developments in recent years. The country's efforts to build a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society had been recognized and appreciated in the report of the Secretary-General, and its relentless and effective fight against narcotic drugs had been reflected in the report of the United Nations Drug Control Programme. Those developments, however, were not reflected in the information media of many Member States, which

persistently continued to distort the true situation in Myanmar.

18. Her delegation hoped and believed that United Nations Radio, or "the Voice of the United Nations", would continue to be a source of information on the work of the Organization and a reliable and direct source of information on world events for the peoples of the world.

19. It went without saying that the continuation of the aforementioned project would require the allocation of additional resources. However, her delegation believed that the allocation of resources for such a worthy cause, which would bring the United Nations closer to the people of the world, would prove to be a good investment.

20. **Mr. Al-Hajeri** (Kuwait) expressed appreciation for the important work of the Department of Public Information in making people aware of the activities of the United Nations. That work was all the more important in the "global village", where news and information were rapidly disseminated.

21. With regard to the recommendations and decisions contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/56/21 and Add.1), attention should be drawn to the importance of allocating the necessary resources to the establishment in New York of a radio broadcasting service to disseminate programmes directly in the six official languages. It was essential to overcome the information and communications gap between developed and developing countries, so that the achievements of the information revolution could be used by all. He welcomed the Millennium Declaration, which drew attention to the growing significance of the information and communications field.

22. His delegation was gratified to note the activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was cooperating with information agencies and broadcasting companies in developing countries with a view to providing reliable information. In his delegation's view, the cooperation of the Department of Public Information with other United Nations organs and organizations should be strengthened to promote their common interests. The productive role of the United Nations information centres should once again be reaffirmed.

23. His delegation believed that in various areas of the Department's work all six official languages of the United Nations should be used on an equal basis. In particular, it was essential to use the Arabic language in all publications and documents, to provide interpretation into Arabic at all meetings and to place material in the Arabic language on the United Nations web site.

24. In the current situation of rapid changes in the world, Member States should pay their contributions to the budget of the United Nations on time and thereby allow it to improve its activities. That applied also to the work of the Department of Public Information.

25. It was to be hoped that the Department would pay greater attention to questions of concern to the Arab world, in particular the Palestinian question and United Nations peacekeeping operations. That applied also to such humanitarian questions as the question of prisoners of war, detainees and missing persons: the international community should know about the sufferings of such people and try to find urgent solutions. It was also to be hoped that the Department would play a more active role with regard to peacekeeping operations: the population should know more about the activities of the United Nations and support them more actively.

26. Kuwait was ready to cooperate with the United Nations in all areas, and with the activities of the Department and the Committee on Information in the exchange of information and the strengthening of freedom of the press and of information in accordance with Arab and Islamic traditions and values.

27. **Mr. Dorjsuren** (Mongolia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information, which had been entrusted with the task of establishing a new information and communications order throughout the world. In that connection, his delegation once again wished to underline the pressing need to bridge the information and communications gap between the developed and the developing countries. Of the 6 billion people in the world, only 277 million were users of the Internet and only 7 per cent of the users in the world were in developing countries.

28. Referring to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration", he said that his delegation welcomed and supported its goal: to ensure the freedom of the information media to perform their essential function and to ensure the right of the public to have access to information (A/56/326, paras. 221-224).

29. Of the important achievements of the Department in recent years, his delegation would like to single out the launching of radio broadcasts in the languages of the United Nations. It shared the view that objective information was of great importance in building counter-terrorist psychology worldwide (especially after the tragic events of 11 September) and in overcoming tension in regions where United Nations peacekeeping missions were operating.

30. His delegation welcomed and supported the proposals and recommendations in the report of the Committee on Information (A/56/21 and Add.1), as well as the draft resolutions and decisions before the Fourth Committee.

31. **Mr. Singhara Na Ayudhaya** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said it was imperative that the United Nations and its Member States should employ all means to inform the public at large about the work of the United Nations in promoting international cooperation, solidarity, peace and security. In that connection, he commended the work of the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information, as well as the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/411). The Department should maintain at the proper level its activities in areas of special interest to the developing countries: sustainable development, poverty eradication, health and education.

32. In his Millennium report (A/54/2000), the Secretary-General had drawn attention to a serious problem facing humankind in the twenty-first century — the digital divide. ASEAN commended the efforts of the Secretary-General to overcome that divide — the establishment of the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force. The Department should play its role in supporting or supplementing such initiatives. ASEAN appreciated the rapid development of the

United Nations web site, which received up to 3 million hits a day from more than 159 countries, as well as the development by the Department of the Committee on Information web site.

33. ASEAN continued to underscore the importance of United Nations information centres. The restructuring or reorientation of the information centres should be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of host countries. In that connection, he reiterated the need to increase the allocation of resources to those centres, particularly in the light of the relevance of information activities to local populations. Priority should be given to the information centres in the developing countries that continued to experience financial difficulties. The centres could play a role in strengthening efforts to bridge the digital divide.

34. Since the greater part of the world's population had no access to modern technology, the Department of Public Information should continue to utilize traditional media — print, radio and television — particularly in local languages. ASEAN noted the much-touted proposed multimedia dissemination of news about the United Nations and its activities directly to media organizations. That would help improve access to information by all nations and peoples.

