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PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. T.W. CUTTS (Australia)

1. At the 779th to 783rd and 785th to 787th meetings, the Fifth Committee considered agenda item 59 on the public information activities of the United Nations. The Committee had before it a progress report of the Secretary-General (A/4429) outlining the action taken in implementing General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959, as well as a related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.^{1/}
2. Most delegations were in agreement with the conclusion of the Advisory Committee that "a significant effort is being made to strengthen information services in the field without impairing the over-all central direction of the programme or the present facilities at Headquarters for representatives of media of mass communication, while keeping total expenditure at about \$5 million, as requested by the General Assembly" (A/4408, para. 50). They considered that a firm start had been made in giving effect to the three main objectives of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959: decentralization of public information activities and the establishment of new centres; adequate regional representation at the policy-making level both at Headquarters and in the information centres; and reasonable budgetary stabilization. They pointed to the facts that three new information centres had been opened in 1960, and eight

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session,
Supplement No. 7 (A/4408) paras. 45-50.

others^{2/} would be set up in 1961; that determined efforts had been made to ensure that information material was adapted in every case to the local idiom; that the top posts in the Office of Public Information at Headquarters were now held by staff of nine different nationalities drawn from five continents, while the Professional staff of OPI as a whole was made up of forty-one nationalities; and that, despite automatic and other factors of increase between the years, budgetary expenditure was again planned for 1961 at the level of about \$5 million net approved for 1960.

3. Appreciative reference was also made to annex III to the budget estimates^{3/} in which, as requested in General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV), the Secretary-General had outlined the total information programmes that were planned for 1961, together with the cost estimates of the different projects. A similar submission would be made annually in order to furnish the Committee with the fullest possible information, even though an item on public information would not, in the Secretary-General's understanding, find a permanent place on the Committee's agenda.

4. Some delegations were nevertheless dissatisfied, on a number of counts, with the results disclosed in the Secretary-General's report. In their opinion, little regard had been paid to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV), and OPI was so heavily dominated by nationals of the United States of America and the Western Powers as to compromise its impartiality. One result of this was biased treatment of subjects in the United Nations Review and other publications.

5. As regards the level of expenditure, some delegations considered the figure of \$5 million to be excessive in relation to the annual outlay on technical assistance programmes. The suspension of the unrelayed short-wave broadcasts, which the Committee of Experts had recommended in 1958 (A/3928, para. 260), would alone save \$100,000; but, even apart from financial considerations, it was

^{2/} At the 780th meeting, the Secretary-General's representative informed the Committee that it was intended, under revised proposals, to open eight, instead of three, new centres in 1961 within the approved budget limit for that year. Five of the centres would be situated in Africa, and one each in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

^{3/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Supplement No. 5 (A/4370).

improper for the Secretariat to beam broadcasts to a State unless an agreement had been concluded with that State or with broadcasting systems within its territories. A curtailment of activities at the larger information centres and at Headquarters was another possible source of substantial economy.

6. Many other delegations took a divergent position. The hope was expressed that, as regards the unrelayed broadcasts, the Member States concerned would reconsider their attitude and, as desired by the General Assembly, co-operate in giving publicity to United Nations activities. Failing such action, the duration and frequency of the broadcasts might, as proposed by the Secretary-General, be reduced in the interest of economy. It was generally agreed that the situation in relation to the geographical distribution of staff called, as in other departments of the Secretariat, for improvement.

7. Opinion was divided on the policy to be followed with regard to the network of information centres in view of the expanding activities of the Organization and the admission of new Member States. It was agreed that information activities should be developed both geographically, to cover wider areas, and qualitatively, to meet the special needs of the new Member States. In addition, there was the need, in the interests of the Organization, to maintain public information activities in more developed countries to satisfy the ever-growing demand in those countries for information about the United Nations. Some delegations noted with approval the arrangements already made or in prospect for linking information facilities with offices of the Technical Assistance Board or other offices of the United Nations and specialized agencies.

