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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MATHIAS (Portugal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 59: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/35/21, 362 and Add.1, 504 and Corr.1, 603):

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION;
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL;
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- (d) CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN THE APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT; REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

1. Mr. ALBORNOZ (Ecuador), Chairman of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Committee on Information, said that the Special Political Committee should consider the item from three points of view: the progress achieved by the Committee on Information, the current situation with regard to information matters, and the prospects and characteristics of the Committee's future work. The Committee and the Working Group were pleased that a consensus had been reached on their conclusions, which complied fully with the mandate laid down by the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session. The specific action recommended by the Working Group consisted of 43 recommendations, 35 on United Nations public information policies and activities, five on the activities of bodies in the United Nations system and three on the promotion of the establishment of a new world information order. Consensus on those recommendations could not have been achieved if all members of the Working Group had not been willing to understand the points of view of others rather than merely to state their own, which were peculiar to the respective States and therefore permanent and worthy of respect.

2. The Vice-Chairman of the Committee, when summing up its work at the preceding meeting of the Special Political Committee, had reported that the essential aspects of the three main points of the mandate of the Committee on Information had been fulfilled. That mandate was still valid and should be reiterated at the current session because of the wide field of action still to be covered. In just two years, the Committee on Information had proved itself to be one of the most important committees established by the General Assembly, particularly as information played a fundamental role in the modern world.

3. One basic condition for the Committee's work had been absolute respect for the principle of freedom of information as a fundamental human right, which was set forth in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It was also fundamental in all democratic systems.

(Mr. Albornoz, Ecuador)

4. At the same time, the developing countries had demanded that the world information media should give full coverage to their economic, social and cultural development efforts and not refer to those countries merely when disasters occurred.

5. Another important subject referred to in the Committee's discussions, on which agreements between rich and poor countries already existed, had been the desire for co-operation to improve the information systems in the developing countries by training journalists, improving and establishing schools for journalists, granting fellowships and providing better facilities for correspondents. However, much still remained to be done in that respect.

6. The discussion in the Committee had shown the obvious relationship between the new information order and the new international economic order. All countries had committed themselves to those two objectives but there was an obvious lack of political will to make positive progress towards them. That was the problem which impeded the progress of the Development Decade and in the global negotiations, although the whole international community should be resolved to narrow the gap between prosperity and poverty. Information could do much to bring about positive understanding of the problems involved and promote the new international economic order.

7. The United Nations had been created to preserve peace and prevent the exploitation of the weak by the strong. It was therefore its sacred duty to co-operate in strengthening a well-informed public opinion, if peace was really to be attained in the world. The information media, both public and private, had the primary responsibility for achieving peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and co-operation between large and small countries.

8. The United Nations Department of Public Information should facilitate the activities of the local information media and not compete with them. The General Assembly should give the Department the guidance and financing to enable it to carry out the recommendations of the Committee on Information. Great attention should be paid to the provision of services in the appropriate languages and to the geographical distribution of senior staff referred to by the developing countries. As a Committee of the General Assembly, the activities of the Committee on Information should correspond fully with the ideals of the Organization.

9. The Committee had followed with interest the progress of the discussion at the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and welcomed the interest expressed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), whose work was so important to long-distance communications. The other specialized agencies were also equipped with extensive information services. In the interests of constructive change, all agencies in the United Nations system must help to provide better information about the Organization, especially its ideals and activities to encourage higher standards of living, the solution of international, economic, social and health problems and problems connected with unanimous respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms set

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forth in Article 55 of the Charter. The mandate of the Committee on Information, as spokesman for the United Nations, should be a reaffirmation of previous goals and a list of new targets established in the light of past experience and future needs. If they could reach a consensus on that mandate, the members of the Committee would have fulfilled their responsibility to the peoples of the world.

10. Mrs. RESTREPO de REYES (Colombia) proposed that the statement by the Chairman of the Working Group should be circulated to members of the Committee as a working paper.

11. Mr. KILIÇ (Turkey) supported that proposal.

12. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished the statement by the Chairman of the Working Group to be circulated as a working paper.

