STATEMENT IN THE SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
17 October 2006

ON AGENDA ITEM 32, ENTITLED: “QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION”

Mr. Chairman,

Please permit me, at the outset, to extend our felicitations to you on your able leadership of this Committee. We are convinced that your vast diplomatic experience will help ensure a successful outcome of our work. May I also extend our sincerest greetings to other members of the Bureau as well for their dedicated contributions and commitment to the work of this Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

The comprehensive statement by the distinguished Under Secretary General for Public Information Mr. Shashi Tharoor at the introduction of this agenda item has been extremely useful in providing an updated account of the work of his Department. It is, indeed, a matter of great satisfaction to see that a dedicated person of his eminence and wisdom is guiding the work of this important Department. His philosophic leadership and professionalism are evident in his report. We feel encouraged to see that he is aided by a team of veteran, able and dedicated professionals, who provide dynamism and effectiveness to the work of DPI.

Mr. Chairman,

The role of the Department of Public Information has assumed a far greater dimension in the present day world, which unfortunately, is characterized by emerging polarizations and misunderstandings between societies and cultures. The United Nations is addressing all such issues and concerns with a view to promoting peace and harmony in the world. It is incumbent upon the Department of Public
Information to project and publicize the aspirations and resolve of the international community as expressed in the UN decisions, around the world to maximize the effect. The mandate of the Department of Public Information is to help fulfill the substantive purposes of the United Nations and strategically communicate its activities and concerns "in the most effective manner and to the widest possible audience". This task has, indeed, a vital significance for the member states and its importance cannot be over-emphasized. The resurgence of the member states' interest in the work of the UN can only be multiplied by an effective performance of the DPI. The public at large must be kept informed and involved in the activities concerning the UN. We take due note in this regard of the report of the Secretary General to the United Nations General Assembly contained in Document A/61/26 which explicitly emphasizes the pursuit of these goals by the DPI.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation fully endorses the report of the Committee on Information contained in document A/AC.198/2005/L.3 which was adopted by consensus. Pakistan attaches great importance to the subject of Information. Our delegation has therefore, been closely associated with the work of the Committee on Information since its inception 26 years ago. We endorse the statement made by the distinguished Ambassador of South Africa as Chairman or the Group of 77.

Pakistan attaches high priority to the work of the UN Information Centers around the world in disseminating information of and about the United Nations system. These Centers play the role of mini United Nations in respective countries. They serve to enhance the interest and involvement of populations in those countries in the work and ideals being pursued by the United Nations in promoting peace, harmony and development around the world. The report of the Committee on Information has clearly emphasized the importance which member States attach to the network of UN Information Centers in enhancing the public image of the United Nations and in disseminating messages about the United Nations to local populations especially in developing countries. This corresponds with the mission of the DPI to enhance public information, which is
specified as a key goal of the Secretary General's reform proposals. My delegation is very pleased to note that the Strategic Communications Division is now headed by Committee Secretary Ms. Paula Refolo, who has already earned our respect for her work for the committee.

Mr. Chairman,

The Committee, in its Recommendations, has particularly stressed the importance of taking into account the special needs and requirements of the developing countries in the field of information and communication technology for an effective flow of information in those countries. There are vast disparities and imbalances in the flow of information between countries and regions, and most pertinently between the developed and the developing world. My delegation believes that it is imperative to strengthen the information and communication infrastructures of the developing world which are badly handicapped due to the paucity of resources, lack of training in modern technology and poor set-ups. These are unable to adequately disseminate information about their societies to the rest of the world. Their information set ups get over-whelmed by the powerful operations of a formidable media of the developed world which excels because of their enormous resources. With resources far greater than the national budgets of lots of countries, those media outlets dominate and influence the flow of information. As a result, the flow of information becomes lopsided and unidirectional rather than being balanced and two-way. The biggest casualty in this game of dominance is the understanding and goodwill between societies, regions and cultures. While information and communication can serve as a bridge to enhance understanding between different regions, religions and cultures, the usefulness of that information is belittled and sacrificed. My delegation would therefore emphasize that the usefulness of information and communication must be put to its best use for the sake of bringing regions and religions close to each other rather than placing a wedge between them.

This objective can be achieved, besides a political will, through the strengthening of information and communication infrastructures of
the developing world and by enhancing their resources and communication capacities. It is a task which can be accomplished by UNESCO’s International Program for the Development of Communications. A mandate for the same is contained every year in our resolution, adopted by the General Assembly. We deserve to have a report in this regard from the UNESCO for the information of the member states.

Mr. Chairman,

The work of this Committee under this agenda item contributes substantially to providing a mandate to the Department of Public Information. The implementation of the Committee's mandate can be best served by utilizing channels which have the capacities to reach out to the widest possible audiences. We have no hesitation in identifying some of these channels at the command of the Department to be really far reaching in their scope and thus extremely useful to reach out to the largest number of people. The functioning of the News and Media Division has special significance in reaching out to countries around the world. The Press Releases issued by the UN Department of Public Information are basic, but vital in communicating to the rest of the world as to the progress and performance of the UN in the pursuit of its goals. This Unit needs to be strengthened so as to provide speedy information to the societies around the world, particularly in developing countries. While commending the performance of this Unit, my delegation would like to emphasize the desirability to strengthen it further in order to enhance its viability.

We also attach considerable importance to the traditional means of communications such as radio broadcasts. Urdu language broadcasts, for example, by the United Nations serve a useful purpose in dissemination of information about UN system to the people in our part of the world.

We would like to underline the importance of the mandate provided by the Committee on Information to the Department of Public Information for its role in disseminating information about
United Nations Peace Keeping Operations and in strengthening dialogue amongst civilizations and the cultures of peace as a means of enhancing understanding among nations. The useful role being performed by the news and media division as well as the radio and television service deserves to be acknowledged. May we also request the DPI to ensure equitable representation of journalists from developing countries in not only getting access to the Secretary General for interviews but also in their placement in the UN Press Gallery and accreditation. Not many journalists from developing countries can manage to come to the UN for coverage of its activities. But those who do somehow manage to do so, should be facilitated on priority basis.

My delegation would also like to extend support for the Daghammersjold Memorial Scholarship Fund of the United Nations Correspondents' Association and would emphasize that the Department of Public Information may also, not only extend support to UNCA for this purpose but may also itself finance a greater number of journalists from the developing countries to visit the UN and cover its activities. This can be a good experience for them to learn about the system and subsequently serve as the ambassadors for United Nations in their respective societies.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express the confidence that the resolution on this agenda item shall be adopted by consensus on the basis of the Recommendations of the Committee on Information.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.