

United Nations
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
FORTY-SECOND SESSION
*Official Records**



SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
28th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 17 November 1987
at 3 p.m.
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-KAWARI (Qatar)

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87-57122 74288 (E)

Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/42/SR.28
30 November 1987
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL; SPANISH

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (A/42/21)
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/42/494)
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (A/42/571)

1. Mr. HANAFI (Egypt) said that Egypt supported the initiatives for restructuring the Department of Public Information (DPI), making it more efficient and improving the quality of its programmes. It also welcomed the measures adopted by the Committee on Information to correct the imbalance in the dissemination of information. The establishment of a new world information and communication order was no longer a concept but a fact. The action taken by UNESCO and the United Nations Committee on Information, which provided the theoretical and practical bases for introducing the new order, had been of assistance in that connection. The remaining obstacles to the establishment of a more just and more balanced new world information and communication order were due to official, commercial or professional control over information and its free circulation. The inequality that existed in the balance of forces between developed and developing countries was also apparent in the sphere of information, but information and communication should be a process of interchange based on a balance between freedom and sovereignty. The right to information was a human, political and constitutional right which was reaffirmed in all the documents concerning information adopted since the Second World War.

2. The developing countries should introduce reforms with a view to creating social and economic structures that would satisfy communication and information needs, while the Western and socialist countries should provide third-world countries with assistance in order to bring about structural changes in the economic, technological and information fields. The imbalance in the relations between national news agencies and transnational information services could be remedied only by strengthening the system of communication between third-world countries in accordance with the models established by the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries. There was also a great need for close co-operation between DPI and the information centres, on the one hand, and national press organs, on the other, in which connection DPI should act as intermediary in compiling and disseminating information. To that end, a general work plan should be drawn up which took account of national, regional and international priorities, particularly in countries with information centres. The work of the information centres should be scheduled in terms of very specific tasks.

3. His delegation called upon DPI to take the necessary steps to inform world public opinion about the very real sufferings of the African peoples and their economic recovery efforts to mobilize international assistance with a view to

(Mr. Hanafi, Egypt)

alleviating the plight of those States. Another important was the training programme for press, radio and television journalists from developing countries and the need for co-operation between UNESCO and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries to make sure that activities of that kind continued. He regretted that thus far no consensus had been reached as to how the objectives laid down could be achieved, and therefore urged other delegations to initiate a constructive dialogue with a view to achieving such a consensus.

4. Mr. HANNAN (Bangladesh) noted that the local media had remained silent while the question of information, which was of great importance to the developing countries, had been under consideration. That was an indication of the indifference of the Western countries to the aspirations of the developing countries. The Western media, by all indications, seemed to be tirelessly intrigued by real or imaginary stories of disaster, turmoil and upheaval in the developing countries, instead of stressing their efforts to achieve peace, security and development. The developing countries needed modern communication technology to support them in their development efforts to improve the quality of life of their peoples. They wanted to inform the world about their yearning for a just international economic order based on a fair share of trade and on freedom from poverty, the debt burden and high rates of interest, and also about their need to be emancipated from an economic stranglehold and foreign occupation wherever it existed.

5. It was disconcerting to see that the negotiations for arriving at a consensus had resulted in an impasse because of conceptual debates on the definition of the new order and on a few well-known political issues. His delegation supported the Document of the Group of 77, in which enough concessions had been made, and appealed to the developed countries to show enough political will and breadth of vision to narrow the gap in differences of approach and achieve a consensus.

6. The restructuring of DPI would facilitate a more co-ordinated approach to United Nations priority issues, ensure higher quality and timeliness in production, provide greater flexibility and responsiveness of service, and enable information to be disseminated with speed and accuracy with a view to the evaluation of audience and reader reaction.