8. The Committee welcomed the suggestion of the Secretary-General concerning the possibility of producing more United Nations material in the Arabic language. A similar policy in regard to the African languages should be studied. In any case, it was hoped that there would be an increase in the number of radio broadcasts and television programmes in those languages.

9. The balance of opinion in the Committee favoured the Secretary-General's proposal that the United Nations Reviews should not be converted to quarterly publications. The Committee noted with approval the plan for producing the English edition of the United Nations Review - and possibly the French and Spanish editions

also - in a lighter-weight format suitable for prompt and economical distribution by air freight. Similarly, the transfer of the Spanish Language Publications Service to the Information Centre in Mexico City - to form the editorial production centre of La Revista de las Naciones Unidas and other Spanish language publications - was generally welcomed as evidence of the importance attached to linguistic and cultural factors in public information. Part of the contents of La Revista would be "regionalized" by featuring United Nations activities in Latin America without, however, losing sight of the world objectives of the Organization. In this as in other sectors of OPI work, knowledge of the language was not enough; it had to be supplemented by political understanding and insight. The French edition of the Review might well serve as a model in that respect.

10. At the 785th meeting of the Committee, the following draft resolution (A/C.5/L.617/Rev.1) was submitted by Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, United Arab Republic, Yemen and Yugoslavia:

"The General Assembly,

"Noting with appreciation the reports of the Secretary-General of 25 August 1960 on public information activities of the United Nations (A/4429),

"Recalling its resolutions 1086 (XI) of 21 December 1956, 1335 (XIII) of 13 December 1958 and 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959 relating to the establishment of information centres and setting out the basic policy measures to be followed in the field of public information activities,

"Noting further the progress achieved in the implementation of the above-mentioned resolutions,

"Having regard to the increased membership of the African States in the United Nations,

"Welcoming the Secretary-General's announcement of the intention to open during 1961 eight new information centres, one in Latin America, one in eastern Europe, one in Asia and five in Africa,

"Emphasizing the importance of the dissemination of information on the United Nations objectives and activities in those regions where mass information media are less developed, particularly in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories,

"Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Consultative Panel on Public Information and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as appropriate:

"1. To give high priority to the opening of information centres or arranging for adequate information facilities in the less-developed areas, particularly in the newly independent countries and Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, by effecting economies in other directions;

"2. To intensify his efforts to achieve a more effective regional representation at the policy-making level of the Office of Public Information;

"3. To report to the General Assembly at its sixteenth session on the progress made in implementing the present resolution."

11. At the same meeting, the following amendments to the joint draft resolution (A/C.5/L.617/Rev.1) were proposed:

(a) By Ethiopia (A/C.5/L.620): In operative paragraph 1, to replace the phrase "by effecting economies in other directions" by the phrase "by effecting all necessary economies in accordance with the preponderance of views expressed by delegations at the fifteenth session;"

(b) By Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (A/C.5/L.619): To insert the following new operative paragraph 3:

"To continue to plan the public information programmes on the principle of maximum efficiency and minimum cost, within a net budget of \$5,000,000;"

and to renumber the existing operative paragraph 3.

12. The authors of the latter amendment (A/C.5/L.619) accepted a suggestion for the insertion of the word "about" before the figure \$5,000,000.

13. The representative of Ethiopia said that while his delegation was in favour of the draft resolution (A/C.5/L.617/Rev.1) generally, it had proposed an amendment (A/C.5/L.620) to operative paragraph 1 on the ground that the words "in other directions" were open to misinterpretation.

14. The representative of Ireland suggested the insertion after the word "efforts" in operative paragraph 2 of the draft resolution of the words "in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter". The addition of such a phrase would strengthen the paragraph by giving it the full weight of the Charter provision.

15. The United States representative suggested the addition at the end of operative paragraph 1 of the following: "without impairing the over-all central direction of the United Nations information programme, the present facilities for the representatives of media of mass communication, or other essential activities". His suggestion was designed to make it clear that the Secretary-General would not be required to eliminate completely all unrelayed broadcasts or information centres in developed countries. He would not, however, press the amendment if he could be assured that there would be no impairment of essential services.

