COMITÉ DE INFORMACIÓN
36° período de sesiones
Debate general
Intervención de la Sra. Embajadora María Cristina PERCEVAL
Representante Permanente de la República Argentina ante las Naciones Unidas
en nombre del
GRUPO DE AMIGOS DEL ESPAÑOL EN LAS NACIONES UNIDAS
Nueva York, 28 de abril de 2014

COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
36th session
General debate
Statement by Ambassador María Cristina PERCEVAL
Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic to the United Nations
on behalf of the
GROUP OF FRIENDS OF SPANISH AT THE UNITED NATIONS
New York, 28 April 2014.
Madam Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the "Group of Friends of the Spanish to the United Nations" (GAE) to thank you and the Bureau for the work done and to convey our full willingness to contribute constructively to the debate on this topic. We commend the Secretariat of the Committee on Information for the permanent disposition and kind assistance provided to our delegations.

Our special gratitude to Mr Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, for the valuable information he has provided in his detailed and comprehensive statement. As we had the opportunity to convey in the productive meetings we have had, I renew on this occasion GAE’s full commitment to collaborate and assist in the tasks carried out by the Department of Public Information as well as his responsibilities as Coordinator for Multilingualism.

Madam Chairperson,

We are deeply proud to introduce our Group in this Committee for the first time after its establishment on 16 September 2013, when the Representatives of all Spanish-speaking Member States to the United Nations signed the "Charter" of the Group. This Charter was sent to the Secretary-General and is today an official document of the General Assembly published with the symbol A/67/998 under one agenda item that unites us all, "Multilingualism".

The growing interest of Spanish-speaking peoples in the work of the United Nations was a crucial reason to give birth to the GAE. This interest has been impacting on the activities of the Organization through increased and sustained consultations, interactions and demands from the Spanish-speaking public worldwide.

That is why the decision to establish our Group was triggered by the shared conviction that strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and a Group of Friends encompassing countries that share Spanish as their language will be of benefit to the ideals, purposes and principles United Nations and the general welfare of peoples. Of particular significance to the Group are the ties with other language groups at the United Nations. Because we believe in the richness of diversity and because multilingualism is the principle that unites us and identify us all.

We appreciate the support and interest that so many present here today have conveyed to us along these first months of life as well as during the cordial and friendly event we shared last 23 April to mark the "International Day of Spanish Language" with your valued presence and that of the Under Secretary-General to celebrate multilingualism that unites us all.

Madam Chairperson,

The GAE is grateful for the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the three Divisions of the Department of Public Information. We appreciate the information provided on key issues while facing the challenge of an increasingly global audience, more informed and more interested in learning about a greater number of issues on the work of the Organization. We commend the Department's efforts to develop new contents, using new technology and continue prioritizing the traditional media.

Our sincere appreciation to the staff of TV and Radio in Spanish, the Website in Spanish and the News Centre in Spanish for the magnificent job they do; also to those who help us from the Library, meeting our consultations and feeding the vital network of depository libraries in
several points of the Spanish-speaking world. Our identical gratitude to those who do that from the United Nations Information Centres present in the Spanish-speaking world, who speak to us in our own language and bring the reality of the United Nations to our societies while promoting peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples.

Madam Chairperson,

An obligatory source of information for us all is the United Nations website which is a true reflection of the work they carry out. As indicated in the report of the Secretary General, traffic to the United Nations website continued to grow, registering around 59 million visits in 2013. That is why the GAE appreciates the efforts of the Department to improve the accessibility and design of the website, the new products and services, the creation of new portals and the collaboration of other departments to provide contents.

Nevertheless, it is a growing concern of the Group of Friends of Spanish that these new activities are subject to mechanisms of exception and do not always take place bearing in mind the principle of the necessary linguistic parity among the six official languages of the Organization. Hence the importance of conceiving all product or service, from the planning stage, respecting the guiding principle of multilingualism and the derived principle of full linguistic parity that the General Assembly have enshrined as a guiding mandate also in the work of the Department.