7. His delegation shared the concern voiced by some delegations regarding the integration of United Nations information centres with other field offices in the United Nations system, and in particular those of UNDP. Such integration would have an effect on the wider interests and targets of the centres at times when it was necessary to disseminate information on United Nations activities as quickly as possible to broad sections of the world's population. Loss of independence by the information centres would seriously erode their capacity to work with drive and imagination. Bangladesh trusted that DPI would on no account allow its authority and influence over one of its most important external show windows to be devalued. He was particularly concerned at the transfer of the Director of Information Centre in Dhaka and at the fact that the appointment of a new director was not envisaged.

8. Mr. FARES (Democratic Yemen), speaking also on behalf of the Yemen Arab Republic, said that information and communication were matters of the utmost importance in the modern world given their power to influence public opinion at both the national and international levels. The media and news agencies were, however, still in the hands of monopolies which determined the flow of information, distorting truth to serve their own ends to the detriment of the developing world. It was more than ever urgent that effective measures should be taken, within the framework of the United Nations, to remedy that state of affairs, by establishing a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order as a keystone of the new international economic order.

9. He welcomed the plans for restructuring the Department of Public Information, to which the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had referred in her statement, and trusted that those plans would be implemented without losing sight of the principle of equitable geographical distribution, and that the developing countries would be given their proper role, that collaboration with their news agencies would be increased, and that training courses would be held for their journalists and announcers.

10. Special attention should also be paid to the recommendations of the Eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Harare in 1986, and of the Second Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Harare in 1987.

11. He urged the Department of Public Information to redouble its efforts on the question of Palestine, Namibia and South Africa, the world economic situation, peace and the World Disarmament Campaign. He regarded as positive the proposal to strengthen the role of United Nations information centres so that they actually became centres for dialogue, meetings and daily exchanges with the communications media of Member States, and especially with those of developing countries in order to cover information from those countries more effectively. He expressed appreciation for the report of the Committee on Information, which was the product of exhausting efforts, and reiterated both the importance of the International Programme for the Development of Communication established by UNESCO and his own total support for that organization.

12. Mr. SILILO (Zambia) said that in view of the vital importance of information, his delegation welcomed with great relief the measures being taken to make the Department of Public Information more effective. There was an urgent need for the Department to be more active. In his own country, for example, although the United Nations information centre was attached to the office of the United Nations Development Programme, its presence was not felt even in the capital where it was based. He fully agreed with the representative of the USSR, who had recently called for the establishment of a world-wide information programme under the United Nations.

13. In most developed countries there were broadcasting stations in almost every large city but in developing countries there was generally only one broadcasting station to cover the whole land. The problem was compounded by the multiplicity of

(Mr. Sililo, Zambia)

communities speaking different languages which, coupled with the limited resources available, made it difficult for all those communities to be reached and adequately informed in one common language. The establishment by the United Nations of a world-wide information programme with centres in Member States would greatly benefit less developed countries such as his own.

14. The racist South African régime had launched a campaign of disinformation and propaganda in southern Africa. Any efforts by the United Nations that would help the countries in the region to counter the pro-apartheid campaign would be most valuable. A number of anti-apartheid campaigners had addressed recent meetings of the Committee. One of them had stated that the oppressed people in South Africa were always encouraged to hear that their efforts to liberate themselves were recognized by the outside world. The Committee could do more to provide the masses in that country with better information about the support and sympathy enjoyed by their cause in the rest of the world.

15. Mr. ONONAIYE (Nigeria) said that the global communications system was asymmetrical and dominated by a few news agencies and communication conglomerates which, through their resources and technology, determined what was news. Those who controlled the technology of information had immense power and influence which they had used to promote their own interests. Their coverage of news in the developing countries was slanted to mock those countries and their peoples, to ridicule their developmental efforts and to mould a negative public opinion of them in developed countries.

16. The quest for an equitable world information and communication order, as a corollary to the decolonization process, was an effort to correct the imbalance of the existing order. It was not an effort to restrict the free flow of balanced and objective information, but rather an attempt to have a diverse world informed by different voices about mankind's struggle for development, the furtherance of human rights and the promotion of peace.