35. ASEAN held the view that providing the local populations with access to impartial, reliable and objective information about the goals of a peace restoration mission or a post-conflict peace-building process continued to be important. Objective information provided by the United Nations or other international agencies had always played a constructive role in the process of reconciling warring parties. Objective coverage of United Nations peacekeeping operations could enhance not only the success of operations but also personnel safety. In that connection, cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, at both the planning and implementation stages, was essential. In addition, ASEAN continued to attach great importance to the central role played by the Department of Public Information in the selection of spokespersons for United Nations missions.

36. Achieving real and substantial improvements in the dissemination of information required effort. The ASEAN member States would continue to render their

full support to the Department in its endeavours to develop methods and modalities to achieve the desired results.

37. **Mr. Serdyukov** (Belarus) said that Belarus was firmly committed to pursuing the dynamic development of the information and communications component of United Nations activities. The Department of Public Information had achieved significant progress to that end, particularly with regard to reorienting the Organization's activities and policies as a whole, as was apparent from the continuing formulation of United Nations-wide information strategies and cultures, the successful introduction of new information technology and the provision of simultaneous information on the Organization's activities in print, and over radio and television. An understanding of the main tasks before the Department of Public Information — namely, putting the achievements of the digital revolution to work for the developing countries and countries with economies in transition and eliminating the technology gap — was of primary importance. In the case of Belarus, that would have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of mobilizing international socio-economic support to change the current transitional phase of development.

38. His delegation confirmed that it attached particular importance to the expansion and enhancement of the two-way flow of information between Belarus and the United Nations. Belarus welcomed the Department of Public Information's policy of maximizing the coverage of the mass media and encouraging them to provide comprehensive and accurate information on the Organization's activities. In that connection, he went on to note the Department's implementation of its training programme for radio broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. His delegation had consistently advocated the establishment of a permanent international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, and accordingly, it was interested in the further development of fruitful cooperation with the United Nations Radio Russian service.

39. Belarus supported efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the information component of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

40. His delegation once again called upon the Department of Public Information and other entities of the United Nations system to make consistent and comprehensive efforts to provide assistance in the field of information with a view to overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Belarus was grateful to the Department for the practical steps it had taken in that area, which was extremely vital to countries, and trusted that the United Nations would formulate a long-term and comprehensive information policy in relation to it.

41. In conclusion, his delegation was confident that every effort would be made to further strengthen and develop the communications component of United Nations activities and was prepared to assist in every way possible to that end.

42. **Mr. Jon Yong Ryong** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) noted with regret that the rapid development of information based on modern science and technology was widening the gap between developed and developing countries in the field of information and communication. A new, equitable information and communication order must be established urgently.

43. His delegation believed, first of all, that public information should not be used as a tool for infringing sovereignty and interfering in the internal affairs of others. Some countries took advantage of their monopoly of modern communication systems to impose their own ideas and values on others. In order to disseminate information across the planet, there should be zero tolerance for the double standard whereby an action taken in one's own country was designated "crime prevention" and actions taken in other countries, as "encroachment on human rights", or where the missile of a big country supposedly fostered peace while that of a small country was a threat to peace. The United Nations should focus its attention on the establishment of a new world information and communication order with a view to deepening understanding and harmony among nations, strengthening friendship and cooperation and supporting sustainable development.

44. Second, enhancing national capacity in the field of information and communications was a prerequisite for accelerating economic, educational and cultural development in developing countries and ensuring impartiality and equality in international relations. The

United Nations and other international organizations should devote special attention to renovating information infrastructures in developing countries, training information officials in that field and providing effective international assistance, such as the transfer of technology and investment.

45. Third, it was important to further strengthen the activities of the Department of Public Information. His delegation commended the United Nations on the volume of work it carried out in the field of information and communications despite the insufficient resources allocated to it. United Nations information and communication activities should be based on the principles of objectivity and impartiality and should focus more on issues of concern to developing countries, in particular poverty eradication and the promotion of development.

46. Public information would benefit all humankind when the voices of developing countries, representing an absolute majority of the world's population, were fully respected in the field of information and communications within the framework of an equitable world information and communication order.

47. **Ms. Thomas** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the CARICOM delegations fully supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

48. It was paradoxical that, in what the Secretary-General described as a world suffering from "information overload" (A/56/411, para. 54), owing to the huge volume of information that assailed the public from the Internet and the traditional media, the developing countries had yet to tap those resources in order to fuel their economic growth and development and participate more actively in world affairs. As indicated in the Millennium Declaration, the benefits of the new information and communication technologies must be available to all. She therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's establishment of the Information and Communications Technology Task Force, tasked with finding innovative ways of spreading the benefits of the digital revolution to 4 billion people worldwide.

49. The Department of Public Information must continue to play an active role in strengthening the communication function of United Nations activities with a view to creating an informed understanding of

the Organization's work and building broad-based global support for it. That task had become even more relevant in the light of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States. The Department had had the arduous task of informing the public about the United Nations response to those attacks, as well as curbing the misinformation directed at the Organization in the immediate aftermath of the crisis.

