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## DPI/NGO Communications Workshop

### *Expanding outreach and communications: Partnering with UNESCO*

17 April 2008

#### Summary

The second Communication Workshop this year discussed the United Nations International Years as a way of raising awareness on issues on the Organization's agenda. Media outreach for this year's 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference was also examined as were new media tools such as online social networking sites. The morning session speakers included: **Ms. Suzanne Bilello**, Senior Communications Officer, UNESCO; **Ms. Sherill Kazan** and **Ms. Anne Riccitelli**, Co-Chairs, Media and Publicity, Conference Planning Committee, 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference; and **Ms. Nanci St. John**, Content Management and Knowledge Sharing Officer, Knowledge Solutions and Design, OD/DPI. During the afternoon session, Ms. St. John conducted a two-hour hands-on training on how to use Facebook as a tool to plan and promote the Conference.

Ms. Suzanne Bilello began by introducing UNESCO with a short film outlining the work of her Organization. Ms. Bilello said that UNESCO worked to create meaningful dialogue within international communities. With the help of a slide show, she introduced UNESCO headquarters in Paris as the venue for the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference. She stressed the fact that the Conference was an opportunity for DPI and UNESCO to share experiences and build relationships with NGOs throughout the world. Ms. Bilello briefly discussed the withdrawal from and the return of the United States and the United Kingdom to UNESCO. She noted the possible reason for the return to be the change in the Organization's policy regarding the freedom of the press. Ms. Bilello spoke about the communications strategy behind the United Nation's International Years and cited the Year of Planet Earth as an example. She noted the overall message of the Year to stress the importance of earth sciences as an important subject of study and research. She spoke the Organization's work to encourage young scholars to study earth sciences. She furthermore spoke about the challenges of drawing public support and stressed the need for greater collaboration with NGOs to engage the public, create programs and devise plans of action for outreach. Ms. Bilello concluded by expressing the need to improve communication strategies to advance the United Nations agenda.

Ms. Anne Riccitelli began by reflecting on her former career in the media and personal experiences before becoming an NGO activist. She noted the overall importance of balancing

expectations within the framework of any project. Ms. Riccitelli observed the NGO community to be composed of people with high achievements and dedication to partnering with the United Nations. Ms. Riccitelli briefly discussed the “era of citizen journalism” and discussed ways of how NGOs could disseminate news about the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference. She cited the need for NGO representatives to mention the conference in any media outlet available to them. Ms. Riccitelli suggested disseminating this information in interviews with local press, television appearances, local meetings and newsletters. She noted that NGOs associated with DPI possess a larger capacity for communications. Ms. Riccitelli mentioned the use of “google alerts” to further one’s understanding of the United Nations and the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference. Ms. Riccitelli stressed the importance of outreach to the public and youth. She concluded by noting that NGOs were instrumental in disseminating United Nations information and furthering the goals mandated by the Organization.

Ms. Sherrill Kazan began by introducing the remarkable Conference Planning Committee for the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference in Paris. She noted that the role of her Committee was to help promote the Conference and spread information about it worldwide due to the variety of languages spoken by the Committee members and geographical areas they represented. Ms. Kazan briefly discussed the importance of specialized publications and suggested NGOs make contact with their local specialized publications, including educational journals. She noted the importance of NGOs to coordinate with DPI and join forces to publicize the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference. She also spoke about bringing representatives from developing countries to the Conference in order to bridge the communication gap with these areas.

Ms. Nanci St John introduced the concept of social networking websites and how they could be utilized for the Conference. Ms. St. John defined social networking as a service that uses software to build online social networks. This network enables a community of people, sharing similar interests or geographical location to engage in communication. She spoke about Facebook as an example of a free access social networking site with millions of members, including hundreds of NGOs. Ms. St. John highlighted the ability to create “groups” as one useful feature of Facebook. The purpose of such “groups” was to link people and organizations with a common interest or goal. Ms. St. John spoke about the three levels of global “groups”: the “open” group, which allows anyone to view and join the group; the “closed” group, which allows anyone to view and join the group at the administrator’s discretion; and the “private” or “secret” group, which allows access by invitation only. Ms. St. John concluded by stressing that Facebook was not limited to youth and that the majority of Facebook users were over 35 years of age.

During the question-and-answer period, in response to a question regarding UNESCO’s changed policy regarding press freedom Ms. Bilello provided a detailed historical overview of the MacBride report and the debate that followed. She noted that access to information empowered people and that information was a central element in furthering development in the world. Ms. Bilello emphasized that UNESCO was an entity of the United Nations that protected press freedom for the public. A question was asked with regard to the United Nations utilizing various applications within the Facebook website. Ms. St. John clarified that the United Nations was investigating these various applications available and would be utilizing some of the appropriate applications in the near future. A comment was made regarding the importance of intergenerational dialogue and the contribution of the aging population. In response to this comment, Ms. Chavez noted the lack of education about the United Nations in school curricula worldwide and expressed satisfaction with the inclusion of the UN in schools around Europe. She also encouraged the audience to make use of various United Nations’ websites such the UN Cyber School Bus. She said that although this website was designed for students, it could be used to educate all ages. Ms. Chavez also expressed her hope for DPI to outreach and inspire youth.

Ms. Bilello added that new cutting-edge programs were being introduced into schools across the United States to better educate American students about the United Nations. The fact that the school curricula were decided on the State rather than Federal level presented a challenge to achieve this goal across the country.

During the afternoon session, Ms. St. John guided the NGO representatives through creating their own presence on Facebook. They also learned about how to use Facebook groups. The session took place in the Library's training room; 25 NGO representatives participated.

The briefing was attended by about 70 representatives of NGOs, United Nations and Permanent Mission staff.

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