

**STATEMENT BY DR. MADAN PRASAD JAISWAL, MEMBER OF  
PARLIAMENT, ON AGENDA ITEM 79: "QUESTIONS RELATING TO  
INFORMATION" AT THE 57<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNGA – SPECIAL  
POLITICAL AND DECOLONISATION COMMITTEE (Fourth Committee) ON  
OCTOBER 30, 2002**

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by congratulating Under Secretary General Shashi Tharoor for his succinct and lucid presentation to the Committee, outlining the work and activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI) this year, as well as for bringing us up-to-date on the ongoing process of reform and re-orientation in the DPI's structure. We commend his efforts towards improving communications and efficiency and obtaining more from the limited resources at his disposal by harnessing technology, improving work methods and re-prioritising. He has our whole-hearted support in these endeavours.

We associate ourselves with the statement delivered yesterday by the distinguished representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

As a democracy with a vibrant and free media, India attaches great importance to achieving a new, more just and effective global information and communications order with the aim of strengthening peace and international understanding based on the free circulation and wider and more balanced dissemination of information, as mandated by the General Assembly. (Resolution 34/182 of December 18, 1979).

Mr. Chairman,

Rapid advances in technology have compressed our world. Today, massive volumes of information can be transmitted with a click of the mouse. Better and speedier availability and access to information can be made to contribute to economic and social development: these technological advancements can be harnessed towards achieving the global objectives of poverty reduction and betterment of the quality of life. Lack of accessibility to information and communications technology due to economic reasons or other barriers can only further widen the gap between developing and developed societies. The United Nations, through the Department of Public Information – its chosen instrument - has an important role to play in seeking to bridge this digital divide. In this context, the present reorientation exercise in the area of public information and communications is particularly meaningful and one, we hope, that will meet the aspirations of the developing world and succeed in correcting the present bias against it in the field of information and communications.

Mr. Chairman,

We have before us the Report of the Secretary General on the “Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of Public Information and Communications” of March 25, 2002 (A/AC/198/2002/2), the Report of the Secretary General on “Questions relating to Information” of July 3, 2002 (A/57/157) and the section on Enhancing Public Information contained in the Secretary General’s Report on “Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for change” of September 9, 2002 (A/57/387). Taken together, these reports contain a series of recommendations that are central to the present debate – a reformed and revitalized DPI that is able to better convey the story of the UN and to greater effect. Given the constraints of time, however, we will not comment on the details of all of the proposals, but highlight only those areas that, we feel, warrant particular attention.

First, the United Nations website, which has made enormous strides in recent years. This is evident from the number of ‘hits’ which, in 2001 touched 1.1 billion and are now estimated at an average of 6.5 million a day from more than 172 countries. It is also heartening to note that the UN News Centre will soon be available in all six official languages. We encourage efforts to make the website up-to-date, comprehensive and user-friendly. A word of caution that has also been sounded before: accuracy, impartiality and objectivity must be preserved and should not be sacrificed for speed.

Two, the flagship publications of the UN, which are important mediums for enhancing awareness and understanding about the work of the UN. The “Yearbook” is unparalleled for its archival and reference value. We similarly commend the quality of the “UN Chronicle” which we see as a stimulating and thought provoking publication and as a platform for intellectual discourse on a wide variety of issues currently engaging the attention of the international community. An Indian edition of the Chronicle, for circulation in Asia, is being brought out at no additional cost to the UN and here, we would wish to reiterate the point made by us last year and in the Committee on Information earlier this year that similar approaches for other regions should be explored to enhance the reach and readership of the Chronicle.

Third, the United Nations Information Centres that play such a vital role in promoting informed public understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations to all peoples of the world, contributing to spreading the message of the relevance and the significance of the United Nations to their lives. We support the proposal of the Secretary General to create regional information hubs instead of current patterns of UN information centres, beginning with Western Europe, where these centers drain away a large chunk of the resources of the DPI. We are confident that this restructuring will optimize the functioning of the information centers, in terms of both contribution and impact and look forward to discussing the matter further in 2003 when specific proposals in this regard are expected to be tabled.

Fourth, the United Nations library services, under which we welcome efforts both, to integrate their management and to step-up modernization. We also support reform aimed at having the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at New York assume responsibility for setting policy and coordinating the work of all United Nations libraries, as well as the DPI’s intention to formulate and implement a plan to improve electronic access to United Nations collections and facilitate the transfer of paper collections to electronic files. India supports all such efforts which, we are confident, will lead to an improvement in the management of present systems.

Finally, restructuring of the Department of Public Information. We take note of and would broadly support these proposals and look forward to carrying the discussion forward during the course of 2003. The question that needs to be squarely addressed here is the extent to which the reorientation exercise currently underway will meet the aspirations of the developing world and succeed in correcting the present bias against it in the field of information and communications. The focus of any information and communication strategy has to be on developmental issues, which are the basic challenge before the developing countries. We would encourage the DPI to do more in terms of highlighting critical developmental issue and the work of the Organisation in addressing them.

Mr. Chairman,

Reform, revitalization and renewal are continuous processes. We would encourage the Secretary General to continue with the measures within his competence to improve the functioning of the DPI. We will work with other delegations to ensure that concrete ideas are contained in the Report of this Committee which will help both the DPI and the General Assembly in their efforts to reorient the public information activities of the United Nations.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.