17. His delegation took note of the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and welcomed the report of the Director-General of UNESCO. The work of the International Programme for the Development of Communication organized by UNESCO was commendable. The funding of projects in developing countries by the Programme's Special Account contributed to strengthening the information services in those countries. Requests for such funding of projects by the Programme far outstripped available funds. The Government of Nigeria, which had contributed \$100,000, endorsed the appeal of the Executive Board of UNESCO for voluntary contributions to be made to the Programme's Special Account.

18. Nigeria was pleased with the publicity given to the African economic crisis through such informative and well-presented magazines as Africa Recovery. It was to be hoped that the publicity exercise would continue as long as the crisis persisted.

(Mr. Ononaiye, Nigeria)

19. As in previous years, Nigeria would continue its collaboration with the Department of Public Information by allowing it to use the short-wave broadcasts of the Voice of Nigeria to put United Nations programmes on the air weekly. His delegation was anxious about the possible reduction of press releases in various languages and asked that efforts be made to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis on those aspects of the programme that affected the major concerns of the United Nations.

20. His delegation was pleased to hear of the Under-Secretary-General's commitment to the priority programmes approved by the General Assembly. It interpreted her commitment to mean that there would be no diminution of resources allocated to issues of global concern and no cancellation of programmes focusing on them.

21. Nigeria took note of the proposed changes in the Department of Public Information and supported, in principle, the idea of restructuring the Department to make it more effective. To that end, the Committee on Information should be consulted to enable it to contribute to the restructuring. Nigeria would wish to lend that process support but was in no position to do so until the Committee on Information, of which it was a member, had been consulted and until the impact of the restructuring was known.

22. Ms. GIBSON (Canada) said that her delegation placed great emphasis on developing new communication technologies as a means of bringing the peoples of the world together and contributing to international peace and security. Canada was pleased that the appointment of the new Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had been seized upon to review and reform the activities of that Department. Her delegation welcomed the emphasis that the Under-Secretary-General had placed on improved efficiency and flexibility and noted that she had stated that the restructuring would not affect the Department's current political focus or the priorities set for it by the General Assembly. The Department must keep pace with changing telecommunication technologies even while it maintained its services in the more traditional communications media.

23. The results achieved by the Committee on Information were not what might have been wished. It was up to the Committee to develop a realistic set of recommendations that was within the Department's financial grasp. It was to be hoped that by discussing the issues in a conciliatory manner, the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee could return to a state of consensus.

24. Her delegation supported the Secretary-General's efforts to secure a financial footing for the only inter-agency publication of the United Nations, Development Forum. Similarly, it had high regard for the Non-Governmental Liaison Services, whose continuing financial difficulties were a cause of concern. It might perhaps be time to bring both Development Forum and the Non-Governmental Liaison Services into the United Nations regular budget.

(Ms. Gibson, Canada)

25. Her delegation agreed that the existing imbalances in world information must be gradually eliminated. The most pragmatic method of doing that was to support and strengthen multilateral mechanisms of co-operation, such as the International Programme for the Development of Communication. Practical projects in which the Programme had been involved presented means to close the communications technology gap between developing and developed countries. Canada would continue to support the Programme and hoped that it would be able to count on a broader financial base.

26. Mr. CAVE (Barbados) said that, in view of the fact that the deepest source of conflicts among nations was the image which peoples had of themselves and of their neighbours, information, which was a means for projecting that image, was essential for international peace. The way in which information was used determined whether it would be an instrument of peace or of conflict. If information was to become an instrument of peace, it must remain free from prejudices and vested interests, which of necessity resulted in distortions. Regrettably, distortion was an aspect of modern international communication. Vested interests, whether economic or political, sacrificed truth and objectivity, thereby endangering world peace. In that respect, the fundamental problem which must be taken into consideration was that of ownership and control of mass media. There were very few developing countries which could rely on their own mass media to enable them to transmit and receive the information indispensable for the exercise of national sovereignty and the pursuit of political independence.

