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Summary record of the 7th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Aliyev..... (Azerbaijan)

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05-54572 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 26: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*) (A/60/23, chap. XII, sect. I)

Draft resolution IX on the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (A/60/23, para. 192)

1. **The Chairman** said he had been informed that the draft resolution had no financial implications.

2. *A recorded vote was taken.*

In favour:

Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor-Leste, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Zambia.

Against:

Israel, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

Abstaining:

Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine.

3. *Draft resolution IX was adopted by 72 votes to 3, with 30 abstentions.*

4. **Mr. Williams** (United Kingdom) said that his delegation had again voted against the draft resolution because it believed that there was little evidence to suggest that either of the International Decades for the Eradication of Colonialism had been of any benefit to the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Nor did they seem to be an efficient use of United Nations resources. His delegation would rather work with the Special Committee on Decolonization on the questions related to specific Territories administered by the United Kingdom, with a view to their eventual removal from the Special Committee's agenda.

5. **Mr. Hunte** (Saint Lucia) said that his delegation had voted in favour of the draft resolution because it served to reiterate the call for the international community, including the wider United Nations system, to fulfil its obligations to facilitate self-determination and decolonization in the remaining Territories.

6. The Plan of Action for the second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism could be effective only if it was implemented. The insufficient level of implementation so far was not surprising given the limited human and financial resources devoted to the Plan of Action.

7. The current draft resolution and all others emanating from the Special Committee on Decolonization, had been adopted after considerable discussion by the members of the Special Committee, and only after the available information on the situation on the ground in the Territories themselves had been analysed.

8. His delegation was of the view that the decolonization resolutions could be further strengthened if the administering Powers resumed formal participation in the work of the Special Committee, where many of the issues referred to in the resolutions were thoroughly discussed.

Agenda item 33: Questions relating to information (A/60/21 and A/60/173)

9. **The Chairman** said that the Committee on Information had been established in 1978 to review United Nations public information policies and activities. The increasingly widespread impact of information disseminated through various media greatly influenced most issues falling within the realm of concern for the international community.

10. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh), Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introducing the Committee's report on its twenty-seventh session (A/60/21), said that, with the inclusion of Cape Verde, Iceland, Luxembourg, Madagascar and Qatar, the membership of the Committee had expanded to a total of 107. The general debate during the session had included a statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, who had given a comprehensive presentation on the work and the current strategic direction of the Department of Public Information (DPI). Six reports, including a report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the operation and management of United Nations libraries, had been submitted for consideration by the Committee.

11. Speakers had focused on a wide range of issues, including the progress made by the Department through its restructuring and its new strategic direction, and the outcome of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. While noting support and appreciation for the Department's work in strengthening the United Nations website in all the official languages, several speakers had expressed concern about the continuing disparity among the various official languages and called for the allocation of additional resources to achieve language parity. The new approach taken by United Nations libraries had been welcomed, but some caution had been expressed that changes in the methodology of the libraries should continue to respect the previously agreed mandate and General Assembly resolutions relevant to libraries.

12. A central focus of the general debate had been the report of the Secretary-General on the further rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2005/3); speakers had presented diverse views on various aspects of the rationalization and regionalization process.

13. The Committee's report also dealt with strategic communications services and news services; the role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping and in strengthening dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace as a means of enhancing understanding among nations; library services; and outreach. In the final remarks, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to report to the next session of the Committee and to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly on the activities of the Department.

14. **Mr. Motoc** (Romania), Chairman of the Committee on Information, commended the Department of Public Information, under the leadership of the Under-Secretary-General, for having met the challenge of effectively and creatively communicating information on the 2005 World Summit process and Outcome to the world.

15. The general debate during the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information had demonstrated that there was broad agreement that the reorientation and restructuring of DPI had resulted in a renewed and more effective Department. Its new strategy had given it a sharper focus and empowered it with innovative tools, and the introduction and extensive use of new technologies had made it more effective by widening its reach to audiences. It was gratifying to note that those changes had not come at the expense of the traditional means of communication.

16. Much remained to be done, however. A major task ahead for the Department was to serve as the public voice of an Organization that had been created 60 years previously as the public voice of the world. Meeting that goal demanded both a solid plan and sound leadership, as well as the continued support of Member States and the most effective use of the resources allocated. The people of the world increasingly looked up to the United Nations as a symbol of hope. The Organization represented a collective tool for responding to common concerns.

17. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) highlighted some of the Department's most recent endeavours, focusing on the 2005 World Summit. Although the initial response by media commentators to the World Summit had not been enthusiastic, the tone had gradually improved as the public had become better informed. The Outcome of the Summit not only contained language that affirmed the importance of the multilateral system, but also included clear commitments on the precise steps needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and agreements to create a Peacebuilding Commission and a Human Rights Council. Most significantly, the doctrine of the responsibility to protect had now been unambiguously accepted by all Member States.

18. He pointed out that reform had been on the United Nations agenda since the Organization had first been established. Each phase of reform had improved

the ability of the United Nations to respond to an evolving mosaic of demands, priorities and initiatives on the part of the Member States and public constituencies. Members of the Committee on Information were acutely aware that the global media environment and the rapid pace of technological advances posed a challenge to communicators. The process of reorientation launched by the Secretary-General three years earlier had fundamentally changed the way in which the Department defined and carried out its mission and the changes had resulted in the establishment of clear strategic directions, the results of which had been enthusiastically welcomed by Member States.

19. The report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/60/173) provided an overview of the results achieved through the reform efforts over the previous three years. The promotion of the World Summit had been driven by strategic planning, better use of new information and communication technologies, closer system-wide coordination, and proactive outreach. Coordinated efforts had been made to raise the awareness of the media as part of a comprehensive campaign at United Nations Headquarters with the active involvement of the Secretary-General and other officials, at the local level by the network of United Nations information centres, and through personal contact with media professionals. A number of interviews and background briefings by senior United Nations officials around the world on the full range of topics discussed at the Summit had encouraged journalists to appreciate the importance of the issues that had been addressed. Maximum use had been made of contacts and the capacities of the network of information centres, which, in the lead up to the Summit, had organized media campaigns, workshops and special events. All those activities had served to ensure that the attention of the world's media had been firmly on the United Nations when the Heads of State and Government had arrived, and that that attention had been at a minimum well-informed, if not always fully convinced.

20. When the Summit had actually commenced, it had been the Department's responsibility to manage the more than 3,500 accredited journalists who had covered it. The Department had also recognized the importance of keeping civil society constructively engaged in the process, and the fifty-eighth Annual DPI/NGO Conference, held from 7 to 9 September, had

taken reform of the international system as its theme, under the title "Our Challenge: Voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal". In the week preceding the Summit, more than 2,500 representatives of non-governmental organizations and other civil society partners had come to Headquarters, and even more had followed the proceedings over the Internet. The Conference had allowed the Department to capitalize on the commitment of civil society to the Summit, engendered by the civil society hearings held by the President of the General Assembly, for which the Department of Public Information had also provided essential support.

21. The increasing power of the United Nations website as an information tool had figured prominently in the Summit story: during the three days of the Summit, the website had been accessed some 45 million times — compared to 42 million hits during the entire year in 1997. More than 180,000 viewers from 175 countries had watched the webcast of the Summit live, and a further 722,216 had used the Department's "webcast on-demand" capacity to watch it over the following days. And for the first time, DPI had been able to provide audiences with the option to watch the live webcast — of all statements — in either the original language or interpreted into English.

22. People around the world — people who in the past would perhaps have glimpsed only snatches of the meeting on their evening news programmes — had tuned in via the Web to watch Heads of State and Government address the United Nations, and collectively had watched the Summit live for some 15,700 hours. From the webcast archives, they had then watched for more than three times that number of hours.

23. Those figures indicated three things. First, that the website was an essential tool that allowed DPI to reach global audiences quickly and cost-effectively. Second, that it was being used by people in more than two thirds of Member States, with the result that, unlike in the past, its value now extended far beyond the developed world. And third, that people really wanted to know what was happening at the United Nations, and would tune in if the Organization could find ways to allow them to do so. The figures also indicated the Department's pre-Summit communications strategy had been effective.

24. After the conclusion of the Summit, the United Nations information centres, which had been so well briefed and so engaged in the pre-Summit process, had been able quickly to transmit a summary of the Outcome, often in local languages, and explain to the local media the finer points of the agreements that had been reached.

