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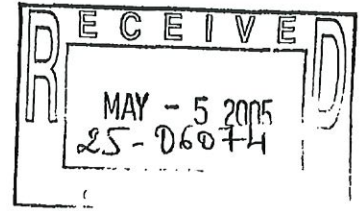
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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Regionalization of UNICs

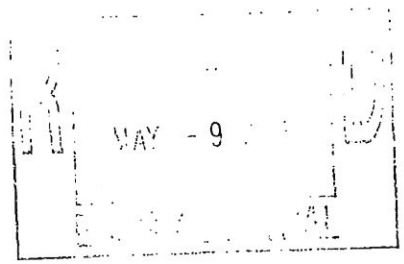


Further to our discussion this morning, I am taking the liberty of attaching an excerpt from a section relating to UNICs from my official report to you on the 27th session of the Committee on Information. The full report has been submitted to Mr. Malloch Brown, but may not otherwise be worthy of your attention.

Shashi Tharoor
Shashi Tharoor
5 May 2005

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~~*[Signature]*~~
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cc: Deputy Secretary-General
Mr. Malloch Brown
Mr. Mortimer



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Rationalization of the network of UNICs

The negotiations on the draft resolution were largely dominated by sometimes heated, and openly conflicting, positions taken by the Group of 77 and China vis-à-vis the European Union and other countries, with regard to the further rationalization of the network of UN information centres.

It became clear from the very outset that the G-77 and China and the European Union, as well as the United States, had drawn contradictory conclusions from the Secretary-General's report on the regionalization process. The G-77 and China, for example, concluded that no further regionalization was possible. They emphasized that the presence of UNICs in developing countries, in particular the least developing countries, strengthened the flow of information in these countries and helped to address the disparities they faced in the areas of access to information and information technology. The Group also argued that any proposal for further rationalization must be carried out in close consultation with the host countries, as well as other with countries served by these centres.

The European Union, on the other hand, restated its commitment to the pursuit of the regionalization process. It accepted the argument that this must be tailored to the circumstances in each region and that the Western European model would not be applicable to all regions. They also agreed that there could be certain advantage in taking a more gradual approach on this subject for the time being, but a gradual approach "must not mean a static one." The European Union countries had agreed to close down centres in their capitals on the understanding that other Member States would also take a similar decision in their own countries if circumstances warranted, the statement pointed out. It also encouraged the Secretary-General to make "bold proposals" for the approval of the General Assembly. This was interpreted by many as a signal by the European Union countries to approve greater budgetary allocations for the network of UNICs, including regional hubs, by the Fifth Committee which had earlier cut DPI's budget by \$2 million, originally intended for furthering regionalization and advancing the Department's work in high-priority areas.

The United States, which took an identical position to that of the European Union, argued for continuing the rationalization process. It said it was not convinced that the regionalization process would have continued to move forward to the extent necessary to effect real change, even if the United Nations information centres' budget had not been cut.

It reminded the Committee that the budgetary allocation to UNICs had been "willingly agreed by all."

The intense negotiations that followed centred on two propositions: the G-77 and China calling for an unconditional end to further regionalization; and the European Union and the United States demanding a clear understanding that the United Nations must continue on a course to enhance its effectiveness and impact through the further rationalization of UNICs. When it became clear that the European Union was unwilling to shift any further on its position, the Group of 77 and China threatened to present its draft proposal for vote at the plenary, where it enjoys a clear majority.

In the end, as a way out, both sides agreed to abandon the use of the word "regionalization", which for some meant closing of some information centres and the creation of regional hubs, and instead to use the word "rationalization", which was interpreted as measures aimed at improving the effectiveness of the network of UNICs through recalibration and realignment of the Secretary-General's original proposal. The G-77 and China demanded - and obtained - an assurance from DPI that no centres would be closed without prior consultations with the concerned Member States, as required in the relevant GA resolutions.

In one sense, this was a significant concession agreed to by the European Union and the United States. However, this concession was secured only after the Group of 77 and China had agreed to replace the reference to "United Nations information centres" with the "network of United Nations information centres," with the implicit understanding that the network included UNICs, UN Information Services, the Regional Centre in Brussels and DPI's information components at UN Offices in the CIS countries, i.e., everywhere DPI had a field presence. It was also understood that the agreement would be considered as a "package deal" and would include new language proposed by the Group of 77 and China on remaining contentious areas.

The draft resolution now includes the following measures on the network of UNICs:

- It recognizes the constraints of further regionalization as described in the Secretary-General's report, but asks the Secretary-General to continue to make proposals on rationalization, including through redeployment of resources where necessary;

- It reaffirms that rationalization of UNICs must be carried out in consultation, on a case-by-case basis, with concerned Member States;
- It asks the Secretary-General to review the allocation of both staff and financial resources to UNICs in developing countries, emphasizing the needs of the LDCs;
- It takes note of the Secretary-General's proposal to ask host governments for rent-free premises for UNICs; and
- In the context of the proposal by Angola for a UN information centre in Luanda, it encourages the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures, within the context of rationalization, to accommodate the needs of the Portuguese-speaking African countries.

This compromise resolution, in our view, gives the Department a mandate to continue with the rationalization process and put in place some of the recalibration and realignment, based on a strategic communications approach, proposed in the report of the Secretary-General. The measures we plan to implement without delay include giving some UNICs a greater coordinating role in providing strategic communications guidance and support on a regional and sub-regional level. These offices would, as far as possible, be headed by DPI Directors at the D-1 or P-5 level, in some cases supported by a P-4 or P-3 Information Officer. The other UNICs within the purview of the above offices would either remain as they are or would be led by National Information Officers (NIOs). DPI is pursuing its requests to host governments to provide rent-free or rent-subsidized premises in locations where rental costs consume a large part of the UNIC's budget, to release funds for public information work. In addition, to enable the Department to recruit and retain the highest calibre of national professionals, DPI will seek the approval of OHRM to introduce the NIO "C" level, to provide them with career development opportunities and to bring the NIO scale in line with that of other UN system partners in the field.