13. It was so decided.

14. Mr. KAZAKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the activities of mass communications systems in the international field should be considered in the context of efforts to strengthen international peace and security and develop friendly relations between peoples. At a time when international tension was increasing, all Member States must strive to use their mass communications systems to foster a more favourable international climate based on peaceful coexistence and co-operation and the elimination of colonialism, racism and economic under-development. It was with that purpose in mind that the Soviet delegation had at the current session of the General Assembly submitted a number of important proposals designed to prevent a return to the "cold war", halt the arms race, and avoid confrontation between East and West.

15. By concerted action, all States could give new impetus to the process of détente in international relations. However, the Government of the United States of America, certain of its NATO allies and the Peking Government were seeking to frustrate the efforts being made in that direction, to increase their military arsenals and to pursue a policy of hegemony in international relations. To achieve such goals, those countries were conducting an unprecedented programme of mass propaganda both domestically and abroad. Under the slogan of freedom of information, the United States and certain Western and non-Western countries were using mass communications systems for the systematic misinformation of millions of people and for arousing enmity between States. Those Powers, which were pursuing a policy of information imperialism with regard to developing countries, stubbornly opposed the establishment of a new international information order and waged a "psychological war" against the Socialist countries and many non-aligned countries, and also against organizations and individuals advocating peace and co-operation between peoples. The Western broadcasting companies, "Voice of America", "Freedom", "Free Europe", and the broadcasting services of the BBC and "Deutsche Welle" had for years conducted a policy of interference in the internal affairs of States and had waged a propaganda campaign designed to discredit the Socialist countries and arouse hatred and distrust between them and the developing countries.

(Mr. Kazakov, USSR)

16. The recent attempts by a number of Western countries to cancel or postpone the Madrid meeting of representatives of States that had participated in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe were an example of that policy. Currently certain Powers were trying to turn that meeting into a forum for propaganda and demagogic speeches. The Soviet Union, however, sought to achieve a number of agreements to promote international détente and, in particular, it proposed the convening of a conference on détente and disarmament in Europe. The activities of Western mass communications systems flagrantly violated the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of various international agreements.

17. The overwhelming majority of States actively sought to restructure international relations in the field of information in order to meet their socio-economic needs, to promote development and to foster peaceful co-operation. To achieve those goals it was necessary to elaborate principles and rules of conduct which would guarantee objectivity in disseminating information to safeguard peace, security and independence, to promote international co-operation and to eliminate colonialism and racism. The first steps in that direction had already been taken. The UNESCO Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War was a comprehensive body of principles dealing with the international exchange of information.

18. Over the past year the non-aligned and the Socialist countries had undertaken a comprehensive study of the basic problems concerning the international exchange of information and the development of effective measures to deal with those problems. The general consensus was that the current system was contrary to the interests of most countries and did not promote favourable international relations. Exchanges of information between capitalist and developing countries were essentially monopolized by a small number of corporations belonging to leading imperialist Powers. Western information agencies dominated newspaper publishing and radio and television broadcasting. Together with the other mass communication systems of the West, they conducted a policy of information imperialism with respect to developing countries.

19. Under those conditions, the struggle of developing countries to create a new international information order was fully justified and constituted another stage in the process of decolonization which had started with the adoption, on the initiative of the Soviet Union, of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Developing countries sought to put an end to the dominance of Western information agencies, to create national mass communications systems and to eliminate the imbalance between developing countries and capitalist States in the exchange of information. The efforts of the imperialist States to perpetuate their monopoly of the exchange of information, under the pretext of safeguarding freedom of information, constituted the basic obstacle to the radical restructuring of international relations in the field of information.

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20. Freedom of the press and information were guaranteed in the Soviet Constitution. However, in order to prevent abuses and promote international peace, that freedom was in the USSR linked with the responsibility of the individuals and organizations which exercised it.