50. Going on to highlight some priorities, she said that the States members of CARICOM welcomed the implementation of the pilot project on live radio broadcasting, launched during the Millennium Summit. The necessary resources must be allocated for the establishment of a permanent international radio broadcasting capacity. She expressed satisfaction with the programming provided by the Caribbean Unit of United Nations Radio. Special mention should be made of the 15-minute package of news covering a wide range of United Nations activities. That package should be complemented by more Caribbean-oriented programmes by the Unit. To that end, additional resources, including personnel, must be allocated to the Caribbean Unit.

51. She expressed concern at the reduction of the radio programmes for Caribbean countries over the years. The Caribbean Magazine Programme, an essential source of news on international affairs, was particularly missed.

52. Noting that the Department continued to distribute telephone feeds in the six official languages, as well as Portuguese and Kiswahili, she said that the request to introduce full radio programming in French and Creole to Haiti by the Caribbean Unit had yet to be fulfilled; in that connection, the States members of CARICOM urged the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983.

53. The States members of CARICOM noted with satisfaction the efforts of the Department of Public Information to maintain and enhance the United Nations web site, and, in particular, to improve the breadth of its content and the level of usage and develop an in-house capability for providing live webcasts. They especially appreciated the inclusion of the Caribbean region on the United Nations web site and the facility offered by the small island developing

States information network (SIDSNET) to disseminate information to all small island developing States.

54. The report of the Secretary-General clearly illustrated the activities of the Department of Public Information to disseminate information on how the United Nations was working to solve the global problems of the twenty-first century. The Department's coverage of the major conferences which had taken place during the year was worthy of special note. The States members of CARICOM hoped that the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the special session on children, to be held in 2002, would also be given full coverage. She expressed satisfaction with the Department's efforts to disseminate information on the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development and World Summit on Sustainable Development and expressed concern at the lack of budgetary provision for those conferences in the next biennium.

55. CARICOM noted in particular the use of stringers from the Caribbean region to assist the Caribbean Unit of the Department of Public Information in disseminating public information on those and other issues and believed that that function should be strengthened.

56. The States members of CARICOM continued to advocate the improvement of the public information capacity of peacekeeping and other field missions. Information transmitted by radio was essential to promoting a better understanding of the peace accords and the United Nations mandates. She expressed particular satisfaction at the Department's establishment of United Nations radio stations for the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and looked forward to the implementation of other specific projects.

57. The strengthening of the Organization's information and communications capacity at the country level was an extremely critical goal. United Nations information centres played a vital role in that connection. CARICOM hoped that the review of the allocation of resources to the United Nations information centres would help to maximize their effectiveness.

58. She went on to say that the States members of CARICOM had repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen the information component in the Caribbean

region. Currently, the region had only one United Nations information centre (in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago), which served some 14 member States and 7 Non-Self-Governing Territories. She commended the work of the centre, which, despite the decline in human and financial resources, had made every effort to fulfil its mandate and served the needs of the Caribbean countries.

59. Concerning the recent request to establish an information component for the northern Caribbean region, she said that the United Nations agencies in Jamaica and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had agreed to establish a focal point in Jamaica for information issues. It was to be hoped that the focal point would be a core public information post for the United Nations system in Jamaica, and would complement the work of the regional office of the United Nations information centre and UNESCO. She urged the Department of Public Information to ensure that the focal point was established and was provided with the necessary training and equipment.

60. She stressed the importance of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in bridging the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The States members of CARICOM welcomed the recent initiatives, including the decision to expand the United Nations depository libraries and the cartographic and geographic services.

61. The States members of CARICOM concurred that one of the major challenges in the field of public information was to enhance outreach activities, partnership and coordination with all United Nations entities to ensure that a coherent, effective and unified image was projected. The role of the Joint United Nations Information Committee played a critical role to that end. The role of the Department of Public Information was even more important in light of the expectations kindled by the bestowal of the Nobel Peace Prize on the United Nations and the Secretary-General. In conclusion, she said that the Department of Public Information, in shaping its strategy, must be mindful that its work was not an end in itself but rather a means to the fulfilment of the substantive purposes of the Organization.

62. **Mr. Ononye** (Nigeria), expressing his delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/56/411), and to the Committee on

Information for the report on the work of its twenty-third session (A/56/21 and Add.1), said that his delegation endorsed the efforts of the Secretary-General to modernize the communications system of the United Nations. His delegation welcomed the opinion expressed in the report of the Secretary-General on the continuing relevance of such traditional means of communication as radio, print and television in developing countries. He also expressed satisfaction with the performance of the United Nations radio project and urged the Department of Public Information to increase the number of its programmes. His delegation also took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/C.1/98/2001/10), and the information on the extensive network of partnerships established with local, regional and national radio and television broadcasters in Member States. That project was one of the more significant and successful examples of the reorientation of the activities of the Department of Public Information.

63. Nigeria welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library "a virtual library with world outreach", and hoped that that would make it possible to broaden electronic access to United Nations information and other acquired materials. Efforts should also be made to enrich the Library's stock of books and journals in various languages.