25. The level of interest in the Summit, along with other indicators, suggested that public support for the United Nations was slowly improving from the slump that had followed the disagreement in the Security Council over Iraq. The surveys conducted in the aftermath of that dispute had shown confidence in the Organization to be at an all-time low, even in countries where support for the United Nations had traditionally been very high. A new poll conducted by the German Marshall Fund in June 2005 among adults in the United States and Europe indicated that strong majorities in both places held a “very favourable” or “mostly favourable” opinion of the United Nations. Three quarters of Europeans and a majority of Americans considered the United Nations better able to manage many of the world’s most pressing problems than any single country.

26. The results of that survey were particularly striking when it was considered that, in some parts of the world, the media continued to pay little attention to global and humanitarian issues. As part of its efforts to counter that trend, in 2004 the Department had launched a new initiative called “Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About”, which was specifically designed to bring into focus important stories that had somehow escaped the attention of news organizations. That initiative, now in its second year, had helped to draw the attention of journalists to stories like the crisis in Northern Uganda, or the continuing violence worldwide against women. The Department had also made those neglected stories priorities for its own video and radio programming, and it was now providing footage on them, from the field, to television and radio broadcasters around the world, further raising the profile of the issues.

27. In a speech in May 2005, the Secretary-General had called the United Nations a work in progress. If a healthy and strong Organization was to be passed on to future generations, he had said, it was important to ensure that the United Nations moved with the times. With the decisions of the 2005 World Summit, a new phase of United Nations renewal was now under way,

and with help and support from Member States, the Department of Public Information — the public voice of the United Nations — would continue to evolve and to play an important part in that process.

28. **The Chairman** said that the Committee would now hold an interactive dialogue on the agenda item and then proceed to the general debate. He invited members to put questions to the Under-Secretary-General.

29. **Mr. Suárez Salvia** (Argentina) said that the organizing facilities for the press at the Summit must have been a major challenge for the Department, and he congratulated the Under-Secretary-General on the results. On the basis of that experience, he asked whether DPI might consider the possibility of greater involvement of the Press Attachés of the Permanent Missions during the run-up to the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

30. While the organization of the Summit had undeniably been generally good, there had been room for improvement in the handling of the press accompanying each world leader during the few hours that they had been present in the United Nations building. Greater flexibility was needed in providing access for the official accredited press and media. One possibility might be to issue them with a special pass for the General Assembly Hall.

31. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that he was intrigued by the idea of associating the Press Attachés of the Permanent Missions with the Department’s work before the following year’s session. The modalities of exactly how that might work would have to be explored. One essential first step would be to make an inventory of how many Missions would be in a position to have a dedicated Press Attaché who could work with the Department in the lead-up to the General Assembly session. With regard to the idea of special passes, he said that, too, would need to be looked into, in particular as the idea entailed some security considerations. He would have the News and Media Division examine the two ideas further.

32. **Ms. Yan Jiarong** (China) expressed satisfaction with all of the arrangements made, and the information given, by DPI prior to and during the World Summit. She supported the suggestion of the representative of Argentina concerning a special General Assembly credential to be issued to official media

representatives. Secondly, noting that both the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General, as well as other senior United Nations officials, had recently written articles that had appeared in leading publications, she asked whether there were any statistics on how many articles had been written and to which publications they had been sent. She also asked how many interviews had been given, particularly to mainstream United States media. Remarking that much of the work of press officers involved writing articles, she said it was regrettable that in many cases such articles were never published, and asked whether there was some particular secret for success.

33. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Secretary-General had written one article specifically relating to the Summit, which had been placed around the world after its original publication in English. The United Nations information centres had offered the piece to many outlets, and it had ultimately appeared in 43 countries. The Department found that the information centres enjoyed an almost 100 per cent placement rate, in the sense that they would virtually always be able to place an article in at least one publication in the countries in which they were based. In order not to overburden the information centres, he had sent his own article to a syndicate and, at no cost to the United Nations, it had finally appeared in some 17 different languages around the world.

34. As to interviews, the Secretary-General had been extremely busy during the Summit, receiving Heads of State and Government on a bilateral basis, and he had therefore been unable to give many interviews. On the other hand, a number of senior officials, including himself, had done so. He had probably handled 15 or 16 interviews a day. He welcomed the interest of journalists, and was always ready to address them individually or in groups. The Department was now carrying out a detailed assessment of the media outreach during the Summit, and would circulate more accurate figures once they became available.

35. **Mr. Adam** (Israel), referring to the United Nations television channel, which his delegation found very important and useful, he asked whether any data were available on the rating of the channel around the world.

36. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) explained

that there was not, in fact, a United Nations television channel, although it was a common misconception that such a thing existed. In fact, Time Warner Cable had made it possible, free of charge, for the United Nations to put its regular live feed onto one channel, although the broadcast reached only a very limited range in midtown Manhattan. The expense of running a television channel would vastly exceed the Department's entire budget. What DPI did do, on the other hand, was to provide the live feed — again, free of charge — for all of the Organization's televised events. That feed was picked up worldwide. A recent innovation was UNIFEED, which every day provided news from the United Nations and items received from United Nations cameras around the world in a free package which was uploaded and available for download by television stations around the globe. The Department did produce some pre-packaged television programmes, such as "World Chronicle", in which a journalist or group of journalists interviewed a senior United Nations official or a senior Government official visiting Headquarters.

37. **Mr. Ali Ahmad** (Syrian Arab Republic) enquired about the Department's latest information tool on global issues for use by media organizations throughout the world.

38. Referring to proposals to abolish the Fourth Committee, he said that they completely disregarded the Committee's very serious work with respect to decolonization, particularly in the context of the International Decades for the Eradication of Colonialism. If the Committee adopted seemingly redundant resolutions year after year, it was only because those resolutions were never implemented. He asked how the Department of Public Information viewed the role of the Committee and whether it believed that, even if reforms were in order, the Committee still served a purpose.

39. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) replied that the criteria followed for the Ten Stories initiative were very simple. The Department contacted every single United Nations department, fund, programme or agency to ask what stories or issues in its area of work were not getting the desired media attention. The recommendations were collected (in 2004 there had been about 60 of them), and a committee reduced them to 10, bearing in mind two elements. First, DPI wanted to pick stories that did not already have much media

coverage; there might be issues that were considered very important, but if they were already receiving adequate coverage, they would not make in onto the Ten Stories list. Second, it had to consider whether the stories would attract the interest of the media; the Department could always explain why something was important for the world to know, but if it failed to convince a journalist that the story was worth writing or broadcasting, then it was wasting its time.

40. On the second question, relating to the reform of the Fourth Committee, he said that DPI had taken no position on the matter. It was delighted to work with delegations in the Committee on Information and found it very helpful to use an autumn meeting of that Committee as an opportunity to update delegations on the previous six months' work.

41. With regard to the wider issue of how the Department publicized reform issues, he wished to stress that it was the job of DPI to publicize the decisions taken by Member States, and until those decisions were taken the Department did not take a position. Only when the Secretary-General put forward a formal reform proposal was it the duty of DPI to publicize it, just as it also publicized the Secretary-General's reports to the legislative bodies.

42. **Ms. El Aloui** (Morocco) asked for an update on the situation of the information centres. Following the publication of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1), the approach had been re-evaluated and adjusted. The matter was referred to in draft resolution B in the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-seventh session (A/60/21), and she wished to understand clearly what the situation was.

43. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) explained that, while the plan for the rationalization of the United Nations information centres had been on the table for a couple of years, the Department had not had sufficient resources to fully implement the regionalization plan as outlined in the previous year's report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/2004/3). While that was a sensitive issue for some delegations, the problem had been exacerbated by the General Assembly's decision to reduce the overall allocation for United Nations information centres by \$2 million in the current biennium; that reduction represented over 20 per cent

of the operating costs of the entire network of 63 centres. The Department therefore had had fewer resources than had been anticipated when the original regionalization plan had been submitted.

44. Moreover, the experience with the Brussels-based regionalization had shown that there were many unanticipated costs attached to closing information centres on such a large scale and establishing a working hub. There had also been a significant increase in travel costs that had not been realistically budgeted for. Closing offices was not an easy proposition, nor was regrouping them into regional hubs. The closure of a comparable number of United Nations information centres in developing countries was neither politically viable nor cost-effective, as many of the centres were housed in rent-free premises provided by the Government concerned. Moreover, in many developing countries, outreach in the traditional media, particularly in the local languages, relied on a continued presence on the ground. As a result of those financial and political realities, the current year's report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/2005/3) outlined a recalibration of the plan, which envisaged not a physical rationalization of the network of information centres but a rationalization of the way they worked together, with greater horizontal cooperation among them and a more strategic approach to communications in the field.