21. Influential Western circles were using all means at their disposal to defend their "right" to manipulate public opinion and irresponsibly misinform millions of people. The opposition of the majority of peoples to that concept of freedom of information was openly voiced in the United Nations, UNESCO and other international forums. The relevant resolution of the twenty-first session of the General Conference of UNESCO stressed that the new international order in the field of information and communications must be based on the fundamental principles of international law proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and that freedom of information must be based on responsibility. In order to bring about the establishment of the new international information order, UNESCO decisions called for the elimination of inequality in the dissemination of information, and the elimination also of the negative effects of the activities of monopolies. The adoption by UNESCO of the report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems and the creation, within the framework of UNESCO, of an international programme for the development of communication and an intergovernmental council to manage that programme were important practical steps towards the establishment of a new information order. The General Assembly should support the contribution of UNESCO in developing principles and norms for the new international information order and should take steps to bring about closer co-operation between the United Nations and UNESCO.

22. Guided by the Leninist principles of foreign policy, the Soviet Union unswervingly advocated the improvement of international relations, and supported the proposal by the developing countries for a restructuring of international relations in the field of information on the basis of progressive democratic principles. His Government was firmly opposed to any form of information imperialism, and supported the constructive principles enunciated at recent conferences of developing and non-aligned countries. Those principles based the concept of the new international information order on the struggle for national sovereignty in the field of information against colonialism and imperialist domination. The Soviet Union supported the concrete measures taken by developing countries in recent years to strengthen regional co-operation in mass communication activities and create national mass communication systems. The Soviet Union was ready to develop equitable and mutually advantageous relations with such groups of States and provide them with practical assistance.

23. His Government supported the efforts of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America to create their own organs of information and to protect themselves from the ideological expansionism of imperialists and colonialists. To that end, it was sending Soviet specialists to developing countries to create and improve

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information systems, and was supplying equipment and spare parts and training specialists from developing countries in various technological fields. Soviet organizations would continue to co-operate with developing countries with a view to the establishment of a new international information order. Such assistance, furthermore, was never subjected to any political conditions.

24. United Nations organs and services dealing with public information must objectively reflect the work of the Organization and its resolutions. The information activities of the United Nations should make use of all existing channels to promote international peace and security, and develop international co-operation. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Committee on Information shared those views. He agreed with the recommendation that the Department of Public Information should continue to orient its work to such issues as international peace and security, disarmament, peace-keeping operations, decolonization and racial discrimination, human rights and the establishment of the new international economic order. The recommendations of the Committee were constructive and were designed to enhance the effectiveness of DPI.

25. Nevertheless, it was regrettable that a number of recommendations had been made without a thorough examination of their financial implications. In that regard, he reiterated his delegation's position that any expansion of the services of DPI should be achieved by the more effective use of existing resources, the redeployment of funds and the reduction or elimination of obsolete programmes.

26. The report made no mention of the urgent need to take measures to prevent the use of United Nations facilities for spreading propaganda against the Organization itself and its Members. In that regard, he stressed the inadmissibility of certain publications which were freely circulated among members of the Secretariat staff and delegations. Even certain Secretariat publications, such as the Secretariat News, contained statements attacking Member States and General Assembly resolutions. His delegation supported the protests made against the publication of such statements, especially the recent protest from the Arab countries, since practices of that kind were harmful both to the Organization and to its Members.

27. The future of the world depended to a great degree on the objectivity of mass information systems. Although it was impossible to eliminate divergent views, agreement could be reached on measures for preventing the use of mass information systems in violation of international law, for example, for the purpose of spreading war propaganda, interfering in the internal affairs of other States or disseminating misinformation.

28. His delegation was ready to co-operate constructively with all delegations which were committed to improving the international exchange of information and the establishment of a new international information order to promote peace, international co-operation and socio-economic progress.

29. Mr. NISIBORI (Japan) said that United Nations public information activities played an important role in mobilizing public confidence, understanding and support, without which the United Nations would not be able to achieve its major objectives.

30. With regard to the budget for United Nations public information programmes, every possible effort should be made by the Secretariat to use existing resources as efficiently as possible. He therefore welcomed the establishment of a Unit for Planning, Programming and Evaluation in DPI. Since the demand for public information activities would continue to increase in a manner commensurate with the expansion in United Nations activities, he hoped that the Fifth Committee would take that situation into account in its future deliberations on allocations for public information activities.

