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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

Report of the Special Political Committee

Rapporteur: Miss Catherine von HEIDENSTAM (Sweden)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The item entitled "Questions relating to information" was included in the provisional agenda of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly in accordance with Assembly resolution 44/50 of 8 December 1989.
2. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 21 September 1990, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include the item in its agenda and to allocate it to the Special Political Committee.
3. The Special Political Committee considered the item at its 8th to 12th, 16th and 26th meetings, held between 5 and 12 November, on 19 November and 28 November 1990 (see A/SPC/45/SR.8-12, 16 and 26).
4. The Committee had before it the following documents:
 - (a) Report of the Committee on Information; 1/
 - (b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/533).
5. At its second meeting, on 9 October, the Committee decided to establish an open-ended working group on questions relating to information to be chaired by one of the Committee's Vice-Chairmen.

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21).

6. At its 8th meeting, on 5 November, the Committee heard introductory statements by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and by the Chairman of the Committee on Information. The Director of the Liaison Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also made a statement (see A/SPC/45/SR.8).

II. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS

A. Draft resolutions A/SPC/45/L.8 and L.9

7. At the 12th meeting, on 12 November, the Chairman of the Committee on Information introduced two draft resolutions (A/SPC/45/L.8 and L.9).

8. At the same meeting, on the basis of the information provided by the Programme Planning and Budget Division, the Chairman of the Special Political Committee made an oral statement of the programme budget implications in respect of draft resolutions A/SPC/45/L.8 and L.9 (see A/SPC/45/SR.12).

9. Also, at the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolutions A/SPC/45/L.8 and L.9 without a vote (see para. 26, resolutions A and B).

10. Following the adoption of the draft resolutions, the representative of the United States made a statement (see A/SPC/45/SR.12).

B. Draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.12

11. At the 12th meeting, on 12 November, the Chairman of the Special Political Committee drew attention to a draft resolution submitted by Poland and circulated as document A/SPC/45/L.12 on 9 November 1990.

12. The draft resolution in document A/SPC/45/L.12 read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Conscious of the importance attached to questions relating to information,

"Confirming the relevant provisions of its previous resolutions 1/ relating to the opening of a United Nations information centre at Warsaw,

"Taking note of the readiness of the Government of Poland to undertake significant financial obligations in connection with the establishment and functioning of the aforementioned centre,

"Invites the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat to open a United Nations information centre at Warsaw."

^{1/} Resolutions 38/82 A of 15 December 1983, 39/98 A of 14 December 1984 and 40/164 A of 16 December 1985.

13. At the 16th meeting, on 19 November, the Chairman drew the Committee's attention to document A/SPC/45/L.15 containing the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.12.

14. At the 26th meeting, on 28 November, the representative of Poland made a statement in connection with draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.12 in view of which no action was taken on the draft resolution (see A/SPC/45/SR.26).

C. Draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.13/Rev.2

15. At the 12th meeting, on 12 November, the Chairman of the Special Political Committee drew attention to a draft resolution submitted by Yemen and circulated on 9 November as document A/SPC/45/L.13, which read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Recalling its resolutions 3535 (XXX) of 17 December 1975, 31/139 of 16 December 1976, 33/115 A to C of 18 December 1978, 34/181 and 34/182 of 18 December 1979, 35/201 of 16 December 1980, 36/149 B of 16 December 1981 and 37/94 B of 10 December 1982 on questions relating to information,

"Recalling article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1/ which provides that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, and article 29, which stipulates that these rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations,

"Recalling also articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 2/

"Recalling the 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, 3/ adopted on 28 November 1978 by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as the relevant resolutions on information and mass communications adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first and twenty-second sessions,

"1/ Resolution 217 A (III).

"2/ See resolution 2200 (XXI), annex.

"3/ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, Twentieth Session, vol. 1, Resolutions, pp. 100-104.

