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GENERAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
29th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 12 November 1985
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KORHONEN (Finland)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
- (b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (A/40/21)
- (b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/40/617 and 841)
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (A/40/667)

1. Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) said that the wide coverage which the events marking the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations had received in the media in almost all countries and the store of goodwill engendered by the commemorative session should serve as an occasion to begin, with the assistance of Member Governments, the media and educators, a serious informational and educative effort regarding the United Nations to attract the sustained support of world public opinion for the purposes and goals of the Organization.

2. The Department of Public Information, for its part, had, within the resources available to it, undertaken the production of a substantial number of publications, films, and radio and video programmes. By focusing on major themes concerning the activities of the Organization and providing some historical background, the Department hoped to help foster a greater understanding of the Organization.

3. The 1985 substantive session of the Committee on Information had been marked by intense debate. The differences in perception that had emerged regarding some key conceptual issues had prevented the Committee from adopting its recommendations to the General Assembly by consensus. Nevertheless, the Committee had been able to make continuing progress in the areas of its threefold mandate from the General Assembly.

4. In the context of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order, the Department's programme for the training of journalists and broadcasters, intended to initiate young people from developing countries in the latest techniques, continued to evoke wide interest. In 1985, the trainees had taken part in an eight-week training session and, in accordance with a decision of the General Assembly, had spent one of the weeks in a developing country - Yugoslavia in the current year - to familiarize themselves with the way in which news about the United Nations was received and disseminated. During their stay in Yugoslavia, the trainees had also had the opportunity to observe the activities of the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies.

5. The Department had also been able to make the necessary arrangements, in co-operation with UNESCO, for a second round table on a new world information and communication order, which was to be held in the spring of 1986 in Copenhagen and would be reported on to the Committee on Information at its 1986 substantive session. The programme of round tables, financed from extrabudgetary sources, continued to attract the attention of media representatives of the highest

(Mr. Akashi)

calibre. In the current year, a regional mass media leaders' round table had been held in Kuwait. The annual senior editors round table, regularly held at Headquarters, had just concluded. The appreciation expressed by the participants in the round tables encouraged the Department to continue the programme in 1986.

6. In pursuing its efforts to develop closer relations with the media in various countries, the Department had developed specific projects with national, regional and private media organizations. He was glad to inform the Committee that the international consortium of television organizations, Agenda for a Small Planet, was now in the concluding stage of its third phase, which would focus on disarmament and the struggle against the arms race. Twenty-four television organizations from countries of the East, West, North and South were co-operating in that enterprise under the auspices of DPI.

7. The Department had also sought, through the Development Forum and the UN Chronicle, to focus the international community's attention on the crisis in Africa, and had been co-operating closely with the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa. Similarly, the Radio and Visual Services were providing wide coverage in their programmes. The United Nations information centres throughout the world had been instructed to explain the dimensions of the crisis. In view of the high priority assigned by the General Assembly to that task, some of the Department's planned projects had had to be suspended or postponed.

8. At its recent meeting in Rome on 9 April 1985, the Joint United Nations Information Committee had given priority to discussion of the critical situation in Africa. The organizations concerned had reported on the activities they had undertaken, and agreement had been reached on a number of approaches to guide future work.

9. The Department had continued to improve the planning, monitoring and evaluation of its activities, including computerization in order to facilitate analysis and retrieval, and it had improved its data-collection procedures. The review of the distribution of taped radio programmes produced by the Department, on which a report had been submitted, had proved helpful in improving the production and distribution of radio programmes. While periodic evaluation would enable the effectiveness of activities to be enhanced, the Department would try to strike a balance between the cost of the evaluation and the advantages to be derived from it. The important thing for it was to achieve a greater awareness of the end use of its products and the audiences it addressed.

10. The Department would also carry out an evaluation of the six-month experiment in conducting daily short-wave radio broadcasts from Headquarters, and it hoped to submit the results of the evaluation to the Committee on Information in 1986.

11. The restructuring of the Radio and Visual Services Division, dealt with in document A/40/841, should also make it possible to create a better balance among the various divisions of the Department and to rationalize its work. The restructuring would not require any additional resources, and it was proposed to delay its implementation until 1 January 1987 in order to develop fully the schedule and procedures.

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(Mr. Akashi)

12. The activities of the United Nations information centres world wide continued to attract lively interest. The United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta had reopened in August 1985. The appointment of a full-time Director for the Information Centre in Bujumbura had been confirmed, and consultations regarding the appointment of a Director in Yaoundé were well advanced. Consultations with the Governments of Benin and Poland regarding the opening of United Nations information centres in their respective countries through the redeployment of existing resources had continued satisfactorily, and a progress report on the matter would be submitted to the Committee on Information at its 1986 substantive session.

