

**Statement by H. E. Mr. C. Mahendran, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka  
to the United Nations (30 April 2003)**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, let me congratulate you for being elected to Chair the annual session of the United Nations Committee on Information. I have every confidence that under your able guidance, the Committee will make even more progress this year. Let me also take this opportunity to assure you the fullest cooperation of my delegation in pursuit of our common objectives and to make this session a success.

Mr. Chairman,

I also take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Shashi Tharoor on his appointment as the Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information. Under his astute leadership, I am confident, the Department will continue to make progress and achieve the Millennium Goals as well as executing the mandate of the Secretary General to improve accessibility to information and communication technologies.

Mr. Chairman,

acquiring, adopting and implementing information and communication development. These efforts are targeted to provide access to information resources across the Nation and to avoid the manifestation of the 'digital divide'.

Mr. Chairman,

The Department of Public Information of the United Nations is considered by many to be the 'voice' of the United Nations. I wish to recall the statement made by the Interim Head of the Department, during the 24th Session of the Committee, summarizing the importance of the Department.

I quote " Even if the Department of Public Information were abolished, the United Nations would still need the ability to convey news of its work to the mass media; to provide authoritative accounts of its deliberations and actions to the press, public, Governments and academia; to set up facilitate to accredit, house, supply and guide the media based at United Nations Headquarters locations; to provide written information, visual images and sound to those media not based at such locations; and to respond to queries from media and members of the public across the world. Today, we must add to this the capacity to maintain an attractive and functional web site on the Internet. These core tasks are inescapable and not even our severest critics would suggest that the United Nations could survive without the capacity to perform them." I unquote

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased to note that a new Mission Statement has been formulated clarifying the goals and purposes, which is expected to enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Department. By establishing of Strategic Communications, News & Media and Outreach Divisions, we hope, would strengthen and streamline the Department and improve efficiency and the better usage of the limited resources available. By achieving this Department would be able to negate the effects of any budgetary constraints, at least to some extent.

In this new information age the latest technology should be used for the dissemination of information and build a broad base support for the programmes of the United Nations, which has no substitute for the unique legitimacy, which is globally accepted. But, we should not forget that only about five percent of the world population has Internet access and majority of them are concentrated in industrialized countries. A vast majority of the world population

Nations Radio programmes, broadcast with the participation of the partner stations, are listened to by more than 133 million worldwide. Considering the extensive outreach potential in all regions and the cost effectiveness, continuation of this, I am confident, will lead to an even greater understanding about the United Nations and its activities.

As it is difficult, practically, for the countries maintaining relatively small Missions in New York to sufficiently cover all the meetings, we appreciate the issuing of daily press releases by the Department, which are very useful. We also appreciate the contribution made by the United Nations Information Centers. These Centers considered being the 'field voice' of the Department are very important in disseminating information work of the United Nations. We are encouraged by the efforts of some UN Information Centers to develop web sites in local languages, in order to reach key constituencies at local level.

Mr. Chairman,

My Government notes the recent report of the Secretary General on strengthening of the United Nations, which proposes the idea of rationalising the network of information centers around regional hubs. This is expected to ensure more equitable distribution to all regions in order to take advantage of the vastly altered world media landscape. However, we must ensure that these restructuring envisaged should be done in a manner that would not deprive the developing and the least developing countries of the services already provided by these centres.

The United Nations web site, which has done a commendable task of enhancing parity among official languages of the UN has been one of the most popular and sought after as well as cost effective medium used in the dissemination of information. The popularity of this could be gauged by the fact that more than 10 million accesses were recorded within a 24 hour period in February this year. With the continued decreasing cost per unit this could become one of the most effective medium of dissemination of information in the future, even in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

**Thank you.**