31. United Nations short-wave broadcasts were picked up regularly by many high school and university students in Japan and such public interest in United Nations activities should be encouraged. However, since reception of those broadcasts varied considerably according to country and region, a careful study should be made to assess the impact of existing broadcasts, to define target audiences and to consider various approaches appropriate to different countries and regions. The possibility of the United Nations undertaking international short-wave broadcasts through its own facilities and frequencies should also be carefully considered on the basis of financial, technical and legal studies to be conducted by the Secretariat.

32. He noted that in 1950 the United States Federal Communications Commission had reserved an FM frequency for a United Nations station. That frequency had been used by the radio station of New York University since 1966 on the understanding that the United Nations would have the right to reclaim it at a future date. In view of the possibility that the cost of FM broadcasting in New York City might be excessive and could pose a threat to other existing priority programmes of the United Nations, a feasibility study should be conducted on the legal, technical and financial aspects before any decision was taken.

33. In view of the important role played by the United Nations in Zimbabwe's attainment of independence, the United Nations should be encouraged to explore the possibility of establishing an information centre in Zimbabwe in order to facilitate future co-operation with that new nation.

34. He strongly supported the DPI's efforts to bring about closer co-operation and co-ordination among the various agencies in the United Nations system, and was pleased to note that the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo was concurrently serving as the representative of UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF. A considerable degree of co-operation had thereby been achieved in United Nations activities at the field level in Japan.

35. With regard to the Secretary-General's proposal for providing training programmes for broadcasters and journalists, his delegation recognized the desirability of establishing such programmes in DPI but wished to stress the Committee's call for close co-operation and co-ordination between DPI and other

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agencies which were already providing training programmes. DPI's Programme of Encounters for Journalists, as well as the Dag Hammarskjöld Scholarship Fund established by the United Nations Correspondents Association which had sponsored over 60 young journalists from developing countries, were highly commendable.

36. He urged all members of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to co-operate in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to strive for the achievement of the common objectives of the United Nations system as a whole. In that connexion, JUNIC's initiatives in undertaking an increasing number of joint programmes were most useful.

37. As an indication of its appreciation of the various programmes of DPI, particularly those relating to economic and social development, Japan had in 1980 made a voluntary contribution of \$240,000 to the Trust Fund for Economic and Social Information in support of its work. Japan had also been making efforts to expand its co-operation programmes with developing countries in various fields of information and communication such as radio and television, telecommunications, telephone and postal services. Each year, it was inviting about 300 specialists from overseas and dispatching approximately 200 Japanese specialists to various countries to participate in programmes in various fields of communication.

38. As international interdependence increased, it was becoming increasingly necessary to achieve a freer, more universal and more balanced flow of information in order to enhance mutual understanding and promote economic and social development throughout the world. In that connexion, the twenty-first session of the General Conference of UNESCO held at Belgrade had made significant contributions to the promotion of international co-operation in the field of information and communication. Its resolution concerning the final report of the Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, which had been prepared under the chairmanship of Mr. Sean MacBride, contained many provisions which required consideration by the international community in its endeavours to reduce the existing communications gap between the developed and the developing countries and to achieve a freer and more balanced international flow of information. Japan considered that resolution to be a fairly balanced one, since it emphasized the need to safeguard the freedom of opinion and expression and to ensure the widest and most democratic access to the mass media. It also included a number of ideas relating to the freedom of the press and information, the diversity of sources and channels of information and the removal of internal and external obstacles to a wider and better-balanced circulation and dissemination of information.

39. The establishment of a new world information and communication order would require not only continued study and efforts by UNESCO and other concerned United Nations organizations but also the co-operation of Member States. Such efforts should proceed on the basis of a broad consensus, and it should be kept in mind

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that mass media organizations, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other interested parties could make valuable contributions to the efforts of the various agencies within the United Nations system. After reminding the Committee of the provisions of resolution 34/182, he called for closer co-operation and co-ordination between the General Assembly, specifically the Committee on Information, and UNESCO, ITU and other relevant organs within the world Organization.