27. In that as in other spheres, the small developing countries were dependent on assistance from the United Nations, and considered the Department of Public Information (DPI) as their ally. His delegation expressed its appreciation for the commendable performance of DPI in the promotion of understanding and co-operation among the peoples of the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East. The efforts of DPI were even more laudable in the light of the financial crisis of the United Nations. Barbados supported the efforts to increase the efficiency of the United Nations, and suggested that, if the Organization was to sustain its role as guarantor of the integrity of developing States, the Department must be exempted from undue pressures. His delegation had noted with gratification the remarks of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, and was especially gratified by her assurance that DPI would remain faithful to the requirements of the Charter of the United Nations and would protect adequately the interests of the diverse peoples and regions represented in the Organization.

28. Since the countries of the Caribbean region were within the sphere of influence of the largest world communications empire, they were in constant danger of becoming a part of that empire. Even when no untoward motives were involved, the inundation of information transmitted by a powerful neighbour could only lead to technological and cultural hegemony. Despite the positive aspects of that situation, the countries of the Caribbean would prefer more varied options, since a large part of the information which they received was incompatible with their social orientations and could result in dangerous distortions of their self-image and priorities. Undoubtedly, DPI could help maintain a balance in the flow of information, which was vital for genuine development.

(Mr. Cave, Barbados)

29. In September 1987, the Caribbean Telecommunications Union had been established for the purpose of co-ordinating the positions of Caribbean countries on international issues affecting telecommunications. Also worthy of mention was the important work carried out by the Caribbean News Agency which, during the past year, had provided invaluable assistance to the Caribbean Radio Unit of DPI to enable it to keep the region informed about the United Nations, and had provided services which the Department had not been able to finance and on which it depended for its short-wave transmissions. That fact revealed, first of all, that the problem of information in the United Nations was directly linked with the problem of ownership of the appropriate technology. As long as technology remained in the same hands, the search for ways of adapting current flows of information to the needs of individual countries would be to no avail. Therefore, only the Caribbean Unit of DPI - provided that it was appropriately staffed and equipped - would be able to provide reliable service to the region. A real solution could be found only by the people who were directly affected by the problem; that kind of solution was what should be understood when one spoke of self-determination.

30. What had been said about the Caribbean could also be said about other regions. If DPI was to carry out its mandate, it could not depend on the technology of some Member States whose interests, no matter how legitimate, would not always coincide with the objectives of the Organization. The irony of that situation was that the means to equip the United Nations were available and that what seemed to be beyond the grasp of the international community was the definition of the proper role of public information.

31. Mr. HAGOS (Ethiopia) said that information was a vital interest for developing countries because of the role it played in the interaction between the urban and the rural population. Moreover, it strengthened national unity, promoted understanding, co-operation and peace among nations, played a decisive role in education and was a valuable instrument for the participation of the people in the political and economic life of their countries. In some cases, unfortunately, the media had been used to foment animosity, slander other countries and interfere in their internal affairs. On more than one occasion radio stations had been used for subversive purposes and to support dissident elements in sovereign States.

32. His delegation supported the restructuring of DPI, provided that its most important programmes were not adversely affected. The Department should concentrate its activities in the general areas of decolonization, development and disarmament, and should give special attention to the problem of apartheid and the independence of Namibia, as well as to the situation in the Middle East.

33. Although it had the assurances of the Under-Secretary-General, Ethiopia would like to emphasize that the staff of DPI must be geographically representative of the major regions of the world. It was also important that co-operation between DPI and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries should be strengthened. With the appropriate budget resources, the Department could also train journalists and media experts. Finally, DPI could strengthen international co-operation through information in priority areas of activity. Ethiopia used information for

(Mr. Hagos, Ethiopia)

constructive purposes, and believed that the United Nations information services should foster harmony and understanding among individual countries.

