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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

1. At its last session, in resolution 1 (XV), the Commission on Human Rights decided "to review developments affecting freedom of information, including the problems of providing technical assistance to under-developed countries in the field of information, as a regular item on its agenda".

2. At the same time, the Commission submitted to the Economic and Social Council a draft resolution on freedom of information. This was adopted by the Council at its twenty-seventh session as resolution 718 (XXVII). Under this resolution the Council requested:

1. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to undertake "a survey of the problems of providing technical assistance to under-developed countries" in the field of information, the survey to be submitted to the Commission and to the Council before the summer of 1961;
2. The Secretary-General to provide for the Commission "an annual report on developments affecting freedom of information, including the problems of providing technical assistance to under-developed countries in the field of information"; and
3. The Secretary-General to prepare, in co-operation with Member States, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and professional associations, "a substantive report, for submission to the Council in 1961, on developments in the field of freedom of information

since 1954, including in particular: (i) the news sources to which peoples have access; (ii) the extent to which they receive news of the United Nations and its specialized agencies and their work for peace; and (iii) developments in the facilities for the free flow of accurate and undistorted information into and out of under-developed countries".

3. UNESCO has since undertaken to make the "survey" as requested. As regards the "substantive report", the Secretary-General has advised the Council that he would entrust the task to a consultant and would transmit the consultant's report to the Council. He has also advised the Council that the "annual reports" would be prepared entirely on the basis of information from official sources.

4. Since both the "survey" and the "substantive report" will be completed in 1961 and since both will cover developments in the field of freedom of information during the years 1959-1960, the Secretary-General proposes that the first of the "annual reports" which he is requested to prepare should cover the year 1961 and should be presented to the Commission at its eighteenth session in 1962.

5. The Secretary-General also has the honour to inform the Commission that the Economic and Social Council, at its twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth sessions, considered the question of a draft declaration on freedom of information. By resolution 732 (XXVIII) the Council decided to accept for submission to the Governments of Member States the draft text of such a declaration (which was annexed to the resolution) and invited Member States to submit comments on (a) the desirability of the adoption by the United Nations of a declaration on freedom of information and (b) the draft text. The Secretary-General will submit a consolidated report on the comments of Governments to the Council at its twenty-ninth session.

6. At the fourteenth session of the General Assembly, the Third Committee discussed the text of the draft convention on freedom of information as formulated by a committee established under General Assembly resolution 426 (V). The Third Committee adopted the texts of the preamble and article 1 of the draft convention (A/4341), and the General Assembly in resolution 1459 (XIV) decided to give priority to consideration of the draft convention at its fifteenth session and to request the Third Committee at that session to devote as many meetings as possible to the consideration of the remaining articles of the draft convention.