64. His delegation noted that United Nations information centres continued to serve as the Organization's voice throughout the world, particularly through the dissemination of information on the priority themes of the Organization's work. He commended the activities of the United Nations information centres aimed at raising public awareness of the United Nations at the local level.

65. Nigeria endorsed the Secretary-General's reform proposals designed to strengthen the centres with a view to facilitating more effective promotion of health, dissemination of information, poverty eradication, debt relief, better education, promotion of children's rights and environmental protection.

66. His delegation recognized the critical importance of developing human and technical resources for the improvement of information and communications

systems in developing countries, and therefore greatly appreciated the practical training programmes of the Department of Public Information for journalists and radio and television broadcasters from developing countries. In conclusion, he urgently appealed for the strengthening of the programme in order to enable it to cope with its responsibility to bridge the “digital divide” between the developed and developing countries.

67. **Ms. Girtel** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that information played an important role in the modern world and that its rapid dissemination shaped the way in which people interacted across the globe, while also presenting new challenges and opportunities. She hoped that the United Nations, and its Department of Public Information in particular, would be able to capitalize on that potential in order to serve the larger aims of the Organization. The dissemination of information was an essential complement to the core activities of the United Nations; while it could not be a substitute for efforts to achieve peace, security and development, it could undoubtedly accelerate such efforts.

68. She recalled the mandate for the Department set out in the medium-term plan and reiterated in the report of the Secretary-General: “to create an informed understanding of the Organization’s work and to build broad-based global support for it” (A/56/411, para. 3). Canada fully supported the mandate in its essentials. There were countless ways in which the Department could define, contact and influence its audience, and that created a clear need to establish priority activities. That belief shaped the way in which Canada, Australia and New Zealand viewed the issues under discussion.

69. A judgement concerning the United Nations radio project should be informed by two considerations: the merits of the activity itself, and the merits of that activity in relation to other Department of Public Information activities. The initial information before the Committee seemed very favourable. Multilingual radio broadcasts appeared to be an extremely useful tool with which to reach across linguistic, technical and even development barriers, reaching populations which might otherwise remain outside the influence of the United Nations. Although the medium of radio broadcasts was conventional, the approach was an innovative one for the Organization, and succeeded in delivering on the mandate discussed. However, more information was needed on listener numbers and the

impact of the programmes. Such information would provide a clearer definition of their target audience and help to refine the objectives and messages of the programmes, thus leading to a more informed judgement of the overall effectiveness of the broadcasts. Further thought was needed on how the United Nations radio project fitted into the Department’s overall reorientation. If radio programming was a priority, the question was what activity it overtook or displaced.

70. A second new initiative, an electronic news service, fitted well with the ongoing efforts to ensure that the United Nations was an “e-”organization. The Department had a special role to play in creating and maintaining an interface between the United Nations and its clientele that was adapted to contemporary technology and information-gathering habits. Efforts to enhance the delivery of information products in all official languages via the United Nations web site and the new ODS were welcome. Placing greater emphasis on electronic development and delivery should dovetail with other public information initiatives such as thematic campaigns.

71. As the Department rethought its key priorities, some traditional activities should make way for new undertakings. That should include further efforts to integrate and streamline the services offered at Headquarters and through the United Nations information centres. The main objective would be to ensure that value was being added to United Nations information products in a way that was not duplicating or recreating what was being done elsewhere, or that could otherwise be done electronically. The Department should also review some of its traditional paper-based publishing activities, whose value was becoming increasingly marginal in the electronic age. The paper-based edition of the *UN Chronicle* was a key example. It was a professional-quality publication whose distribution was very limited and whose format and content appeared to be increasingly overtaken by events. Other examples were the production and distribution of traditional video and audio cassettes, the demand for which was decreasing and was insufficient to justify efforts in that area. Her objective in pinpointing such examples was to underline the need for a systematic review of priorities so that some lower-priority activities would be discontinued in favour of newer, more effective ways to fulfil the broad mandate of the Department.

72. **Mr. Syed Hasrin** (Malaysia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the statement made by the representative of Thailand on behalf of ASEAN on the item under discussion. He wished, however, to comment on a number of issues which were of particular interest to his delegation.

73. Information and communication technology had revolutionized the world. With very detailed and sometimes saturation coverage of events occurring in the four corners of the globe in real time, the world had become a much smaller place. For instance, events in Afghanistan were almost instantaneously flashed to the remotest areas, thanks to the advent of new information and communication technologies. It was encouraging to note that 410 million people throughout the world had access to cyberspace. However, only 5 per cent of that number were in developing countries. He hoped that the launch of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force would change that situation and help to bridge the digital divide between the developed and the developing countries by fostering digital opportunity and putting information and communication technology at the service of development for all.

74. Understanding that information could be a powerful tool for development, world leaders at the Millennium Summit had pressed for the right to universal access to information and communication technology. As essential partners in the development process, the developed countries must therefore assist the developing countries in their effort to develop those technologies. The Department played a vital role in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The developing world attached particular importance to the Department's role in helping to establish a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order based on free circulation and wider and more balanced dissemination of information.