45. Since the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information, the plan for further rationalization of the information centres had been refined on the basis of feedback from Member States. Resources were being realigned with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of the network, as outlined in the latest report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/2005/2), and the role of national information officers was being reviewed. The Department was investing in information technology in order to achieve longer-term efficiencies and was continuing to seek extrabudgetary resources, as well as heavily subsidized or rent-free premises for its field offices. With the assistance of the communications professionals in its field offices, the Department's new regional civilian communication model was being more fully implemented. In an effort to improve its internal communication system, it was briefing the information centres on all issues, from the 2005 World Summit to oil for food, and providing them with the necessary information to function independently and to

be proactive in their outreach to the media and civil society. It was also attempting to familiarize them with the rules and procedures of the United Nations.

46. Also, since the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Information, the Department had been assigned responsibility for the new internal communications unit with a mandate to transform the Intranet into a powerful information tool that would at the same time increase transparency and accountability. Regrettably, there were some serious technical shortcomings in the field. Not all the information centres could be connected to the Intranet, owing to the costs involved, and the Department was addressing that problem on a priority basis. In the meantime, a password-protected Internet-based civilian communication network, developed since the latest session of the Committee on Information, linked field offices with Headquarters and served as an internal communications forum and reference tool. Nearly three quarters of the respondents in a rough internal Department survey had indicated that, in the two months since it had been launched, they had used the network daily to access information on the Summit. Increasingly, there were signs of a better team spirit throughout the Department and greater cohesiveness of its messages at all levels.

47. The Department was also attempting to improve regional cooperation among the information centres. For example, with a generous grant from the United Nations Foundation, it had organized a workshop in Nairobi in June for information staff from 16 centres in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of the conclusions reached at that workshop had had a significant impact on the work of other centres in Africa and elsewhere. Information centre websites were being created as an alternative to regional hubs, especially in locations where connectivity was a problem, and information centres were encouraged to coordinate their outreach activities at the regional level. For example, the third issue of a new bimonthly regional newsletter, with readership in West and Central Africa, had just been issued by the Dakar information centre. The Department's regional approach to promoting the Summit had increased its effectiveness.

48. In sum, the Department's activities had been marked by greater regional cooperation, greater effectiveness in the use of information technology and better management of limited resources. The Department lacked the resources to replace obsolete technology in some of the information centres

equipped with 10-year-old computers; its resources had been cut in the previous two budget cycles.

49. **Ms. Miller** (Jamaica) enquired about the impact of the new strategic approach on the staffing and resources of the information centres, and about webcasts on the World Summit on the Information Society and about plans to modernize the Department's equipment at Headquarters. She asked how interested countries could access UNIFEED.

50. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that scarce resources, particularly in the previous two budget cycles, were a common thread running through all the issues that had been raised. It was true that some of the equipment at Headquarters was outdated and that even successful ventures, such as the United Nations Library programmes, could not be further developed for lack of capacity. Indeed, the McKinsey consultants who had carried out an assessment at the beginning of the reform exercise had been astonished at the Department's productivity on such a restricted budget. Still, its critics continued to claim that it was overstaffed and overfunded. In the end, the Member States would have to resign themselves to getting what they paid for.

51. Under the reallocation of resources exercise in 2002, he had reassigned a number of D-1 posts that had hitherto been disproportionately concentrated in Europe to information centres in South Africa, Cairo, Tokyo and Delhi. The United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi had also upgraded its communications director to the D-1 level. There were too few General Service posts, however, to be moved around. The Department and Jamaica had hoped to extend outreach in the Caribbean region by assigning a national, or even an international, information officer to the regional office in Port-of-Spain; the Department had requested assistance from the host Government of Trinidad and Tobago in reducing the very high rent it paid for its regional office premises and it would re-evaluate the fate of its activities in that region depending on the reply.

52. Turning to the question about UNIFEED, he said that, in the next few months, world news downloaded from the Associated Press Television News network would be available on the Department's website for the benefit of countries that could not afford to subscribe to the service directly.

53. New equipment would not be installed at Headquarters until it was determined whether the final version of the Capital Master Plan would involve a relocation of staff.

54. **Mr. Coelho Ferreira** (Portugal) said that the Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels had been largely responsible for the rousing reception given to the Secretary-General on his three-day visit to Portugal and that, in the space of one year, it had accomplished all its goals with respect to the Portuguese-speaking community. He enquired about the prospects of establishing a regional hub in Luanda to serve Africa's five Portuguese-speaking countries.