13. The General Assembly had underlined the intrinsic functions of United Nations information centres as distinct from the operational activities of the United Nations system for development. At the same time, it had called upon the United Nations information centres to disseminate information about the activities of the Organization in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly, which included economic and social information. The Department had therefore sought to strengthen co-operation and co-ordination between the offices of UNDP and its own information centres and had established systematic consultations and guidelines for that purpose.

14. The General Assembly and the Committee on Information had repeatedly stressed the need to strengthen the role of DPI as the focal point for information activities of the United Nations and had discouraged the establishment of new informational units outside DPI. The Department had been unable to complete the report on that subject requested by the General Assembly, and the consultations on various aspects of the question were being pursued in the Secretariat.

15. Concerted efforts had enabled the Department to control budgetary growth, and the Department's proposed biennial budget for 1986-1987 showed a negative growth of 3 per cent, but in order to meet the priorities established by the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies, the Department must maintain a certain flexibility and discretion in redeploying its resources.

16. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the Committee's discussion of the item under consideration would not entail a greater ideological polarization, but rather a determination to reach a common understanding in the interests of all.

17. Mr. SCHLEGAL (German Democratic Republic), introducing the report of the Committee on Information in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, said that part III dealt with the results of the substantive session of the Committee which had been held from 17 June to 5 July and on 29 August 1985. The report gave a summary of the positions voiced by member States and by organizations during the debates and contained 70 recommendations to the General Assembly which the Committee had adopted by a large majority.

18. The recommendations relating to the promotion of a new world information and communication order were the most significant and the most controversial because, in the view of a number of States members of the Committee, they did not correspond to the decisions adopted by consensus in UNESCO.

(Mr. Schlegal, German Democratic Republic)

19. The recommendations attached equal importance to the principle of free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information and to the principle of the sovereign equality of States and the strengthening of peace and international understanding.
20. It paid tribute to the activities of UNESCO in the clarification, elaboration and application of the concept of a new world information and communication order and stressed the equal importance of UNESCO resolutions 4/19 and 3.1, which had been adopted by the General Conference at its twenty-first and twenty-second sessions.
21. Many recommendations stressed the need to promote the access of the developing countries to modern communication technology. The entire United Nations system was called upon to assist the developing countries, in accordance with their interests and needs, in the field of information. In that connection, a report of the Secretary-General on the contributions of UNDP, UNESCO, the International Programme for the Development of Communication and ITU in support of the development of information and communication infrastructure in the developing countries had been submitted to the Committee on Information. The Department of Public Information was asked to continue its co-operation with the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies of those countries.
22. A number of recommendations stressed the Department's role as the focal point of United Nations activities in the field of information. They requested the Department, inter alia, to promote teaching in the educational institutions of Member States about the structure, principles and purposes of the Organization in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. The Department was also requested to use the official languages of the General Assembly adequately in its audio-visual and other materials.
23. Maintenance of the functions of the Middle East and Arabic Unit in producing television and radio programmes for Arab countries was also recommended.
24. Other recommendations dealt with United Nations information centres. Note was taken of the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/75) concerning measures to improve their effectiveness and to intensify communication exchange with local information and educational communities in a mutually beneficial way. It was recommended that efforts be pursued to establish information centres in Benin and the Polish People's Republic.
25. Lastly, the Department was requested to incorporate in its future reports more adequate information on the cost of its activities, target audiences, the end-use of its products and the analysis of feedback data received.
26. Despite strenuous efforts and prolonged consultations, it had not been possible to reach a consensus on those recommendations because of the different approaches and divergent views which had emerged with regard to the question of international exchanges of information and the establishment of a new international information order. Nevertheless, 64 out of 70 recommendations had been adopted by all the members of the Working Group.

(Mr. Schlegal, German Democratic Republic)

27. The problems related mainly to the conceptualization of future tasks in the establishment of a new international information order, the responsibility of the media for the content of their broadcasts, coverage of United Nations activities aimed at the implementation of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine, the building up of the press and radio services in the French language and the restructuring of the Radio and Visual Services Division.

28. It was to be hoped that the decisions adopted at the recent session of the UNESCO General Conference in Sofia would be carried out by all Member States. Those decisions related to an entire package of issues and represented a balanced compromise. It would be regrettable to single out certain formulations and make consensus contingent upon their adoption. Only through patient co-operation and conciliation could the problem of the constant expansion of international exchanges of information be solved. The Special Political Committee, the Committee on Information and even UNESCO would only live up to the expectations placed on them if they developed and implemented the requisite measures to redress the current imbalance in flows of information and achieved equal co-operation in that field.