75. That task was particularly relevant at a time when the media, with its global reach, had become an enormously powerful institution. The media had a responsibility to its audience to report events — particularly events in developing countries — in a balanced, fair and factual manner. They should exercise care and not allow preconceptions to affect their work. By making slanted and distorted reports, the media was doing a great disservice to its listeners or readers. The

terrorist attacks on the United States of 11 September had posed a great challenge to the professionalism of the major media organizations in ensuring that the reporting of events and developments was objective and unbiased. However, not all of them had passed the test. The stereotyping of particular religious or ethnic groups, for example, would only stir up racial and religious prejudices that were latent in many communities, causing mistrust and even outright hatred among peoples and nations, contrary to the Organization's goal of promoting dialogue among the peoples and civilizations of the world. In that regard, the role of information and the media in inculcating a new world culture of understanding and peace, based on a sharing of information among peoples, could not be underestimated.

76. It was gratifying to note that the United Nations fully understood the vital importance of providing objective and unbiased information to its Member States and the positive power of information in bringing about greater understanding among peoples and nations in the interest of world peace.

77. **Mr. Foo Shyang Piau** (Singapore) endorsed the statement made by Thailand on behalf of ASEAN with regard to the terrorist attacks of 11 September, which had had a tremendous impact on international relations, the global economy and even individuals' everyday lives. There were three lessons which the media could draw: the need for media responsibility; the dangers of media stereotyping; and the value of diversified news media sources.

78. After the attacks, the United States Government had warned television networks to be mindful of the dangers of relaying Osama bin Laden's statements to audiences in the United States. Some journalists had complained that those measures limited the media's ability to provide people with the information they needed, noting that a free press was necessary to keep abuses of power in check. Some measure of accountability from the media was necessary, however. Sober judgement was needed more than ever. Fortunately, most of the television networks in the country had recognized that they should exercise some restraint in order to avoid placing the nation's interests at risk. They had in particular refrained from revealing the plans of United States forces and from broadcasting the statements of Osama bin Laden in full.

79. In the same way, the media in other parts of the world needed to strike a balance between press freedom and responsibility. The methods of reaching such a balance varied from country to country. Singapore had chosen to strike that balance by allowing unimpeded access to information from around the world, including information on the Internet, but it maintained ways of channelling the Government's views to the citizens. Advances in communication technologies meant that it was almost impossible for any Government to prevent the flow of views and information. Singapore's citizens had access to multiple sources of information and could make their own judgements on the trustworthiness of those sources; biased content providers rapidly lost credibility with consumers.

80. An equally important responsibility of the media was to avoid stereotyping. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September, many government leaders around the world had been careful to draw a distinction between the perpetrators of those attacks, who happened to be Muslims, and the Islamic community at large. That was a commendable effort.

81. Stereotyping in the media was a problem which had long plagued minorities around the world. Muslims justifiably criticized the media for the indiscriminate use of labels such as "Arab terrorists" or "Islamic extremists"; that was highly characteristic of the entertainment industry, particularly the film industry. Muslims were not the only victims of stereotyping. The media often gave a one-sided portrayal of events in developing countries, a practice described by one journalist as the "coups and earthquakes syndrome". Endless reports of violence, corruption and devastation painted a black picture of entire societies. As a result, ignorance about the developing world remained high. Many other groups were also stereotyped: Asians, Jews, Native Americans, the physically disabled, women and so on.

82. History had shown that stereotyping could lead to discrimination, abuse and even State-sponsored genocide, as had occurred in Rwanda. Individuals should explore the underlying messages of the words and images which they encountered every day; otherwise, there was little chance that there would ever be a change in media stereotyping. The media also had a duty to reflect on their own coverage of current events. The entertainment media should avoid typecasting of religions, ethnic groups, nationalities or

genders. It was gratifying to note that advances had been made in some respects. Much remained to be done, however, and the media should not discriminate in their portrayals of people on grounds of race, religion or creed.

83. The key to avoiding stereotyping in the news media was to educate journalists in the subtleties of the issues they covered. They should resist the urge to generalize and simplify complex issues, and media companies must ask their journalists to study every aspect of such issues.

84. He welcomed the rapid growth in recent years of regional all-news television stations which could provide more comprehensive coverage of developments than global corporations like BBC and CNN. After naming several such stations, he said that they presented news from their own perspective, reflecting a different set of nuances.

85. Because the war on terrorism would be protracted, the media should be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. They should avoid adding a "clash of the media" to the potential "clash of civilizations". With their strong influence over society, the media had a moral obligation to educate responsibly and provide a more in-depth understanding of developments in all parts of the world.

86. **Mr. Trepelkov** (Russian Federation) welcomed the steps which the Department had taken in recent years to strengthen the communications component of the United Nations in accordance with the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

87. The rapid development of information and telecommunications technologies had obvious advantages, but it also had to be acknowledged that there was a real risk that the advance in those areas would be used for purposes incompatible with the maintenance of international peace and security.

88. The First Committee had recognized how urgent that issue had become when it had adopted the draft resolution proposed by the Russian Federation entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security" (A/C.1/56/L.3/Rev.1). That resolution sought to counter any attempts to use information technology for military purposes. It requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study of the issue and to establish a group of governmental experts to provide

assistance with that study. The resolution recalled earlier General Assembly resolutions 53/70, 54/49 and 55/28, and was intended to promote legal regulation in the field of information and to lay the groundwork for information security. He drew attention to the proposal made by the Russian Federation that a world forum should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations to debate the contribution of civil society and the media to the fight against terrorism.