55. Welcoming the announcement about upcoming Associated Press Television News services, he suggested supplementing television with a strengthened radio network, which would reach a much wider audience. Perhaps the current 15-minute daily live radio broadcasts could be extended.

56. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Department was deeply grateful to the Government of Angola for its generous offer to provide rent-free premises for an information centre in Luanda to serve the five Portuguese-speaking African countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe). Unfortunately, even with rent-free premises, the operating costs of an information centre in Luanda would be prohibitive. The desk officer for Portugal at the Regional United Nations Information Centre for Western Europe was currently translating the Department's products for lusophone countries in Africa.

57. As for live radio, the Department was carrying out significant outreach activities with very limited resources. Although the United Nations did not have its own radio or television stations, it was currently offering 15 minutes of live feed and providing other materials to radio stations. Live broadcasts from the United Nations were aired on over 187 radio stations in 76 countries in a variety of languages. The Department had formed strong partnerships with three of the most popular radio stations in Brazil, reaching 15 million, 30 million and 10 million listeners on Radios Banderantes, Radio Nacional do Brasil (Radio bras) and Jovem Pam, respectively. Its special news programmes for the Portuguese-speaking African countries were transmitted by e-mail or by telephone

feed. It also provided material to national radio stations in those countries, to Radio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP) in Portugal, which had a wide audience in the lusophone diaspora, and to the Portuguese service of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).

58. **Mr. Tanon-Boutchoue** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that publicity for the Summit had focused largely on the reform of the Security Council and the Commission on Human Rights rather than on the everyday problems confronting African citizens, such as poverty, debt and HIV/AIDS. For Africans, the tangible results of the 2005 World Summit, with regard to both reform and development, had been sorely disappointing.

59. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) replied that reform efforts had made headlines because of the media's belief that debt and other development issues had already been covered at the recent Group of Eight Summit. He pointed out, however, that, in his report, the Secretary-General considered the impact of reform on development, and that, indeed, 60 per cent of the World Summit Outcome dealt with development issues. The publicity for the Summit had changed the image of the United Nations, which had been tarnished by the oil-for-food controversy in the months leading up to it.

60. **Mr. Gallardo** (Peru) agreed that coverage of reform had overshadowed coverage of development issues. The Department must now consider how it would publicize efforts to implement reform, and how it would portray the gap between objectives and reality, in view of the lag in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. He sought confirmation that the Department was interested in creating regional and subregional networks to accommodate the particular needs of countries, and wondered about the response to offers by the Permanent Missions to secure media contacts to publicize the work of the United Nations over the past 60 years.

61. **Ms. Kamboj** (India) expressed great disappointment that a lack of resources had made it impossible to run the information centres as originally envisaged. Her delegation strongly supported the Department's efforts to make optimal use of the resources available to it and looked forward to further discussion of the issue at the twenty-eighth session of the Committee on Information.

62. **Mr. Diaz** (Spain) welcomed the Organization's improved image and its multilingual webcasts. He thanked the Department, in particular, for organizing an Internet course and for designing a web page in the Spanish language; that had given rise to a Hispanic Forum that included 27 countries.

63. **Ms. Davis** (Antigua and Barbuda) requested additional details on partnerships with educational institutions within the context of the Department's new strategic approach to improving its work.

64. **Mr. Alberto** (Angola) wondered whether the Department of Public Information was truly committed to requesting funding for an information centre in Luanda in its budget submission to the Fifth Committee. Such a centre must be opened in order to meet the needs of the Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa; they should not be penalized by the lack of services in their language, which was spoken by many millions of people across the world. His delegation and the delegations of the other Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa would do everything possible in the Fifth Committee to ensure that resources were allocated to fund a Portuguese-language information centre in Luanda.

65. **Mr. Idoko** (Nigeria) said that, during his youth, information about the United Nations had been available even in the most remote parts of the country; that, sadly, was no longer the case. The services of the Department of Public Information continued to be the first contact for information about the United Nations for many people in the world and he expressed great concern that its budget continued to be cut.

66. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Department would continue to work with the New York-based press to disseminate information about successes and failures on the part of the General Assembly and Member States in following up the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Information about the Millennium Development Goals was also a priority; a chart, which would be constantly updated, had been developed to show progress towards meeting each goal and target broken down by region and level of attainment.