29. Mr. KANDIL (Director, Division of Free Flow of Information and Communication Policies, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), noted that the twenty-third General Conference of UNESCO had ended on 9 November 1985, two days ahead of schedule, owing to the spirit of consensus which had prevailed. However the Conference had unfortunately been deprived, for the first time in its history, of the wisdom and imagination of one of its founding members; moreover, two other members had served notice of withdrawal from UNESCO.

30. UNESCO had recently been the object of criticism, but it was only fair to say that it had also gained the support of a number of intellectual, artistic and cultural groups from around the world, such as the "Americans for the Universality of UNESCO" committee, the "Keep Britain in UNESCO" movement, and the signatories of the "Dakar Appeal", the Latin American manifesto and the "Madrid Appeal". The unique place of UNESCO as a permanent source of ideas, initiatives, debate, dialogue and mutual enrichment continued to be reaffirmed, especially in the area of communication, which was by nature controversial and charged with ideological connotations.

31. At the latest General Conference, as at previous ones, there had been no attempt to avoid the problems and contradictions, and all parties had stressed the need to continue the exchanges of views in UNESCO and had reaffirmed their commitment to UNESCO. Accordingly, all the major programmes, including the programme "Communication in the service of man", had been approved by consensus. The last-mentioned programme was a good illustration of the constantly evolving nature of the process which provided the basis for the aspiration, once again voiced during the Conference, for a new world information and communication order.

32. While requesting UNESCO to enhance co-operation in the area of study and reflection and not to become an ordinary technical assistance agency, member States had expressed their strong will to intensify UNESCO's role in the development of the communication capacities of the developing countries. For example, 90 per cent of all funds allocated to communication for 1986-1987 were devoted to operational

(Mr. Kandil)

activities for development of infrastructures and human resources. When the generous extrabudgetary contributions made mainly by the industrialized countries were added to the resources of the regular programme, the programmes undertaken by UNESCO represented more than \$35 million over the next two years.

33. It must be noted, however, that only \$5 million came under the IPDC Special Account, which had already financed 147 projects. It was clear, therefore, that IPDC needed a larger budget. On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, he thanked those who had contributed to IPDC or who planned to do so and noted that Zimbabwe had announced a contribution of \$10,000 to the Special Account and that 25 of the 34 member States which had contributed to the Special Account were developing countries. If a similar effort was made by the more advantageously placed countries, IPDC would have a more secure financial basis which would enable it to finance not only large and complex projects but also smaller pilot projects suited to the needs of groups and communities, such as the Kheda project in India, which had received the IPDC-UNESCO Prize for Rural Communication.

34. While the more privileged nations of the North were experiencing a proliferation of communications technology of increasing sophistication and were suffering, if that was the word, from information overdose, many developing countries were still compelled to request support for their rural press. That clear imbalance, which was a source of deep concern for the developing countries and for the smaller nations of the North striving to keep pace with technological developments and their implications, must be corrected. The Director-General of UNESCO had therefore attached great importance to this problem in part III of his report. UNESCO would continue, as part of its programme, to study the social and cultural effects of the new communication technologies, in which some 300 research institutes around the world had expressed an interest. The General Conference had also decided to include in the project a study of the legal and economic implications.

35. The General Conference had also approved a proposal from Sri Lanka based on the resolutions adopted at the Conference of the Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries held at Jakarta in 1984, which provided for UNESCO to contribute to the establishment of a system of information and data exchange among the institutions of developing countries concerned with the development and application of modern communications technologies. UNESCO would also contribute, in co-operation with a number of satellite systems, to the establishment of the new technologies needed for increasing access to satellite communication systems.

36. Those were only some examples of the activities approved by the General Conference. Within a year the world would witness the launching of the first direct broadcast satellites, which would have profound consequences for every individual. By compressing space and time, the satellites would help to bring peoples, continents and cultures closer together, promote the exchange of information and ideas and transform the modalities of inter-State relations. That exchange would not only develop in terms of quantity and quality, but would also have an unprecedented ubiquity and vitality, as well as a powerful impact. Unfortunately, instead of unfolding in an atmosphere of justice and interdependence, direct broadcast satellites might emerge in skies all too often

(Mr. Kandil)

clouded by suspicion, misunderstanding, cultural ethnocentricity and a desire to dominate. While it might be dangerous to take a conspiracy view of new technologies, it would be irresponsible, even suicidal, for developing and developed countries not to make enlightened decisions with regard to the introduction, planning and use of new communication technologies, or not to assess their implications for the individual and society.