"Recalling also the relevant provisions of the Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace, 4/

"Conscious of the need for all countries, the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned to collaborate in the establishment of a new world information and communication order based, inter alia, on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information, guaranteeing the diversity of the sources of information and free access to information, and, in particular, of the urgent need to change the dependent status of the developing countries in the field of information and communication, as the principle of sovereign equality among nations extends also to this field, and intended also to strengthen peace and international understanding, enabling all persons to participate effectively in political, economic, social and cultural life and promoting understanding and friendship among all nations and human rights,

"Emphasizing the important role that public information plays in promoting understanding of and support for the establishment of the new international economic order and international co-operation for development,

"Emphasizing also the role that public information plays in promoting support for universal disarmament and in increasing awareness of the relationship between disarmament and development among as broad a public as possible,

"1. Invites the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat to give a favourable reply to the request of the Government of the Republic of Yemen that a United Nations information centre be established at Sanaa;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session on the implementation of the present resolution."

"4/ Resolution 33/73.

16. On 14 November 1990, a revised text of the draft resolution was circulated as document A/SPC/45/L.13/Rev.1, which read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Conscious of the importance of information in promoting human understanding,

"Taking note of the readiness of Yemen to contribute to the establishment of a United Nations information centre,

"1. Invites the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat to give a favourable reply to the request of the Government of the Republic of Yemen that a United Nations information centre be established at Sanaa;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session on the implementation of the present resolution."

17. At its 16th meeting, on 19 November, the Committee had before it a further revised text of the draft resolution, which had been circulated as document A/SPC/45/L.13/Rev.2 on 15 November 1990 and read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Conscious of the importance of information in promoting international peace and human understanding,

"Taking note of the readiness of Yemen to contribute to the establishment of a United Nations information centre,

"1. Invites the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat to give a favourable reply to the request of the Government of the Republic of Yemen that a United Nations information centre be established at Sana'a;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session on the implementation of the present resolution."

18. At the same meeting, the Chairman drew attention to document A/SPC/45/L.16 containing the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.13/Rev.2.

19. At the 26th meeting, on 28 November, the representative of Yemen made a statement in connection with draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.13/Rev.2, in view of which no action was taken on the draft resolution (see A/SPC/45/SR.26).

D. Draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.14

20. At the 16th meeting, on 19 November, the Committee had before it a draft resolution that had been submitted by Cuba on 12 November and circulated as document A/SPC/45/L.14 and which read as follows:

"World Decolonization Campaign

"The General Assembly,

"Welcoming the activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat in the major political and economic issues before the United Nations,

"Recalling the thirtieth anniversary in 1990 of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 1/

"Recalling also its resolution 43/47 of 22 November 1988, declaring the years 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism,

"Convinced of the important contribution of the United Nations to decolonization,

"Conscious of the need to adopt urgent measures, in particular in the field of public information, to promote the elimination of colonialism,

"1. Decides to launch a world decolonization campaign within the context of the steps to be undertaken for the advent of a world free from colonialism in the twenty-first century;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General, in co-ordination with the Committee on Information and the Special Committee on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and through the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, to adopt the necessary steps to launch a world decolonization campaign as a contribution to the eradication of colonialism by the year 2000;

"3. Also requests the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the present resolution to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session;

"4. Decides to include an item titled 'World Decolonization Campaign' on the agenda of its forty-seventh session."

"1/ Resolution 1514 (XV).

21. At the same meeting, the representative of Cuba made a statement in the course of which he withdrew the draft resolution contained in document A/SPC/45/L.14 (see A/SPC/45/SR.16).

E. Draft decision A/SPC/45/L.34

22. At the 16th meeting, on 19 November, the representative of Cuba, in withdrawing draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.14, put forward a proposal in the form of a recommendation from the Committee to the General Assembly, which was circulated on 21 November 1990 as a draft decision (A/SPC/45/L.34) and read as follows:

"World decolonization campaign

"The General Assembly

"Requests the Secretary-General, in implementing programme 38 on public information of the Organization's proposed medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, to take into account the need to intensify the dissemination of information on decolonization in the context of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism."

23. At the 26th meeting, on 28 November, the Chairman drew attention to document A/SPC/45/L.35 containing the programme budget implications of draft decision A/SPC/45/L.34.

24. At the same meeting, the Chairman of the Special Political Committee announced that he had been informed by the representative of Cuba that his delegation was withdrawing the draft decision contained in document A/SPC/45/L.34. In this connection, the Chairman informed the members that, following consultations among interested delegations, it had been proposed to him that the Committee take note that a number of countries had requested the Secretary-General, in implementing programme 38, Public information, of the Organization's proposed medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, to take into account the need to intensify the dissemination of information on decolonization in the context of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

25. The Committee decided to proceed accordingly.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE

26. The Special Political Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

A

Information in service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information, 2/

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, 3/

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21).