67. Cooperation with academic institutions had been strengthened: educational outreach was continuing and agreements had been entered into with six universities to grant them quasi-non-governmental organization

status and deepen the partnership with them; courses about the United Nations had been organized at the City University of New York; and discussions were being held with the International Association of University Presidents on modalities for developing the relationship between universities, the Department and the United Nations. He also cited the example of a videoconferencing arrangement undertaken with Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, whereby United Nations programming could be shared with other university campuses. That initiative could perhaps be developed with a view to worldwide distribution.

68. The Department's position with regard to the United Nations information centres had indeed changed; the objective was to make better use of the scarce resources in order to create regional cooperation and synergies without, however, moving towards regionalization, which the Department could not afford. The role and work of the information centres would continue to be assessed and modified as needed. In that context, he said that the assessment of the Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels should be completed by the end of 2005 and a report submitted to the Committee on Information in 2006. The assessment would include not only a cost-benefit analysis but also an analysis of how to be innovative and achieve better results in terms of both activities and the impact of those activities. He thanked the Governments of Spain, Belgium, Portugal, France, Germany and Italy for the additional contributions they had made to the Department's activities. He regretted the need to request additional assistance from States but said that at least the costs of the reorganization of the Department's services in Europe — thanks to those additional resources provided by the developed countries — would not affect programmes in the developing countries.

69. The Department was committed to the concept of a Portuguese-language information centre in Luanda, and he noted with thanks the generous offer of rent-free premises made by the Government of Angola. It would certainly be possible to transfer a professional-level post to Luanda to act as coordinator and to create a cooperation network with the Portuguese desk office in Brussels and the information centre in Rio de Janeiro. What was lacking, however, was funding for infrastructure and operating costs, such as communications, technology and travel. Unfortunately

no funding was available. He pointed out that funding for information centres had been reduced by 20 per cent.

70. The Department of Public Information did not make a separate budget request to the Fifth Committee, but was included in the Secretariat's overall budget submission. Governments were, of course, free to encourage the Fifth Committee to mandate the establishment of a Portuguese-language centre; if that was agreed, resources would have to be found. He pointed out that the General Assembly had only called for the funding of a Portuguese-language information centre within existing resources. The issue was therefore in the hands of Member States. If they were able to move forward in that regard, his Department would be only too happy.

71. He hoped that the interactive dialogue had helped to give the Committee a better understanding of the opportunities for the dissemination of information about the United Nations, as well as the limitations on the Department. It was important to communicate to the world the message that the Organization could help to make it a better place. That would require increased outreach efforts. He noted that, like many Member States, the United Nations was faced with the challenge of carrying out public diplomacy. He was encouraged by the expressions of support and understanding on the part of Committee members.

72. **The Chairman** enquired about the Department's activities aimed at encouraging dialogue among countries and civilizations.

73. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Department disseminated information about every issue on which the General Assembly had taken a position. Some issues required specific resources. Some, such as those related to the dialogue among civilizations, were simply added to those dealt with by the Department, which used its own creativity, within existing resources, to promote issues related to the dialogue among civilizations. That had led, for example, to the development of the seminar series "Unlearning Intolerance", and to the organization of the first seminars on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. With regard to the alliance of civilizations, a noble initiative put forward by the Governments of Spain and Turkey, the Department had made the relevant announcements; there was a special adviser on that

topic, but the Department would certainly assist in any way it could. As for the culture of peace, his Department focused on the observance of the International Day of Peace.

74. **The Chairman** said that the interactive dialogue had provided a valuable opportunity to discuss important issues such as the need to ensure that the Department of Public Information was allocated sufficient resources to fulfil its mandate. He suggested that the Secretariat and the Department of Public Information should consider the possibility of providing a forum, for example a web page, through which Permanent Missions could submit questions to the Secretariat with a view to promoting better communication between the Missions and the Secretariat.

75. He thanked the Under-Secretary-General for his most informative responses. The Committee would now proceed to the general debate on the item.

76. **Ms. Laohaphan** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), expressed support for the Department of Public Information's efforts to enhance communications between the United Nations and the public, which was a key goal of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. The Bangkok-based United Nations Information Services played a pivotal role in that regard and should be provided with the necessary resources to expand its outreach activities in the region.