16. Representatives of the Secretary-General pointed out that the budgetary limitation of "about \$5 million" enjoined upon the Secretary-General in last year's resolution had been confined to the year 1960. He had nevertheless, of his own accord, planned the 1961 programmes of public information upon the same restrictive basis. There were certain items - some were listed in his budget foreword, at paragraph 29 - over which the Secretary-General could exercise a reasonable degree of control; others were inescapable and unforeseeable additions to the total bill: for example, price increases affecting wage rates and other contractual obligations as well as changes in salary scales or post adjustments. The power of absorbing a series of such items in the years 1960 and 1961 had already been strained, and the time was approaching when the expenditure limit could be maintained only at the expense of activities which delegations held to be essential, either at Headquarters or in the field. The choice before the Secretary-General would then be either to propose an increase in expenditure or to invite the Fifth Committee to specify the activities that should be deferred, curtailed or eliminated.

17. It was stated on behalf of the Secretary-General that the objectives of the twenty-Power draft resolution would be attained - to the degree possible - through changes in the order of priorities or through reallocations of personnel, and not in ways that might impair the central direction of the programme or interfere with essential activities. As regards paragraph 2, he would continue the efforts he had always exerted in accordance with paragraph 3 of Article 101 of the Charter. In view, however, of the reduction in the Professional establishment, the possibility of improving the geographical distribution of the OPI staff was dependent upon a fortuitous factor, the rate of replacement of that staff.

18. At the 786th meeting, the representative of Ethiopia withdrew his amendment (A/C.5/L.620), while at the 787th meeting the representatives of Canada and the United Kingdom agreed, in the light of the discussion in the Committee, to withdraw their joint amendment (A/C.5/L.619) and to propose in its stead the insertion in the joint draft resolution (A/C.5/L.617/Rev.1) of the following new preambular paragraph:

"Noting that for the years 1960 and 1961 the Secretary-General has planned the public information programmes at an expenditure level of about \$5,000,000 net for each year,"

19. At the 787th meeting, a vote was taken on the joint draft resolution (A/C.5/L.617/Rev.1) and the amendment proposed by Canada and the United Kingdom. The results of the voting were as follows:

The new preambular paragraph proposed by Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was adopted by 49 votes to 5, with 11 abstentions;

The words "by effecting economies in other directions" in operative paragraph 1 were adopted by 62 votes to none, with 7 abstentions;

Operative paragraph 2 was adopted by 69 votes to none, with 1 abstention;

The draft resolution, as a whole, as amended, was adopted by 61 votes to none, with 9 abstentions.

Recommendation of the Committee

20. The Fifth Committee therefore recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The General Assembly,

Noting with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on public information activities of the United Nations of 25 August 1960,^{4/}

Recalling its resolutions 1086 (XI) of 21 December 1956, 1335 (XIII) of 13 December 1958 and 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959, relating to the establishment of information centres and setting out the basic policy measures to be followed in the field of public information activities,

Noting further the progress achieved in the implementation of the above-mentioned resolutions,

Having regard to the increased membership of the African States in the United Nations,

Welcoming the Secretary-General's announcement of the intention to open during 1961 eight new information centres, one in Latin America, one in eastern Europe, one in Asia and five in Africa,

Noting that for the years 1960 and 1961 the Secretary-General has planned the public information programmes at an expenditure level of about \$5 million net for each year,

Emphasizing the importance of the dissemination of information on the United Nations objectives and activities in those regions where mass information media are less developed, particularly in the Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories,

Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Consultative Panel on Public Information and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as appropriate:

1. To give high priority to the opening of information centres or arranging for adequate information facilities in the less-developed areas, particularly in the newly independent countries and Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, by effecting economies in other directions;
2. To intensify his efforts to achieve a more effective regional representation at the policy-making level of the Office of Public Information;
3. To report to the General Assembly at its sixteenth session on the progress made in implementing the present resolution.