37. He therefore welcomed the decision taken by the Administrative Council of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) at its fortieth session to set up a centre for telecommunications development, in accordance with the recommendations of the ITU Commission for World-Wide Telecommunications Development. Without the work of the ITU Commission, the work of UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, no doubt like that of the United Nations Committee on Information also, would not have been complete.

38. The General Conference of UNESCO had once more stressed the importance of the co-operation between ITU and the other agencies of the United Nations system which had led to joint operations for the establishment of communications infrastructures, one example of which was the project for the development of broadcasting services carried out in Bangladesh. The two agencies had drawn up a report containing proposals for the reduction of telecommunications tariffs for the developing countries. UNESCO was at present producing a feasibility study, in co-operation with ITU and regional organizations in Africa, for a regional African satellite communication system.

39. A new project, which was being planned by ITU and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) but which also involved other United Nations agencies, concerned the preparation of a largely statistical and descriptive periodic report on the state of communication in the world. That was an extremely important initiative which met an urgent need: the provision of more comprehensive data on existing communication needs and resources, so as to offer a more solid base for activities in that area.

40. As for the United Nations itself, UNESCO had recently participated with the Division of Outer Space Affairs in a study of educational television programmes broadcast by satellite, and it had enjoyed, as always, the full collaboration of the Department of Public Information. He was convinced that the second round table on a new world information and communication order would produce as positive results as the first one. If the General Assembly so wished, UNESCO would be ready to co-operate with the United Nations in organizing a third round table in 1987. That proposal had not been endangered by the reduction of UNESCO's budget by 25 per cent as a result of the withdrawal of one of its member States. The Special Account for Voluntary Contributions, opened to finance activities endangered by the budgetary restrictions, had already received a number of contributions, the most recent being one of \$580,000 announced by Spain at the closing meeting of the General Conference.

41. Over and above its effects on programmes and staff, the above-mentioned withdrawal would have the more important consequence of undermining the universality of UNESCO. He was, however, convinced that the virulent attacks

(Mr. Kandil)

against the organization were now more groundless than ever and that the effort made, particularly by the General Conference, to ensure its plurality and efficiency had been successful. UNESCO, moreover, could take pride in having undertaken in so short a time a process of reform never before witnessed in the United Nations system.

42. As the Director-General had noted in his introduction to the general debate of the Conference, UNESCO, as a forum for communication among men, was a complex, sensitive and therefore vulnerable mechanism. Yet that vulnerability, which resulted from its receptiveness to the world around it, was in the long term its strength. The Director-General had urged the Conference to make the session a moment of truth, courage and imagination in which the international community could find new reasons to believe in itself and to have hope in its future. The General Conference had ended two years of speculation, given clear answers to the questions raised and confirmed the trust which the world had placed not only in UNESCO, but in the United Nations system, humanity's last bastion against world conflict.

43. Communication in itself was doubtless neither good nor bad; it was not, however, neutral. It could inflame the conflict, but it could also help to preserve peace, establish justice and promote human rights.

44. On the eve of 1986, the International Year of Peace, the world must call upon its responsible journalists to decide for themselves how best to work towards those objectives. For it was by enjoying freedom and independence and by defending the integrity of their profession that journalists could place communication in the service of man.

45. Mr. NOWAK (Poland) said that during the current period of tension the success or failure of the establishment of a peaceful international order in a world of development in diversity would also depend on the behaviour of States and of the various participants in international life in the field of information and communication. His delegation was concerned at the way in which international relations were deformed by information that was slanted and biased, insidiously stereotyped, unbalanced and sometimes defamatory (as in the case of certain inadmissible malicious media campaigns) which, by giving a false and distorted picture of the situation in certain countries and of their policies, was a source of lasting misperceptions and was contrary to the Charter. That phenomenon required countermeasures, in particular, the promotion of a freer flow of information, with due regard to the principles of non-interference and sovereignty; in other words, the flow of information should be based on the norms of international law. In that regard, the regional solutions elaborated at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe merited particular attention.

46. A concentrated international effort should be made to promote mutual understanding, trust and the dissemination of objective information. Those conditions were indispensable not only for economic development but also for social and cultural progress, without which the strengthening of national cultural identity, a notion particularly dear to the Polish nation, could not be achieved. The promotion of a new, more just and more effective information and communication order offered the international community an opportunity to develop various forms and means of co-operation on a global scale.