77. An organization's success depended not only upon its work but also on perceptions of its work; that was especially true for the United Nations, the world body with the highest public profile. It therefore needed a well-defined communications strategy to be effective in reaching out to the widest possible audience with a view to increasing people's awareness of its relevance to their lives. She commended the role played by the Department in disseminating information about the activities of the United Nations, but stressed that outreach and dissemination of information were only the starting point. Further strategies were needed to enhance people's understanding of the role of the Organization in maintaining international peace and security and promoting human rights and development. Information must be seen to be useful and valuable to those receiving it. The Department should therefore integrate a culture of evaluation which would cover

both access and awareness. That would ensure an accurate assessment of the Department's overall performance.

78. Reform of the Department of Public Information had contributed to the process of renewal and reform of the United Nations. The Department had played a significant role in increasing awareness in the world about the recent High-level Plenary Meeting. The real challenge, however, lay in ensuring that the general public in every country continued to be well informed on progress towards the implementation of the Outcome of the High-level Plenary Meeting.

79. It was important that the United Nations Communication Group should further enhance cooperation and coordination between the Department of Public Information and other agencies, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, in order to strengthen the public information component of peacekeeping missions and develop strategies to address the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse during peacekeeping operations.

80. In the context of the rationalization of United Nations information centres and the re-calibration of the earlier plan to emphasize a more regional approach at the country level, she said that integrated communication activities on priority thematic issues that resonated with local audiences warranted support. The Department of Public Information should undertake consultations with concerned countries in which information centres were located and with the countries served by those centres and other interested countries in the region in order to reflect the distinctive characteristics of each region.

81. While she welcomed the Department's efforts to utilize advanced communication technologies, she pointed out that many parts of the world still relied on the use of a simple radio. In that regard, she noted that the digital divide between developed and developing countries continued to widen. The Department should continue its efforts to close both that digital divide and the communication gap between the United Nations and the public at large. She hoped that the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunis in November 2005, would develop tangible solutions for narrowing the digital divide.

82. Speaking as the representative of Thailand, she informed members of the Committee that her

delegation had applied for membership of the Committee on Information. Her delegation attached great importance to the work of that Committee. Information was a powerful tool for peace, security, development and understanding among the peoples of the world. It was her fervent hope that the members of the Committee on Information would support her delegation's application.

83. **Mr. Suárez Salvia** (Argentina), speaking on behalf of the Río Group, expressed support for the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/60/21). He stressed the importance of the work of the Department of Public Information in disseminating information about the United Nations, which was often not available from the commercial media, and welcomed the Department's efforts to improve the image of the United Nations and counter the negative effect of recent scandals. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005 was a good example of the use by the Secretariat of available resources to transmit a coherent message to non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and universities. Free public access to the official document system would also be a positive step.

84. The Department of Public Information had become a more effective messenger in making people aware of the importance of the work of the Organization; that had strengthened the latter's relationship with civil society and the public and private sectors. The Department was to be commended for using new means of communication while at the same time continuing to improve its use of traditional means. He noted the emphasis on strategic communications services, whereby certain information centres would have increased programming functions and support other offices in their region. It was important, however, that that strategy should include consultation with the Member States concerned and not lead to the closing of information centres but rather to the enhanced effectiveness of existing centres. The rationalization process did not in any way imply the closing of information centres. The regionalization process, as initially put forward, had been rejected. The Río Group nevertheless supported careful study, in consultation with Member States, of any reforms aimed at improving United Nations public information and communications services.

85. Information should be available in all the official languages. It was regrettable that no real progress had

been made towards achieving parity of languages in budgetary allocations, in particular with regard to the Organization's website, the increasing use of which made it important to ensure that all documentation was available in the six official languages. In spite of the limited resources available, the Spanish-language website was experiencing one of the greatest increases in usage and the efforts of those responsible for that website should be commended. The United Nations website should likewise be accessible to persons with disabilities and the Department of Public Information should continue to stress with its various offices the need to provide information in a format accessible to persons with disabilities.

86. Traditional means of communication, such as radio and television, continued to be an effective means of disseminating information, in particular in many regions of the developing countries where access to advanced technology was still limited. In that connection, he acknowledged the daily news programme of the United Nations radio service in Spanish which, with 174 radio partners in 75 countries, provided information about the Organization to every corner of the world.

87. He expressed support for the development of the United Nations libraries in order to make them better equipped to meet requests from users for information. In order to improve the dissemination of information about the work of the General Assembly, it was important to maintain coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and between the Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly and the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General. Finally, the Rfo Group noted with interest the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with regard to the dissemination of information about the Organization's peacekeeping activities.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.