3/ A/45/533.

/...

Urges that all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all other concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources of and their free access to information, recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process", should:

(a) Co-operate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) Ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) Provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) Enhance regional efforts and co-operation among developing countries, as well as co-operation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) Aim, in addition to bilateral co-operation, at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and the media, public, private or other, in the developing countries, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and the media, public, private or other, in developing countries, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(f) Provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information, 4/

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, 5/

1. Calls upon the Secretary-General, in respect of United Nations public information policies and activities, to implement the following recommendations, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions:

(a) The United Nations system as a whole should co-operate in a concerted manner, through its information services and the co-ordination of the Joint United Nations Information Committee, in promoting a more comprehensive and realistic image of the activities and potential of the United Nations system in all its endeavours, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, with particular emphasis on the creation of a climate of confidence, the strengthening of multilateralism and the promotion of the development activities in the United Nations system;

(b) Reaffirming the primary role of the General Assembly in elaborating, co-ordinating and harmonizing United Nations policies and activities in the field of information, the Secretary-General is requested to ensure that the activities of the Department of Public Information, as the focal point of the public information

4/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21).

5/ A/45/533.

tasks of the United Nations, are strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter, the priority areas defined by the Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information, so as to ensure an objective and more coherent coverage of, as well as better knowledge about, the United Nations and its work. The Secretary-General should ensure that the Department of Public Information:

- (i) Co-operate more regularly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, especially at the working level, with a view to maximizing the contribution of the Department to the efforts of that organization;
- (ii) Enhance its co-operation with news agencies of and in the developing countries, in particular, the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, the Eco-Pool of the News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries and the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as with other news agencies and intergovernmental and regional organizations;
- (iii) Continue to disseminate, in co-ordination with the information services of other relevant agencies, information about United Nations activities pertaining, inter alia, to:
 - a. International peace and security;
 - b. Disarmament;
 - c. Peace-keeping operations;
 - d. Decolonization and the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories;
 - e. The elimination of foreign occupation;
 - f. Human rights;
 - g. The elimination of all forms of racial discrimination;
 - h. The advancement of the status of women and their role in society;
 - i. The problems of economic and social development, as well as international economic co-operation aimed at resolving external debt problems;
 - j. The least developed countries;
 - k. The environment and development;
 - l. The campaign against terrorism in all its forms, bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 40/61 of 9 December 1985;
 - m. The international fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking;

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- (iv) Do its utmost to disseminate widely and to publicize the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 6/ and the tremendous efforts of the African countries towards recovery and development, as well as the positive response by the international community to alleviate the serious economic situation prevailing in Africa;
- (v) Enhance the effectiveness of its activities and the dissemination of information on United Nations activities against the policies and practices of apartheid, giving due attention to the unilateral measures and official censorship imposed on the local and international media with regard to all aspects of that issue;
- (vi) Continue to disseminate information about activities of the United Nations directed at a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of international conflicts by exclusively peaceful means, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization;
- (vii) Continue to cover all United Nations activities pertaining to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine in particular, and current developments in that region, and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its thirteenth session, in 1991;

(c) The Department of Public Information should continue its efforts in promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations system among the peoples of the world and in strengthening the image of the United Nations system as a whole and, in this connection, it is recommended that the Secretary-General should ensure that the Department:

- (i) Continue to maintain consistent editorial independence and accuracy in reporting all the material that it produces, taking necessary measures to ensure that its output contains adequate, objective and equitable information about issues before the Organization, reflecting divergent opinions where they occur;
- (ii) In the context of the review of its role, performance and methods of work, continue to apply appropriate modern technologies for the collection, production, storage, dissemination and distribution of information materials, including the use of satellite facilities;
- (iii) Consider expanding the programme of telephone news bulletins that are paid for by its users;
- (iv) Continue its co-operation with those countries which have expressed readiness to assist the United Nations in resuming the short-wave broadcasts through their respective national networks free of charge and encourage expansion of such a type of co-operation with those developed and developing countries with recognized capabilities in this field;

6/ Resolution S-13/2, annex.

