



Fifth session
Agenda item 47

UNITED NATIONS TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. B.G. FOURIE (Union of South Africa)

1. In accordance with instructions given by the General Assembly at its 285th plenary meeting, the Fifth Committee, at its 263rd and 274th meetings on 9 and 30 November 1950, considered recommendations submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to the third paragraph of General Assembly resolution 240 (III) of 18 November 1948, for the implementation of a United Nations telecommunications system.
2. In addition to the proposals of the Secretary-General (A/1454) the Fifth Committee had before it the observations thereon of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, as contained in its fifteenth report of 1950 (A/1492).
3. In resolution 240 (III), the General Assembly approved, in principle, the establishment of a United Nations telecommunications system, reaffirmed the United Nations as an operating agency in the field of international telecommunications, and authorized the Secretary-General to present to the fifth regular session such recommendations as he deemed necessary for the purpose of giving effect to the Assembly's decision. It was pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report that, in addition to making provision for radio broadcasting facilities, a comprehensive telecommunications plan should take account of the needs of "point-to-point" facilities for written record and telephone traffic between the United Nations Headquarters, overseas offices and missions in the field. The Secretary-General recommended, however, that the development of such facilities should not be proceeded with for the time being, since existing commercial arrangements appeared to be adequate, and the present volume of traffic would not warrant the additional expenditure involved. Accordingly, his proposals

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envisaged the construction by the United Nations of minimal broadcasting facilities only, to be used for services of special priority and services to areas which cannot be effectively or appropriately served by the use of available national facilities. The procurement was proposed, therefore, of one 200-kilowatt transmitter in the New York area equipped with antennas beamed on Europe, Africa and Latin America, with a relay installation in North Africa consisting of two 50-kilowatt transmitters with antennas directed to South Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. In order to minimize construction and operating costs, the Secretary-General proposed that these facilities should be operated under a maintenance and service contract by an outside contractor, in which event it was estimated that operating costs would be comparable to the costs involved for an equal amount of time on the nationally operated facilities presently in use. The new facilities to be acquired and operated by the United Nations would, it was estimated, accommodate 50 per cent of the present broadcasting schedule. On this basis it was anticipated that no net addition to the budget in respect of operating costs would be incurred, since the Organization would dispense with certain transmitting facilities which currently entail rental charges of over \$95,000. The total estimated capital cost of the modified plan recommended by the Secretary-General was estimated at \$1,983,000. The Secretary-General proposed that he should be authorized to accept for this purpose such voluntary contributions or donations as would be appropriate and necessary to carry out his suggestions in whole or in part. The General Assembly was further informed that in all proposals presented to and considered by the International Telecommunication Union, United Nations frequency requirements necessary for the implementation of the United Nations telecommunications system have been fully recognized, in addition to which, the International Telecommunication Union has accepted the United Nations as an operating broadcasting agency and a non-voting member of the Union.

4. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions expressed the view that the proposed plan would offer an appreciable advantage to the United Nations, subject, however, to the conditions governing the acceptance of donations or contributions being clearly consonant with the dignity of the Organization, and affording the necessary safeguards for the independent operation and security of the telecommunications system. Consequently, the Advisory Committee considered it desirable that the Secretary-General should be given

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clear guidance in this connexion should the General Assembly decide to approve the plan as recommended.

5. During the initial discussion of the Secretary-General's proposals at the 263rd meeting of the Fifth Committee, certain delegations, before taking a decision, asked the Secretary-General for additional information as to what negotiations, if any, were taking place, the nature of the voluntary contributions envisaged, and whether sponsored radio was in any way involved. In response to these requests, the Secretary-General submitted a further note (A/C.5/401), in which the Fifth Committee was assured that the integrity and dignity of the United Nations would be fully protected in every respect in connexion with the acceptance of any donations that might be offered for the purpose of implementing the proposed telecommunications plan. The Fifth Committee was advised that, while no formal negotiations had taken place, informal explorations had indicated that possibilities existed of obtaining sufficient donations on the sole condition that they be used for the furtherance of United Nations interests in the field of broadcasting. The Secretary-General wished, however, to state, without reservation, that it was not his intention to permit the United Nations telecommunications system at any time or in any way to be used for commercial purposes, or for any other ends not in accordance with the specific interests of the Organization. No donation, therefore, would be acceptable if any condition other than the furtherance of such interests were attached.

6. At the 274th meeting of the Fifth Committee these assurances were reaffirmed, including the assurance that approval of the Secretary-General's recommendations would not involve the United Nations in any additional or supplementary expenditure either for capital or operational purposes. It was further stated, on behalf of the Secretary-General, that the criteria of furthering exclusively the interests of the United Nations would preclude acceptance of any donation or contribution which carried with it any political, economic or moral obligation. With this understanding, the Fifth Committee unanimously approved a draft resolution instructing the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of the proposals as recommended.

7. The Fifth Committee, therefore, recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following resolution:

UNITED NATIONS TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

The General Assembly

1. Instructs the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of the proposals outlined in document A/1454 for a modified United Nations telecommunications system, provided that the capital expenditure involved does not constitute a net addition to the budget of the United Nations;
2. Authorizes the Secretary-General to accept for this purpose such voluntary contributions and/or donations as would be appropriate and necessary to carry out these proposals in whole or in part, it being understood that any and all facilities or funds made available to the United Nations as a result of such voluntary gifts or contributions would become the exclusive property and be under the sole control of the United Nations;
3. Requests the Secretary-General to report on this matter to the sixth session of the General Assembly.
