

# ISRAEL

61<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly  
Fourth Committee

Statement by:

**Mr. Ran Gidor**  
**Israel's Representative to the Fourth Committee**

Agenda Item 34: Questions relating to information

United Nations, New York  
16 October 2006

Check Against Delivery

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by expressing my congratulations for the expeditious, genial and professional manner in which you, Mr. Chairman, have conducted the deliberations so far.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, for his long-serving contribution and astute leadership of the Department of Public Information. We congratulate the DPI and the members of the Committee for their work this year, and express our gratitude for the very useful reports provided by the Secretary-General.

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to reiterate the sentiments already expressed by other member states, and express our satisfaction with the professional standards and absolute vocational commitment displayed by the DPI and its various organs during the past year.

Indeed, in light of the magnitude of the challenges facing us today, nothing short of total zeal and commitment would suffice in order to promote and disseminate the ideals of the United Nations. The DPI has to convince a growingly cynical public around the globe of the sincerity of the UN's efforts, while struggling all along to be heard alongside numerous competing narratives.

As the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information said at the opening of the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2006: "DPI's task, simply put, is to tell the UN story. Since the UN's story is also the story of our world and of the time in which we live, these stories are always changing, sometimes alternating between hope and despair."

We, in the Middle East, understand only too well the wisdom of these words and their aptness to our current circumstances.

During the past troubled year, the United Nations' role in our region has been even more pivotal than before. We gratefully acknowledge the UN's efforts to promote peace in the Middle East, and invite the DPI to enhance its role even further by considering the opening of an Information Centre in Israel. In our opinion, such a Centre would serve to consolidate the incipient dialogue in our region and perhaps even modestly give rise to a fresh impetus for peace. Israel – as a sophisticated, multi-lingual democracy, with its wide-reaching media, advanced internet infrastructure and genuine thirst for knowledge, and a place where Jews, Moslems and Christians have been living side-by-side for millennia, considered holy to the three great monotheistic religions – is an ideal location for disseminating the UN vision.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to particularly commend the DPI and Under Secretary-General Tharoor for their impressive endeavours to promote Holocaust remembrance around the world. It is nearly a year since the landmark resolution (A/60/7) on this subject, and we – at the Israeli mission – are genuinely

touched by the creative and comprehensive way in which its various stipulations have begun to be implemented – in spirit and in practice. A series of wide-ranging initiatives, such as the memorial ceremony at the General Assembly Hall on 27<sup>th</sup> January, the film screening events on 25<sup>th</sup> April and 19<sup>th</sup> July, the display of the traveling exhibit entitled “No Child’s Play,” the seminar on outreach programmes held here, in the UN ECOSOC Chamber on 12<sup>th</sup> May, and most of all – the accessible, thorough and sensitively produced website entitled “Remembrance and Beyond,” all of these form a promising start to this important initiative. Furthermore, they are not only a credit to the DPI, but also effectively demonstrate the evolving UN’s educational role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

No doubt, the Holocaust Awareness initiative has provided us with a unique precedent. We have here not merely a statement or a resolution but an educational project, launched most successfully at the United Nations, with potential universal application. The initiative is based on the dissemination of information, and designed to promote global understanding and mutual tolerance. If the UN can assume a greater role in the promotion of such initiatives, rather than merely provide a venue for international bickering and a regular exchange of recriminations, then we have no doubt that the organization will live up to the original ideals of its founders.

The DPI has proved for its part that it can muster up the requisite motivation, resources and skills for the task at hand. It is now up to the Member States to take up the mantle and implement their part of the resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the pioneering work of the DPI, we are disappointed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to feature as the only conflict in the world which still has a Special Information Programme, and certainly the only conflict having a programme which conveys – by the very definition of its mandate – a one-sided, biased and misleading picture. In an age of rationalism, one cannot help but wonder how “rational” this wasteful policy is – in a time when there are no funds to tell other, more pressing or globally relevant stories.

The Secretary-General’s Report on the Activities of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2006/5) states very clearly, that the DPI needs to focus on the priority issues of the United Nations. In paragraph 54, it goes on to explain that “This prioritization was necessary not only to secure the greatest public impact but also to ensure the optimal use of ever-dwindling resources.”

It is our position, Mr. Chairman, that by allowing the continued existence of such a Palestinian Information Programme, a money-wasting, superfluous organ, the UN is failing to meet the self-imposed standards mentioned above.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel is a young state, a melting pot for immigrants from more than 160 nations, speaking a myriad of tongues and jargons. We have two official languages: Hebrew and Arabic, and various minorities comprise about 20 percent of our total population. Social, linguistic and ethnic difficulties have been compounded by unfavourable

climate conditions, as desert makes up just under half of our territory. In short, Israel has been grappling for almost six decades with many of the issues and concerns expressed by my colleagues in this room. We would therefore like to share our hard-won experience and some of our successes with the international community at large, and our immediate neighbours in particular. That applies especially to the critically important issue of “bridging the technological and digital divide.”

In order to demonstrate Israel’s credentials in this field, we would like to share with you some relevant statistics (all of them relevant for 2005):

- ? No less than 55 percent of Israeli households have internet access, and 52 percent have broadband connections, which is significantly higher than most Western European countries, and far above the OECD average.
- ? About 3/4 of all Israeli households possess at least one computer. That number increases to 9 out of 10 in households with family members under the age of 18. Again, that figure is higher than most European countries, and second only to Denmark and Iceland.
- ? In terms of addressing the gender digital divide, the percentage of Israeli female surfers on the net nearly tripled from 14% (1997) to 38% (2005), which – again – is higher than most European countries.
- ? The Digital Divide Index (DIDIX) places Israel above the European average (2002 figures). We are behind countries such as Sweden, Austria, Denmark, UK, but ahead of countries such as Germany, France, Belgium, and Spain.

I think, Mr. Chairman, being justifiably proud – as we are – of these figures, Israel is eager to share its experience with other nations in our region to further the common good. Surely, the venue provided by the UN, and the means advanced by the DPI and the Committee on Information, were designed for just such a purpose, namely: putting aside our political disagreements and concentrating our efforts on cross-border cooperation. Communication and cooperation go hand in hand, and this is what this committee is all about.

Let me conclude, therefore, by wishing that the DPI continues to utilize the resources put at its disposal, and harness the considerable talents and energies of its staff, in order to do what it does best, namely: the promulgation of the story of those nations united in their desire for peace and cooperation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.