40. Mr. KOH (Singapore) expressed his Government's support for the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General to improve the efficiency of the Department of Public Information. There should be no conflict between the UNESCO General Conference and the General Assembly, which should be complementary.

41. The report of the Committee on Information had touched upon many specific issues and recommendations. He wished to comment on the eight points which he considered most important. The first was that in most countries, the general public had a negative idea of the United Nations. From his own experience during meetings with groups of citizens in his own country and in the industrialized countries, he had tried to understand the reason for that conception. The first reason was that the United Nations had not succeeded in its primary task of maintaining international peace and security. In fact, since its inception, there had been over 100 outbreaks of violence between or within States. It was the duty of those who worked within the United Nations system to explain that the Organization had failed to maintain international peace and security firstly, because the principles of the Charter had frequently been violated, secondly, because the United Nations possessed no army and could not impose sanctions on countries which violated the Charter and thirdly, because the Security Council, the organ that was primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, was often unable to take effective action, either because of the use of the veto by one of the permanent members or because for bilateral reasons its members were unwilling to assume a definite position on the rights and wrongs of the case.

42. The general public saw a lack of congruity between the realities outside the United Nations and the decisions it adopted, many of which were not implemented. The Department of Public Information should explain that the deliberative organs of the United Nations had only a moral force and could not enforce their demands.

43. Another reason for the misconceptions about the United Nations was that the information media throughout the world did not give adequate dissemination to the non-political activities of the United Nations system. For that the Department was partly to blame for giving most prominence to reports on meetings at Headquarters and little information about activities in the fields which affected the welfare and livelihood of people all over the world. Even in areas where the Organization had failed, there were usually rational explanations for its short-comings which everyone, and particularly the Department, had a responsibility to explain.

44. The second important aspect of communications activities concerned the organization of the Department. His delegation welcomed the establishment within the Department of a Planning, Programming and Evaluation Unit, as well as the

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streamlining of the use of staff and the elimination of duplication, and the co-ordination of radio information and economic and social information.

45. The third point was the need for the Department to obtain from the countries concerned, through the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) if one existed or from the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) if it did not, more information about the interests of the countries and their needs. In his own region, programmes were often disseminated that were of little interest to the general public, which had the impression that Headquarters staff were trained to dictate to their consumers.
46. The fourth point concerned the United Nations information centres. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) (A/34/379) stated that at present 85 per cent of the funds allocated to those centres were swallowed up in staff costs, leaving only 15 per cent for personnel, hardware and software. He urged the Under-Secretary-General to try to reduce that imbalance progressively. His delegation endorsed the JIU's comment that the information centres should be provided with more adequate facilities and information to enable them to respond to requests without undue delay. At present, there seemed to be a one-way traffic system from Headquarters to the centres. That should be progressively developed into a two-way flow of information and the centres should gradually be given more power and responsibility. A flexible attitude should be adopted on the regionalization of the centres since in some parts of the world political constraints might make it impossible to establish regional or subregional centres. In any event, such regional centres should not be established unless the Department was certain that they would be more efficient and economical than the current system.
47. As the United Nations was similar to a federal system, co-ordination between its parts was becoming increasingly difficult since each institution within the system was very protective of its own boundaries. It was therefore gratifying that, in the field of information, the United Nations system had succeeded in avoiding duplication and in carrying out joint projects and activities by virtue of the efforts of the Joint United Nations Information Committee.
48. He supported the proposed fellowship programme for journalists and broadcasters as a practical way to help the developing countries and eventually to eliminate their dependent status in that field of communication. However, the programme was extremely modest since it involved the training of only 12 broadcasters and 4 journalists each year.
49. With regard to what the industrialized and the developing countries could do to promote the establishment of the new world information and communication order, his country was striving to eliminate its dependent status in the field of communication and information not by curtailing the activities of the mass media organizations of the industrialized countries but rather by learning from them.
50. As a heterogeneous community, the third world did not have a monolithic view with regard to the ideological conflict between the East and West on the relationship between press freedom on the one hand and press responsibility on the other. However, there were many developing countries which favoured a synthesis between those conflicting views.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.