34. Mrs. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said that, in view of the unprecedented financial crisis in the Organization, it was necessary to restructure some departments with a view to making them more cost-effective. Botswana fully supported the restructuring of DPI, but considered unacceptable and regrettable the fact that some of its principal activities, in particular those related to apartheid, were being impaired. The possibility of reduction of some of the Department's programmes could be a question of life or death for many human beings. What was needed, if anything, was even more information on the policies and practices of the tyrannical South African régime. The situation in which the only information on events in South Africa was the Government's own propaganda must be ended. It was disturbing that Western television did not broadcast scenes depicting massacres of young children. In that regard, General Assembly resolution 32/105 H of 14 December 1977 urged Member States whose radio transmitters could reach South Africa and adjacent territories to make available their transmission facilities. Moreover, in response to Assembly resolution 33/183 I, the Radio Service of DPI broadcast in six languages, which made it possible for its programmes in support of the struggle of the black majority to reach almost all of South Africa's linguistic communities. Botswana, one of the countries which benefited from the Department's programmes, hoped that those programmes would be increased and that the campaign against apartheid would be intensified.

35. Her delegation had taken note of the statement made on 11 November 1987 by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, as well as document ST/SGB/Organization/DI of 2 November 1987, and wished to put on record that, in its opinion, the content of both seemed to run counter to the objectives of the General Assembly resolutions on the dissemination of information on apartheid. She hoped that, in view of the financial constraints facing UNESCO and the United Nations information centres, the international community would provide as much assistance as possible in order to ensure the continuation of information activities.

36. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya) said that, while his country fully supported the efforts being undertaken to enhance the efficiency of the Organization, his delegation viewed the proposed changes in DPI with concern because they seemed to contradict the fundamental objectives and principles of the United Nations. For instance, it was not certain that reducing the Division for Economic and Social Information to a mere section would yield the desired results or increase efficiency. He sought assurances that the new section would be able to render the same services as the current Division and that that measure would help cut costs. His delegation also sought confirmation that adoption of any of the proposed measures would not adversely affect special programmes on Namibia, apartheid or the question of Palestine. The provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/213 must not be used as a pretext for making sweeping changes in DPI or any other United Nations organ without considering the adverse impact such measures might have on their mandates. Moreover, some of the changes being made in the Department did not seem to have

(Mr. Mudho, Kenya)

improved cost-effectiveness as their objective. For example, it was difficult to accept that the hiring of consultants to perform non-essential functions was the best way of economizing the meagre resources at the disposal of the Department and the United Nations as a whole. His delegation was deeply disturbed at the Department's practice of hiring consultants, with the costs that that implied, without consulting delegations beforehand. His own delegation could not accept such restructuring measures and consequently called upon the Secretary-General to submit a report on that issue to Member States.

37. Despite the time that had elapsed since the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had introduced the idea of a new world information and communication order and the inclusion of that item on the agenda of the General Assembly, the objective of eradicating inequalities in the exchange of information had yet to be achieved. He emphasized that the proposed new order was not an attempt to impose a uniform communications policy on all countries, nor was it synonymous with censorship or control of the press.

38. His delegation had studied the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/42/494 and urged that the training programme for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries should be continued and expanded and that DPI should constantly evaluate the programme in order to strengthen it as necessary. His delegation had also taken note of the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and welcomed her decision to restructure the Department of Public Information to make it more efficient. However, that restructuring must not be undertaken arbitrarily or without the knowledge and consent of Member States.

39. In view of the key role of the mass media in moulding public opinion and the process of policy formulation, it was unfortunate that the developing countries continued to be simply passive receivers of information as a result of the imbalance in the dissemination of information between developing and developed countries. To end that situation, the new world information and communication order, which would allow freedom of the press to be exercised in a responsible manner, must become a reality. His delegation supported the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication because it was part of the efforts to establish the new information order.

40. The reform measures sanctioned in General Assembly resolution 41/213 should not be used to cut back the services expected of DPI; his delegation was particularly opposed to the adoption of measures that might result in the elimination of anti-apartheid radio broadcasts and other programmes without the consent of the General Assembly and the Committee on Information, whose recommendations, appearing in the report contained in document A/42/21, it fully supported.

