

## **Opening Statement by Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Interim Head of the Department of Public Information (30 April 2001)**

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to address the Committee on Information as it begins its twenty-third session. As you are aware, the Secretary-General has asked me to serve as the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information, following the departure of my distinguished predecessor, Under-Secretary-General Kensaku Hogen. I know that you join me in expressing appreciation for Mr. Hogen's leadership of the Department of Public Information. We shall all benefit from the excellent work that he did during his three years in the post.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly-elected Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Milos Alcalay, and the members of the Bureau. I have every confidence that under Ambassador Alcalay's able guidance, the Committee will make even more progress towards helping the Department accomplish its important mission. I would like to thank the Ambassador for the kind words addressed to me. My colleagues in the Department of Public Information and I very much look forward to working with the Committee, its Bureau, and you, Sir, to help make this a productive session. Allow me also to pay tribute to the outgoing Chairman, Mr. Elhassane Zahid, as well as to the other members of the Bureau for their

[REDACTED] Bureau for

For my part, with your support and guidance I will strive to improve the Department's efficiency and outreach with the objective to "energizing", rather than restructuring, our work. I have made a modest beginning in this direction over the last three months and I look forward to achieving further progress in the months ahead. When I began my assignment in the Department of Public Information, I convened a "town hall" meeting to talk with all the staff of the Department, and have also visited virtually every one of them in their offices, to see how the work of this Department is being done. From what I have seen, I believe that the Department should be proud of what it is achieving in the face of limited resources, especially in relation to the proliferation of mandated priorities, which make up the Organization's work programme.

An overview of the wide range of the Department of Public Information's activities is included in the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General entitled "Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications" (A/AC.198/2001/2), which you have before you at this session. In it, we have highlighted our most recent efforts to further develop the conceptual framework and operational priorities for the reorientation of United Nations information and communications policies, aiming to develop a culture of communications throughout the Organization. Seven other reports have also been prepared, as called for by the General Assembly, on specific subjects such as the innovative pilot radio project, the ongoing work of the United Nations information centres, the United Nations Web site, and the information campaign for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. These reports were all available well in advance of our session this year, and I trust they will be particularly useful in your deliberations, as they offer a detailed picture of the Department's day-to-day activities at Headquarters and in the field, in some of the main areas of our work.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to briefly outline what we believe to be our principal mission, and highlight some of our current priorities, both for 2001 and beyond.

The primary objective of the Department's public information programme — to build broad-based global support for the work of the United Nations — goes back to resolution 13(I) of 1946 and again, is clearly articulated in the medium-term plan for 2002-2005, approved by the General Assembly this past December.

The Millennium Summit and Assembly have reaffirmed that the United Nations is "the indispensable common house of the entire human family". The world's leaders have called for the Organization to live up to the faith being placed in it — by achieving clear and measurable results. At the same time, the Secretary-General has underscored, and certainly everyone in this room would agree, that the challenges and substantive goals of the United Nations cannot be attained without garnering public support for the Organization through our efforts to create an "informed understanding" of the Organization's work and purposes. How can we possibly hope to succeed with our global campaign to eradicate poverty, for instance, without mobilizing public support, both in donor countries and amongst the poor? How can United





The challenge now for the Department of Public Information is to translate "reorientation" into "modernization" — in other words how to translate a "process" and an "approach" into a detailed blueprint for better serving the "We the peoples" of the United Nations Charter in the twenty-first century. The Department will work to ensure that the information and communications function will continue to be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization and that the imperative of communications infuses the Organization's policy-making. The Secretary-General has already invited me to address his Senior Management Group at the end of May, following the conclusion of this Committee's deliberations, on the "Information Challenge". We will draw from the past to document and disseminate accurate and timely information about United Nations achievements, experiences and lessons learned. At the same time, we will reflect the present, to provide timely news and spread the words and images of the Organization, using the best available technology. The Department will also look at the future, to foster an awareness of the global challenges to the peace and well-being of our world, as well as to the role the United Nations can play in making it a better place for the generations to come.

We will continue to work, I assure you, to project an open, transparent Organization, which the Secretary-General has worked hard to achieve, and which is a change now being recognized by many members of the world press.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department's embrace of new technology in all areas of its work will become even more critical to its success in the future. The overall goal is to develop an infrastructure capable of developing instantaneous transmission of text, image, and voice messages from the Organization to the world at large. The Department will continue to work to strengthen the United Nations web site as a major communications tool to enable hundreds of millions of people to directly access information about the United Nations. In this connection, guidelines will soon be officially issued as an administrative instruction, which will help coordinate this Internet effort, as called for by this Committee. Photocopies of the text of these guidelines are available in the back of the conference room. Furthermore, Committee members have traditionally praised the resources and services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and I would like to assure you that these will continue and be enhanced for Member States as well as for other users of the Library.

However, I would like to assure you that our increased use of electronic media will not be at the expense of the traditional means of dissemination. We have taken good note of your statement this morning regarding the bridging of the digital divide. Our publications programme will remain vital, and multilingual, resources permitting. Likewise, library resources in print formats will also be acquired, to meet the needs of Member States and staff. Strides will continue to be made in radio broadcasting, clear evidence of which is the success of the pilot project for direct international radio broadcasting, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Progress report on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations" (A/AC.198/2001/7).

Our information centres, services and United Nations offices will continue to present the work and achievements of the United Nations to local audiences around the world, and their means of outreach will continue to be creative and diversified, based on their knowledge gained in their respective areas, and local needs.

The Department will continue to face challenges regarding resource availability and resource allocation. The Department of Public Information represents 5 per cent of the United Nations budget with 428 staff at Headquarters and 307 in the field. It is one of the larger Departments of the Secretariat and, like any administrative entity, there must be periodic self-assessment, evaluation, and fine-