And our concern is even greater when in 2013, once again, the United Nations website in Spanish has continued to grow in content, proof of which is the increasing number of visits registered. Indeed, as acknowledged by the Secretary-General in his report on activities of the News Service of the Department of Public Information of the United Nations (A/AC.198/2014/3), after English, Spanish language was again the second language of visits in 2013 reaching 20% of total page views of the website, after English which accounted for 59%.

On this issue the GAE reiterates its aspiration that future reports of the Secretary-General again provide more statistics as this contributes to making accurate assessments in a framework of full transparency and freedom, and to designing concrete actions to achieve the widest possible dissemination. We appreciate in this regard the report made by the Department upon the request of our Group and which provides ample disaggregated statistics on the use of all six official languages regarding all products of the Department. Of course the Group is ready to share this report with every interested delegation.

Madam Chairperson,

Members of the GAE are encouraged by the fact that the draft resolution to be negotiated has a solid base as the General Assembly has already established the importance of ensuring the equitable treatment of all the official languages of the United Nations in all the activities of the Department of Public Information, whether based on traditional or new media, including in presentations to the Committee on Information, in order to eliminate the disparity between the use of English and the five other official languages.

It is a heritage that we have enshrined after intense negotiations and upon which we should build our future work. "The responsibility of the Secretariat in integrating multilingualism into its activities, from within existing resources on an equitable basis" is clear now.

In short, Madam Chairperson, we believe that we have been able to overcome at this stage the traditional limitation imposed by the scarcity of resources related to the necessary
linguistic parity because it has been decided that that same scarcity be managed on an equitable basis.

Madam Chairperson,

This mandate also reaches a matter of vital interest for the members of the GAE: the need for daily press releases also in Spanish. We deliberately highlight that we refer “also” to Spanish as there is an old and reiterated mandate demanding the Department to deliver press releases in all official languages, adding those that have been neglected for decades despite the existing mandate.

In this regard, we recognise the efforts recently made by the Department to comply with the specific mandate as contained in resolution 67/124 B and reaffirmed in resolution 68/86 B, whereby the General Assembly requests the Department “to develop a strategy, in close collaboration with other departments, to deliver daily press releases in all six official languages through creative schemes, in a cost neutral manner and in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions”.

We welcome the announcement made by the Department in the report of the Secretary-General A/AC.198/2014/3 to begin to deliver press releases in Spanish by redistributing resources that are currently only used for releases in English and French. At the same time, we reiterate that a strategy should be developed using creative schemes to enable the publication of daily press releases in all official languages.

It is clear that the GAE is ready to collaborate in searching those “creative schemes” and contributing ideas. Also in this issue it is high time to rethink old models in order to make room for everyone on an equitable basis, without discrimination, adapting to current times. Even without additional budgetary resources and within the “existing” ones but on an equitable basis, that is, having fairness as the criterion for justice in scarcity.

Our position is the unconditional defence of multilingualism and we welcome that the Secretary General has recognised that there is a growing debt regarding our language. However, this cannot and should not be interpreted in detriment of any other official language as the six have the same rights. That is why we solemnly reaffirm that the scarcity of resources cannot be an impediment to overcome this outstanding debt. The existing resources are those allocated to the Department in a detailed a specific budgetary programme and it is not acceptable to favour one language in detriment of any other.

Madam Chairperson,

To conclude, the GAE renews its full commitment to the achievement of multilingualism in the United Nations based on the principles of equity and linguistic parity. It is the conviction of the GAE that this will enhance the primary mission of the Department of Public Information: to provide, through its outreach activities, accurate, impartial, comprehensive, balanced, timely and relevant information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations in order to strengthen international support for the activities of the Organization with the greatest transparency. I assure you, Mr Chairman, and through you, the Department of Public Information, that you all count on our Group of Friends of Spanish as a friend for the fulfilment of this task.

Thank you very much.