- (v) Take adequate measures to resume the taped radio programmes, which it has temporarily curtailed, if so requested by broadcasting stations;
- (vi) Continue its briefing, assistance and orientation programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries focused on United Nations-related issues;
- (vii) Provide, on the basis of its activities, information to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization about new forms of co-operation, at the regional and subregional levels, for the training of media professionals and for the improvement of the infrastructure of developing countries in the field of information and communication;
- (viii) Co-operate with educational institutions of Member States, educators and education policy-makers, informing them about United Nations activities;
- (ix) Ensure adequate daily coverage of United Nations open meetings in the two working languages of the Secretariat, reflecting the views of all delegations with accuracy and objectivity. The Department should also continue to co-operate closely with and provide assistance to members of the United Nations Correspondents' Association, taking into account their needs and requirements, especially in the area of press releases, press conferences and briefings, which provide them with basic information for reporting;
- (x) Use the official languages of the United Nations adequately in its documents and audio-visual documentation and make balanced use of the two working languages of the Secretariat;
- (xi) Ensure timely distribution of its material to subscribers and to United Nations information centres;

(d) The Department of Public Information should produce and distribute its publications in a timely manner. In particular, the Secretary-General is requested to make further efforts regarding the timely appearance of the Yearbook of the United Nations. The improvement in format and printing of the UN Chronicle is welcome. The Department is encouraged to continue to consider the interests of the specific target audiences as it formulates its editorial policies;

(e) The Secretary-General is requested to expedite his consultations regarding the provision of the appropriate technical and financial assistance to those States which are broadcasting or willing to broadcast to South Africa in order to enable their radio transmitters to be heard inside South Africa, as identified in his report, 1/ in fulfilment of the mandate of the General Assembly reflected in paragraph 1 of that report, and to report to the Committee on Information at its thirteenth session;

1/ A/44/698, paras. 35 and 36.

(f) The Secretary-General is urged to continue his efforts to secure a sound and stable financial basis for the publications Development Forum and Africa Recovery;

(g) It is recognized that United Nations information centres constitute an important means of disseminating information about the United Nations among the people of the world. In this regard, United Nations information centres should intensify direct and systematic communication exchange with local media, information and educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. The Department should arrange for periodic evaluation of the centres' activities in this regard. It should continue to co-ordinate closely with other field offices of the United Nations system, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme, in order to avoid duplication of work, taking into account the functional autonomy that the United Nations information centres should have. The Department should provide open and unhindered access by all people to all United Nations information centres and to all materials distributed through the centres. It is also urged to pursue the process of linking the remaining United Nations information centres that have not been linked with electronic mail;

(h) Stressing the need for co-ordinating the information activities of the United Nations system and recognizing the important role that the Joint United Nations Information Committee plays in that regard, the Department of Public Information is encouraged to continue its active participation in the work of that Committee;

(i) It is recognized that free distribution of materials is necessary in the public information activities of the United Nations. However, as demands increase and whenever it is desirable and possible, the Department of Public Information should actively encourage the sale of its materials;

(j) In view of the importance of radio programmes in developing countries, the Secretary-General is requested to enhance the efficiency of and to ensure full programme delivery by all regional radio units, namely, the African, Asian, Caribbean, European, Latin American and Middle Eastern Units and the Anti-Apartheid Programmes Section, including production of radio programmes called for in General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983;

(k) All reports by the Secretary-General, as well as by representatives of the Department of Public Information, to the Committee on Information and to the General Assembly, in particular on new programmes or on the expansion of existing programmes, should contain:

- (i) Detailed information on the output of the Department on each topic included in its work programme, which forms the basis of its programme budget;
- (ii) The costs of the activities undertaken on each topic;
- (iii) Adequate information on target audiences, end-use of the Department's products and analysis of feedback data received by the Department;

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- (iv) A statement detailing the priority level that the Secretary-General has attached to current or future activities of the Department in documents dealing with such activities;
- (v) The Department's evaluation of the effectiveness of its different programmes and activities, with particular reference to the need constantly to review internal programme elements and activities;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to implement the recommendations relating to the activities of the Department of Public Information in accordance with the budgetary procedures as approved by the General Assembly in its resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 42/211 of 21 December 1987, 43/213 of 21 December 1988 and 44/200 B of 21 December 1989, and taking into account the priorities set by the Assembly;

3. Also requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its thirteenth session in 1991 on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

4. Further requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session on the implementation of the present resolution;

5. Requests the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session;

6. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its forty-sixth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".
