

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BAGHER ASADI, CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77
(ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN) AT THE 23RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION**

New York, 30 April 2001

Mr. Chairman,

At the very outset, allow me to extend, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, our most sincere congratulations to you and your distinguished colleagues on your meritorious election to the Bureau of the 23rd Session of the Committee on Information. We are very delighted to see you directing the affairs of this session. Under your able leadership we feel reassured that our deliberations will come to successful conclusions. I would like to take the opportunity to assure you and the Bureau of the support of the Group of 77 and China as you discharge your important task and responsibilities that lie ahead.

Let me also express our deep gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General and the DPI for the important reports placed before us. We find these documents incisive and enlightening. They will certainly help us arrive at good consensus decisions.

Before moving on, I should pay tribute to Under Secretary-General Kensako Hogen for his excellent work at the head of the DPI and express our pleasure to see Mr. Shashi Tharoor as the Interim Head, whose comprehensive, energetic and promising statement I enjoyed very much. While echoing the expectations just raised by the Chairman from you, Mr. Tharoor, and from the DPI, I wish you and the Department every success in the challenging task you have ahead of you.

Mr. Chairman,

We start the first session of the Committee on Information in the new millennium, with the spirit of three major events of the year 2000. The South Summit of the Group of 77, the Ministerial session of the high-level segment of the substantive session of ECOSOC and the Millennium Summit. In all these important events the issue of information and communications figured prominently and their respective outcome indicates clearly that there is a great amount of hope and concern in this field.

The Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of ECOSOC, while recognizing that information and communication technology revolution opens vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development and can play an important role in eradication of poverty in developing countries, emphasized that it also poses challenges and risks and could lead to further widening of disparities between and within countries. The Declaration also highlighted that the majority of the world population still lives in poverty and remains untouched by the ICT revolution and the emerging new economy - characterized by rapidly increasing reliance on information and knowledge - still remains concentrated in developed countries. The Millennium Declaration, in conformity with the recommendations of the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration, also reflected these concerns. The South Summit, held in Havana, Cuba, in early April 2000, stated in its Programme of Action that "we should take full advantage of this unique opportunity to help shape the use of information technology and to ensure that its vast benefits reach all humankind by undertaking efforts to make it more widely accessible to and within developing countries".

Secretary-General's report to the Millennium Assembly - "We the peoples" - further highlighted the "digital divide" and underlined the importance of the ICT revolution. It as well drew attention to the fact that information, as the core product in this sector, has unique attributes, not shared by others, including that the economics of information differs from the economics of inherently scarce physical goods and that it should

be used to advance policy goals. The report also addressed the questions of information revolution and connectivity at and within the United Nations system, emphasizing, inter alia, the existing handicaps and the need for updating and upgrading of the system's internal information technology capacity.

Within this framework, the Group of 77 expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for all his valuable endeavours towards the creation of an information and communication technologies (ICT) task force, in conformity with the mandate of the ECOSOC resolution 2000/29 of 28 July 2000. The Group welcomes the current efforts by the Secretary-General and ECOSOC for the actual establishment of the Task Force and supports its prospective endeavors in bridging the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries. We believe the United Nations system can play a key role in bridging the digital divide by promoting and accelerating universal access to ICT and contributing to the development of norms and standards on a transparent, meaningful and participatory basis. In our view, the United Nations in general, and the Task Force in particular, should in their efforts take into account, inter alia, development priorities, cultural diversity, information ethics, privacy, security and cyber-crime. Apart from the imperative of genuine international cooperation and the assistance the developed partners and all other stakeholders can extend to the developing world in the field of transfer of technology and technical and financial support, I should as well underscore the significance of the role to be played in this regard by the developing countries themselves, especially through South-South cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to the United Nations public information policies and activities, I would like to reaffirm once again that we concur with the Secretary-General's view in assigning a major role to communications and information activities of the United Nations system in order to create broad-based, global support for the Organization. The Group of 77 welcomes the initiatives of the Department of Public Information to strengthen the public information system of the United Nations, including through undertaking necessary organizational shifts and also through obtaining quality feedback from its target audiences on the effectiveness of its programmed delivery. Our emphasis on the imperative of due regard for the principles of impartiality, fairness and objectivity hardly needs to be underlined.

We think the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 (A/55/Rev.1), as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/234, is a very important guideline. The plan sets out the overall orientation of the public information programme for the Organization's goals through effective communication. We believe that the Committee on Information should provide DPI with relevant recommendations to facilitate its implementation of the medium-term plan.

On the question of reorientation of the United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications, let me state that we concur with the conclusion in the Secretary-General's report that development of a strategic vision linking all the components of the Secretariat with emphasis on planning cooperation within the Organization constitutes the central goal for continuing reorientation. We believe that the Department of Public Information should, through its reorientation, maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries, with particular emphasis on socio-economic development.

We also believe that United Nations information centers and information components should continue to play a significant role in disseminating information about the work of the Organization to the people of the world, in particular in the areas of economic and social development. This objective could be achieved through efficient leadership, independence, professionalism, adequate financial resources and close cooperation and harmony with host countries. We have considered with keen interest the Secretary-General's report on integration of the United Nations information centers with UNDP, and we would like to be informed by the Secretariat about the present situation of the integrated Centers.

The Group of 77 attaches great importance to the public information capacity of DPI in the field of peacekeeping operations. We take note of the proposal in the Secretary-General's report regarding the transfer of certain units and division of the DPI to the DPKO and ECPS as contained in document A/55/507. We wish to hear from the Secretariat about the implication of such a proposal on the DPI capacity in peacekeeping operations.

Mr. Chairman,

Equitable disbursement of resources to the United Nations information centers is still a matter of concern for developing countries. While taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on this issue, we believe further efforts are needed to rationalize disbursement of resources of UN information centers. And within this framework, particular attention should be paid to the concerns of developing countries. To this end, we support the appeal made by the Secretary-General to the host governments of UN Information Centres to facilitate the work of these Centres in their country by the provision of rent-free or rent-subsidized office space.

Coming to the conclusion of my statement, Mr. Chairman, let me underline the importance we attach to the work of the Dag Hammarskjold Library and the development of the United Nations Web site. We very much appreciate the on-going efforts and initiatives in this respect. I should, however, emphasize that the traditional media still play a significant role for developing countries. With this in mind we welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the progress on the implementation of the pilot project of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the UN, and encourage Member States to provide feedback on the impact of the live daily programming so far and guidance for future development of the daily international radio broadcasting capacity for the UN.

And to conclude, allow me to underscore two more points, and of course, very briefly . One, as all our negotiating partners are aware, we have a rather cherished attachment to the structure of the traditional resolution we adopt in the work of the Committee. The second and the last point, having made the first point, we are, nevertheless, fully prepared to engage in an open and flexible exchange and negotiation with our partners with a view to achieving consensus.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.