89. The Russian Federation shared the strategic aims, priorities and recommendations for strengthening the Organization's activities in the field of public information, contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/411). His delegation supported the Department's efforts to disseminate information on peacekeeping operations, human rights issues, development, social and economic activities and equality between men and women. The Organization's actions to speed up access to information for the media were timely. Efforts to consolidate the information potential of the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General would also produce results.

90. Receiving rapid answers to questions was important, and the Organization should focus on producing material which would attract media interest in its activities, provide quality analysis for the media and place the emphasis where it was most appropriate.

91. The Department's efforts to make the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library more effective were important. The Department should provide its most active non-governmental and academic partners with access to ODS free of charge.

92. The Russian Federation shared the view of the Secretary-General on the importance of using the latest technologies, and it appreciated the Department's efforts to create and develop new web sites and to update the United Nations news pages promptly. Making more material available in Russian had resulted in more hits for the Russian pages. The principle of parity among all the official languages on the Organization's web sites was being implemented too slowly. The home page looked identical in all six official languages, but there was a growing gap in the amount of information actually available in those languages.

93. While recognizing the unique potential of information technologies for the development of human civilization, his delegation was concerned that

most of the world's peoples had been denied the economic and social benefits of the technological revolution. Everyone without exception should be able to profit from the global information society. The Department's efforts to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries had been noted; in that connection, the Department's training programmes for journalists from developing countries and other educational measures — which should also be open to participants from countries with economies in transition — were particularly important.

94. The Russian Federation agreed with the Secretary-General that the Organization's network of information centres and services should be strengthened; he noted that the information centre in Moscow was playing a growing role in disseminating full and reliable information about the Organization in Russian. He drew attention to the need to boost staff numbers at the centre.

95. At its spring 2002 session, the Committee on Information had set out strategic guidelines for activities to modernize the Department's work, one of which was to maximize its worldwide audience. His delegation endorsed the comprehensive approach which the Department's managers had adopted to achieve those aims, namely, using the latest technology alongside traditional methods of communication. The pilot programme for United Nations international radio broadcasting was a centrepiece of that approach. The Russian Federation hoped that the decisions adopted by the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session in the autumn of 2001 would provide a foundation for the further development and improvement of the radio broadcasting project.

96. In conclusion, the Russian Federation assured the Secretary-General and the Department of its readiness to contribute constructively to finding solutions to the complex information issues of the time.

97. **Ms. Mulamula** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It endorsed the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-third session (A/56/21 and Add.1) and thanked the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on questions relating to information.

98. Her delegation shared the Secretary-General's view that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations (A/56/411, para. 3). The reports under consideration revealed a great deal of hope and concern regarding information and communications. The process of globalization had created a digital divide between developed and developing countries, but could be positive if its benefits were shared equitably between all participating nations.

99. The development of human and technical resources was crucial for the improvement of information and communications in the developing countries. It was gratifying to note that the Department of Public Information was continuing its annual training programmes for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries. However, the number of participants in those programmes should be increased, in order to include participants from the least developed countries, particularly in Africa.

100. She welcomed the decision of the Committee on Information to continue the United Nations live radio broadcasting pilot project. For most developing countries, radio remained the most accessible and reliable medium of communication. In that connection, it was to be hoped that the live broadcasting programme would be made permanent. As part of that process, the United Nations should provide technical support to enhance those countries' broadcasting facilities, so that they could make full use of the Department's new communications technologies.

101. The role of the information centres in disseminating information about United Nations activities in various fields could not be overemphasized. As the Department modernized itself, the information centres needed funding and staffing commensurate with their increased tasks. It was encouraging that the Interim Head of the Department intended to review the allocation of resources to the information centres, and her delegation wished to see an equitable disbursement of those resources, with special attention to the needs of the developing countries. That would enable the information centre at Dar-es-Salaam to develop its own web page in Kiswahili.

102. With regard to the process of integration of the centres with field offices of the United Nations

Development Programme, her delegation still favoured the option of selective integration, so as not to hamper the effectiveness of the centres.

103. Her delegation welcomed the plan to hold a high-level World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. The Summit would give the international community an opportunity to address the problem of bridging the digital divide between developed and developing countries. It also welcomed the establishment by the Secretary-General of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force. It was to be hoped that the Committee on Information would pay particular attention to the preparatory processes leading to the Summit. It was also to be hoped that the developing countries would be given all necessary assistance to enable them to make adequate preparations for the Summit and to take an effective part in its work.

104. **Mr. Khomenko** (Ukraine) said that his delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that public information should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations. People all over the world needed to be fully informed of the decisions and actions taken by the United Nations in such areas as counter-terrorism, conflict prevention, development, environmental protection, AIDS and other issues of common concern. The Department of Public Information had an important role to play in that regard.