41. Mr. JABBAR AL HADDAWI (Iraq) said that, until the mid-1970s, information, despite its importance and power to influence public opinion, had played a very limited role within the United Nations, contributing little to its objectives with

(Mr. Jabbar Al Haddawi, Iraq)

regard to world peace, security and development. At the same time, the imbalance in the distribution of communications media continued to work to the detriment of the developing countries, which were frequently looked down upon and treated with a lack of seriousness by the communications media of the developed countries, even though they vaunted freedom of information and the sanctity of that freedom. The Arab world had been a victim of that phenomenon because of the duplicitous manipulation by Zionists of information about its true nature and the justness of its cause. It was unfortunate that the Western information media had not realized that they, too, were the victims of those lies, which only heightened international tensions.

42. Given the inability of the United Nations to end that situation, which primarily affected countries of the third world, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had, at its fifth Summit Conference, held at Colombo in 1975, decided to establish a special information policy for those countries; to that end, it had established the Co-ordinating Committee, in which Iraq had been actively involved. Considerable progress had been achieved since that time with regard to collaboration among third-world news agencies, radio broadcasts and communications in general. The Movement's concern about information was one of the factors which had led the General Assembly to establish, by its resolution 33/115 of 18 December 1978, the Committee on Information, which had been entrusted with the task of establishing a new world information and communication order. However, the Committee had enjoyed only relative success in carrying out its mandate, as could be seen from the report contained in document A/42/21. Nevertheless, after having studied the Secretary-General's report on that question and having heard the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information on the plans for restructuring the Department of Public Information, his delegation was optimistic about the Committee's future work.

43. He emphasized that the financial crisis must not constitute an impediment to United Nations information activities. On the contrary, public opinion must be made aware of the importance of the role of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in such problems as the question of Palestine, apartheid, Namibia, the maintenance of peace, disarmament, human rights, drought, hunger and other issues relating to economic and social development. Thus information, by virtue of its influential power, could be of vital importance to the implementation of United Nations resolutions by Member States. Member States must work together with a sense of political commitment and good intentions in order to formulate fairer information policies and objectives aimed at protecting the international community from the threat of fanatic, allegedly reformist, ideologies and from pressure groups that used the communications media for their own ends, thereby increasing tensions in international relations. For all those reasons, the problem of information must be solved as a matter of urgency so that the imbalance between developed and developing countries would not grow worse and so that the latter might become self-sufficient through training programmes and the transfer of technology in the field of information. Only in that way could a basis for friendship between peoples be established and global well-being, peace and security be established.

44. Mr. RODRIGUEZ MEDINA (Colombia) said that only a frank dialogue between the developing countries and the developed countries could ensure that DPI was given more effective assistance with a view to consolidating a new world information and communication order, which could be achieved only on the basis of consensus. However, such a new order should be unequivocally based on freedom of information, thus guaranteeing unrestricted access to sources of information and safeguarding full dissemination of information, the exercise of the profession of journalism and the right of peoples to information without the imposition of doctrines or propaganda. When freedom of information was thus interpreted, it was, necessarily, the most fundamental human right.

45. New technological developments in the fields of information and communications were steadily widening the gap between development and underdevelopment. Initially there had been an arithmetical discrepancy in the number of newspapers and radio and television stations; then there had been a geometric discrepancy in the use of newsprint and frequencies and the launching of communications satellites; and now there was an exponential discrepancy as information technology developed, with the use of laser techniques, optic fibres, teletext, data banks and the possibility for countries to develop their own technologies.

46. He wondered how the developing countries were to exercise their right to sovereignty and self-determination, if they did not have full control over their own frequencies, channels, transponders and orbital positions in the geostationary spectrum; if they did not have low-cost, rapid access to the latest telecommunications technologies; if they did not form part of the so-called "know-how revolution" and were given little opportunity to integrate themselves into the process that produced "social intelligence"; if their leaders did not have at their disposal clear, appropriate and adequate information at the crucial points where political, economic and social decisions were adopted. Information issues could no longer continue to be seen solely in a technological context, since information was not only a cultural, but also a political and social asset and should be dealt with as such in the Committee on Information.

