Statement by Mrs. Santosh Chowdhary, Member of Parliament on agenda item: Questions relating to information at the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of 66th General Assembly on October 19, 2011

Madam Chair,

At the outset, on behalf of my delegation, let me congratulate you as well as the rest of the members of the Bureau, for the manner in which you have conducted the work of the Committee thus far. We wish you all the best of success.

Madam Chair,

We welcome the report of the Secretary General on the three-fold activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI), namely strategic communications, news and outreach services.

The DPI’s role is pivotal in helping to fulfill the substantive purpose of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization with the greatest public impact in a situation where the UN confronts a variety of complex challenges and opportunities.

We note with satisfaction that the DPI has made some advances towards delivering its messages to the targeted audience in an effective way. The DPI’s Strategic Communications Division, under its thematic campaigns, worked closely with the Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS) and produced 27 press releases and 1206 articles in English on peacekeeping matters for the UN web portal, during the period from July 2010 to February 2011. The UNifeed produced and disseminated 250 stories and UN Radio produced 120 stories on the subject during the same period to generate greater public support for peacekeeping operations.
Madam Chair,

We, however, reiterate that information being produced and disseminated has to be relevant and meaningful and, to the extent pertinent, it has to be spread in a manner that makes it not only interesting but also enjoyable for the target audience. This is not easy to achieve and those working on content management must be driven by a constant yearning for further improvement. DPI’s programmes must seek to further deepen and strengthen their coverage and projection of the most noteworthy activities of the UN, in particular, those that directly impact upon the lives of ordinary people. These include humanitarian activities as also the work performed, often under extremely demanding circumstances, by UN peacekeepers in strife-torn lands.

As regards the latter, we would like to see DPI, DPKO and DFS working more closely in highlighting UN peacekeeping success stories and providing accurate, impartial and timely information on the regular activities of UN peacekeepers, as also on the exceptional work that they often do that goes beyond the routine keeping of the peace and the call of duty.

Madam Chair,

The DPI needs to use the widest possible range of technologies in order to make its work as pertinent and accessible as possible to the largest number of users, making it an effective channel for the flow of information between the UN and the peoples of the world. However, as many countries simultaneously span several centuries in technological terms, it is essential that the end product offered by DPI is dispensed through a wide spectrum of media channels. Thus, while the selection employed should incorporate the latest technologies, such as webcasts and podcasts, a strong emphasis must also be retained on using traditional and very cost-effective means of communication, such as radio and print. These remain of tremendous importance in reaching out to ordinary people in many parts of the developing world and must constantly be kept in sight.

It is encouraging to note that social media followers of UN Radio have grown to 21 thousand, an increase of 275 percent over the second half of 2010. It is a testimony to DPI’s efforts to address the need of varied audiences in different parts of the world, particularly in the developing countries, by maintaining a strong focus on traditional means of communication while, at the same time, capitalizing on new media platforms like internet and social networking sites.

Madam Chair,

We also fully support the effort to enable the emergence of a more linguistically equal world, in which information is disseminated not merely in the official languages of the UN, but also in other languages. We congratulate the DPI for now producing information in over 150 languages and note with satisfaction that among other
languages, UN radio programmes are also being made in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. This promotion of multilingualism by the DPI in its activities needs to be further widened and intensified, including in particular parity between the six official languages in terms of content on the website.

There is also much value in raising the level of local content and local involvement in the production of DPI programme material. Doing so will also encourage local talent and creativity to involve itself in the work of the UN. In this regard, we consider the UN Information Centers (UNIC), which have the capacity to work in 48 languages and maintain websites in 29 languages, as crucial in enhancing the public image of the UN and in disseminating its message, particularly in the developing world. We would encourage the DPI to work closely with host countries in strengthening these information outposts of the UN. We would also support adequate budgetary resources being made available for UNICs.

Madam Chair,

India appreciates DPI’s Outreach Division for its Academic Impact and Celebrity Advocacy programmes. We are pleased to mention that of more than seven hundred members Academic Impact initiative, institutions of India aggregate second largest number and that the University of Calcutta, one of our oldest and most renowned universities, is the Academic Impact’s global hub for peace and conflict resolution. Our cricketing icon Sachin Tendulkar is a Goodwill Ambassador of UN Environment Programme.

Furthermore, the Indian Mission was associated actively with the DPI and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in organizing a symposium on the theme “Can literature effect change” with a panel of eminent Indian authors on May 5. The event was dedicated to our former President R. Venkataraman.

Madam Chair,

We would like to assure you of India’s full support to the DPI in its endeavor to project the UN story and build support for the Organization and its noble aims.

Thank you, Madam Chair.