105. Ukraine welcomed the updating of the United Nations web site in accordance with the principle of parity of all six official languages. The Department of Public Information web site was highly professional and provided a gateway to the latest news about the United Nations. It was a useful tool not only for outside visitors but also for various United Nations offices. For example, the web site maintained by the United Nations office in Ukraine had a direct link to the News Centre on the United Nations web site.

106. As far as the information centres were concerned, his delegation wished to emphasize their importance in maintaining direct contacts between the United Nations and local communities. Ukraine agreed that the information centres should be provided with sufficient resources, especially in countries where the mass media were less developed. At the same time, it was important to adopt a balanced approach to the allocation of resources between information centres.

107. Implementation of the radio pilot project in all six official languages of the United Nations was one of the more notable examples of the successful reorientation of the Department and its commitment to the principle of multilingualism. Radio remained one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching traditional media available to the Department and was an important instrument in United Nations activities in the area of development and peacekeeping.

108. Ukraine, which was among the 10 largest troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, had consistently advocated close cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in enhancing the public information capacity of such operations.

109. The United Nations could play a central role in drawing the attention of the international community to issues such as the Chernobyl disaster, which continued to affect the lives of millions of people in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation. In that connection, his delegation thanked the Interim Head and the staff of the Department of Public Information and all Permanent Missions to the United Nations for their assistance in organizing a series of events at Headquarters devoted to the fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident.

110. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic) thanked the Secretariat for its efforts to enhance the capability of the Department of Public Information and expressed gratitude to the Interim Head of the Department for the work he had done. His delegation associated itself with the statement made by the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

111. The Syrian Arab Republic attached considerable importance to the creation of the new world information order, which would be more equitable and would reflect the principles of the United Nations and of international legality. It hoped that the digital divide between developed and developing countries would be bridged, so that the voice of the developing countries could be heard and their needs better known.

112. Realizing that information and development were inextricably linked, the Syrian Arab Republic had taken decisive steps to develop audio-visual media and the press, so as to keep abreast of events of concern to the country and its nationals. Using the latest technological advances, including Internet technology and satellite television, the mass media in the Syrian

Arab Republic were familiarizing the international community with the real situation existing in the country and with the difficulties it was facing.

113. In the opinion of his delegation, one of the most important tasks of the United Nations public information machinery was to publicize the issues being dealt with by the Organization's various organs, especially the Security Council and the General Assembly. Through its information activities, the United Nations must oppose occupations and support efforts to establish a just and comprehensive peace in all parts of the planet, and particularly in the Middle East, denounce the activities of those who were violating the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and were not implementing its resolutions, promote development in all its aspects and emphasize the importance of nuclear disarmament.

114. His delegation had taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/411), which contained information on the upgrading of United Nations web sites. In that connection, he mentioned the need to ensure parity of the six official languages and equitable distribution of staff and funding, in accordance with paragraph 37 of the draft resolution adopted by the Committee on Information at its most recent session (A/56/21, para. 70). In addition, in connection with the ongoing problem of publications, he stressed the need to issue all publications simultaneously in the six official languages. Finally, training programmes for candidates from developing countries should be continued, in order to upgrade information activities in those countries.

115. His delegation assured the Chairman of its readiness to cooperate with him in his efforts to ensure the dissemination of realistic and transparent information about the United Nations for the use of all its Member States.

116. **Mr. Shah** (Nepal) said that the tragic events of 11 September had given the United Nations mass media the complex task of informing the public about the activities undertaken by the Organization in response to the tragedy. The changed world security situation underlined the need for information technologies to play a more important role. Nevertheless, the events which had occurred had not diminished the importance of the problems facing the world prior to 11 September.

117. The opportunities created by the development of information technologies were not available to the poor developing countries. The digital divide still existed and seemed to be widening. For the developing world, traditional means of disseminating information remained important.

118. The launching of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force was a welcome step, which should help to narrow the gulf between developed and developing countries in that area.

119. As one of the poorest developing countries, Nepal was eager to see more United Nations programmes to train journalists. Unfortunately, for the last several years, Nepal had not been given an opportunity to send its media persons to participate in those programmes, but it hoped that that situation would change.

120. **Mr. Kaid** (Yemen) said that Yemen supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The activities of the Department of Public Information were extremely important for all mankind, especially in view of the current shortage of neutral information, whatever had been said about so-called "democracy". The Fourth Estate was sometimes completely controlled by the First Estate and forfeited its independence.

121. The people of the world were entitled to know what was in the resolutions of the United Nations, how much they were being implemented and which countries were violating them. The creation of a new international information order should ensure greater fairness in that respect and a balanced flow of information to all countries. Without access to information, there could be no support for the principles of the United Nations and no practical implementation of them.

122. His delegation called for equal treatment of all languages on the Internet and a fair allocation of resources for the dissemination of information in all the official languages. In that connection, he expressed concern about the fact that Arabic was not on an equal footing with the other official languages of the United Nations.