47. It was paradoxical that in a world that was undergoing far-reaching change, with so many sophisticated techniques, that the United Nations should be continuing to communicate by means of outdated conventional methods. The technical and administrative restructuring should therefore receive general support. It was not easy to replace bureaucratic sluggishness and inertia by the necessary flexibility and the awareness for opportunities in the field of information that all DPI staff should have. What was called for was boldness in order to make the required reductions; courage in order to plan and rationalize activities with a view to avoiding duplication of effort and functions; a sense of balance and reflection in order to reach fair decisions concerning professional contributions and the need for appropriate geographical representation; and self-criticism and commitment in order to analyse and evaluate accurately the impact of campaigns and programmes. At a time when the United Nations was undergoing a serious structural, financial and credibility crisis without precedent, now more than ever the world needed a free, balanced flow of information so as to ensure that the dialogue that was so badly needed in order to achieve international harmony actually took place. The United Nations must publicize its message, since its very survival was at stake.

48. Mr. MONTGOMERY (United States of America) said that in every debate there was a text and a context. Regarding the text under consideration in the Special Political Committee (A/42/21), his delegation had stated its views explicitly in its explanation of vote at the end of the most recent session of the Committee on Information. In the broader context, the United States reaffirmed its support for the statements made by the distinguished representatives of Argentina and Denmark that freedom of information was a fundamental human right and the touchstone for all the freedoms to which the United Nations had dedicated itself.

49. The United States commitment to freedom of information, which went back over 200 years, was well known. That freedom had constantly faced new tests as political, economic and social conditions had changed. However, the freedom-of-information principle connected with freedom of the press was one of the fundamental impulses for the sustained political, economic and social growth of the United States.

50. There was a far-reaching connection between freedom of information and economic development. The United States was convinced that it was possible to proceed towards interdependence only on the basis of a free flow of information and freedom of information within countries, which were elements that could open the way for consistent and equitable growth in international ties.

51. In the current debate a variety of views on questions relating to information had been heard. States had an important role to play, through such bodies as the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunication Union, and they must be willing to co-operate with one another in standardizing postal and telecommunications rates and in allocating frequencies and orbits in such a way as to ensure access for all. Moreover, States must agree on the technical means for ensuring the free flow of information.

52. The uses and free dissemination of information could only be an evolving and continuous process. In the current debate some delegations had placed the concept of a new world information and communication order in the necessary context of such a process. It was a matter of concern to the United States that there were other delegations that were placing emphasis on the "establishment" of an order that would, by its very nature, inhibit the free flow of information.

53. The United States delegation considered regrettable the ill-defined proposal for a world-wide information programme put forward by the delegation of the Soviet Union. No useful purpose would be served by convening yet another expensive international conference to issue empty declarations on the mass media. The Soviet Union had placed its proposal within the framework of another of its ill-defined proposals, concerning the "comprehensive system of international peace and security". The title of the item in question included the word "peace" as a result of the intervention of the representative of the United Kingdom at the forty-first session of the General Assembly. In any event, it would be more appropriate to discuss any aspect of the "comprehensive system" in question in the First Committee.

(Mr. Montgomery, United States)

54. The United States, which recognized the desire of countries to develop their communications infrastructures, was active in the area of training and the provision of technical assistance, not only through government-sponsored programmes but also through the private sector.

55. The United States delegation, which had listened with great interest to the statements made by the Under-Secretary-General since the beginning of the 1987 substantive session of the Committee on Information, welcomed her commitment to revitalize the Department of Public Information. Moreover, it supported her view that it was essential to update the focus of the work of DPI to give priority to such critical issues as the role of women and African economic recovery.

56. The United States attached great importance to personnel questions but believed that the Special Political Committee was not the right place for discussing them. For example, it was regrettable that on the first day of consideration of information items, the representative of the Ukrainian SSR should have raised a specific personnel issue in the Committee. The United States urged delegations to discuss personnel issues where they belonged - in the Fifth Committee - and in the light of the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/42/636).

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.