123. **Mr. Kanaan** (Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that the introduction of information and communications technology significantly

facilitated the dissemination of information throughout the world. However, there was serious concern about some pernicious consequences of that process, which were adversely affecting national sovereignty and undermining religious and cultural values. A serious danger was also posed by the manipulation of information in the context of the tragic events of 11 September, following which Muslims had become the subject of an unbridled campaign of disinformation concerning Islam in the Western mass media. An extraordinary meeting of Islamic countries had been held on 10 October in Doha, Qatar, at which it had been decided strongly to condemn the terrorist actions against the United States, which were incompatible with international humanitarian values, including the values of Islam — a religion which advocated peace, concord and mutual understanding between States and peoples and condemned the killing of innocent people. At the meeting, there had been high praise for the constructive position of the United States and other Western States in defence of the Arabs and Muslims living in those countries. However, attempts had been made in certain mass media to link terrorism with the just struggle of the Palestinian people for liberation from the foreign yoke.

124. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) attached particular importance to information and communications technologies at the current critical stage of history, was endeavouring to formulate an agreed policy for its member countries in that area and was working to modernize the existing arsenal of information media in order to keep pace with contemporary needs. In that regard, it would be especially important to strengthen the Islamic States Broadcasting Organization and the International Islamic News Agency, on a basis of tolerance and openness, with a view to the dissemination of reliable information all over the world. Valuable work was being done by the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs, chaired by Senegal, including the drafting of an Islamic Code of Media Ethics containing guidelines for the activities of the mass media.

125. In order to encourage joint information activities by the Islamic countries and to determine the future direction of work, the Sixth Meeting of Ministers of Information and Culture of OIC Member Countries would be held in 2002 in Cairo.

126. The Conference attached great importance to dialogue among civilizations and welcomed the

creation that year on the United Nations web site of a special page devoted to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It also welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly on 9 November of the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations (A/56/L.3 and Add.1). Mention must be made of the positive role played in that connection by UNESCO and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had chaired the Eighth Islamic Summit. In addition, Turkey was to be commended on having taken the initiative to convene a meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of OIC member countries in 2002, with the participation of observers from the European Union countries, in order to initiate a dialogue among civilizations at the international level.

127. He welcomed the efforts of the Secretariat and the States Members of the United Nations to expand activities in all areas, particularly the modernization of the United Nations web site in six languages, the encouragement of cultural diversity, the strengthening of the information centres, the expansion of the services provided by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the publication of issues of the *UN Chronicle*.

128. The Conference was convinced that the United Nations was still committed to the cause of providing the Palestinian people with assistance in exercising its inalienable national rights in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and believed that the seminars held in that connection at information centres in developing countries were extremely useful.

129. The Conference was aware of the growing gap between developed and developing countries and of the efforts needed to close it. In that connection, it was to be hoped that the United Nations would concentrate its efforts on establishing a new and more just information and communications order, which would remove the existing imbalances in order to improve the well-being of all mankind.

130. **Mr. Coelho** (Portugal), speaking in exercise of the right of reply to the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of CARICOM, recalled that the United Nations had started to broadcast in Portuguese on the basis of a decision taken as far back as the 1940s. In May 2001, a web page in Portuguese had been inaugurated on the United Nations server. Radio broadcasts in Portuguese gave important publicity to the aims of the Organization and

disseminated information on its work to 230 million Portuguese-speaking people all over the world.

131. The United Nations Radio had one producer to prepare broadcasts in Portuguese, although the demand for the broadcasts was such that there was a long-standing need for another post of producer. Portugal fully supported permanent international broadcasts at the United Nations. In that connection, the Department of Public Information should not forget to support the use of languages that were not official languages of the United Nations but which were entitled to be heard on its radio programmes.

132. **Mr. Tharoor** (Interim Head of the Department of Public Information) noted that the statements made reflected strong support for the important role which information and communications could play in the life of the United Nations. The Department appreciated the critical remarks of delegations about its work, which prevented it from becoming complacent. He assured Committee members that the Department would study the problems raised and the solutions proposed.

133. There was agreement that the creation of a communications culture was extremely important in order to provide support for the United Nations and to publicize its activities. In that connection, the Department was aware of the need to reduce the gap between developed and developing countries. He noted the positive remarks about the Department's work on the introduction of new communications technologies (in particular, the functioning of the United Nations web site) accompanied by continuing use of traditional information supports (in particular, the live radio broadcasting pilot project).

134. It was encouraging that delegations had noted the Department's efficient response to the tragic events of 11 September and in general its participation in the campaign against terrorism. Mention should also be made in that connection of the Department's activities connected with the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Reference had been made in statements to the need to respect the principle of multilingualism. Using available resources, the Department was endeavouring to respect the parity of languages, but was also continuing to use languages which were not official languages of the Organization.

135. Support had been expressed in statements for the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the information and publicity campaigns for conferences

held in 2001 and the training of broadcasters and journalists from developing countries. As regards the information centres, in recent years the Department had been engaged in upgrading their technology and staff skills.

136. The Department agreed about the need to evaluate feedback on its measures in order to define its priorities, but that was not always easy because of the availability of resources and the decisions of governing bodies. With regard to the references made by a speaker at the current meeting to the Secretary-General's report (A/56/411), he said that the comments in that report about the developed countries were in no way intended to be disrespectful. Without the contribution of the developing countries, and in particular of that speaker's country, the United Nations would quite simply be unable to function.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.