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(Mr. Nowak, Poland)

47. Poland was among the countries which were concerned by the significant imbalance currently existing in the flow of information, a problem which affected primarily the developing countries as a result of the monopoly exercised by the Western media, but which also existed, in a somewhat different form, between East and West. The news coverage of socialist countries often tended to be sensationalist and one-sided, ignoring the real problems of their economic, social and cultural progress. Unless there was a change in that trend, the effects of television broadcasting by satellite might be particularly damaging.

48. Information should be based on freedom of expression and the accompanying responsibilities, as defined in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, by which the news media, in particular the press and individual journalists, were morally bound.

49. In reply to those who felt that the notion of responsibility might be used as a pretext to control or limit the flow of information, he wished to say that it did not necessarily mean censorship and restrictions on the media. What he asked was that freedom of information, which no doubt was one of the fundamental human rights, should be "exercised fairly and tempered with responsibility", to use the words of Ambassador Moreno-Salcedo of the Philippines. It therefore followed that the search for a new information and communication order, a task which was primarily the responsibility of UNESCO but in which the United Nations had an important role to play, should be based on three fundamental notions: freedom, justice and responsibility. The last-mentioned should also embrace the role of the news media in maintaining peace, détente and understanding among nations, in accordance with the UNESCO Declaration of 1978.

50. Poland, which supported the efforts of developing countries to eliminate the imbalances in the flow of information, was ready, within its modest possibilities, to develop co-operation with their news media. He stressed the need to maintain the balance between all the postulates of the new information order, in the interest of all members of the international community.

51. His Government had studied attentively the report of the Committee on Information, and it approved all of the recommendations. It was unfortunate that several delegations had seen fit to break the consensus achieved after strenuous effort. Qualifying the new information order as a "continuous and evolving process" posed a special problem. While it was true that such an order could not be founded exclusively on relations among States, as the right to communicate belonged to all, the normative approach could not, however, be simply excluded. His delegation was convinced that it was still possible and necessary to find a common denominator between those two positions and put aside ideological differences in order to focus on areas of possible compromise. It was fallacious to accuse the Committee, as certain delegations did each year in order to evade a number of basic problems, of politicizing its work: far from being a purely technical issue, information was closely related to political realities.

52. The report of the Director-General of UNESCO (A/40/667) was extremely helpful in that it enabled the Committee to make the activities of the United Nations and of UNESCO in that field complementary to each other. Poland was of the view that

(Mr. Nowak, Poland)

the tougher policy of the United States and some of its allies towards UNESCO, a policy that was mainly politically motivated, might be detrimental to international co-operation within the United Nations and hoped that goodwill and common sense would prevail, as the spirit of compromise had prevailed at Sofia.

53. His delegation had studied the report of the Secretary-General (A/40/617) thoroughly and approved of it. It was satisfied with the work of the Department of Public Information, carried out under severe budgetary restrictions, in conformity with the priorities established by the General Assembly, and in particular with the manner in which it had publicized the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations, International Youth Year and the International Year of Peace.

54. Poland was interested in further expanding its co-operation with the United Nations information services in various fields, particularly television and the graphic arts, and in continuing its working contacts with the Department of Public Information with a view to the establishment of an information centre at Warsaw.

55. Mr. ABOUCHAER (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country, a member of the Committee on Information and of the Group of Developing Countries, and as such sharing the difficulties and aspirations of those countries, had been able to make an effective and constructive contribution to the Committee's work.

56. The discussions in the Committee on Information had clearly shown that an overwhelming majority of delegations approved the establishment of a new world information and communication order and were aware of the need to put an end to the dependence of developing countries in the information field. The developing countries rejected the current order, which was based on the maintenance by Western press agencies of a stranglehold on the distribution of information and data and improper action by the media in misrepresenting facts and spotlighting the sensational. Those Western information systems were engaged in a violent press campaign against the United Nations and were making unfounded allegations against UNESCO in order to justify their own aggressive stance and their refusal to take part in the collective efforts of the overwhelming majority of Member States. Under those conditions, the establishment of a new world information and communication order now seemed no more than an ambitious dream.

57. Telling developing countries that they did not understand the freedom of the press with respect to Governments, and that Governments were not responsible for the information media, was acting in bad faith, since the Western media were merely the mirror and, in the final analysis, the mouthpiece of specific ideological and political stances. The Western countries had the responsibility for their international relations and their policies and therefore could not disassociate themselves from the effects of negative information on those relations and policies. Furthermore, it was unacceptable that the information media should, under the cloak of the freedom of the press, undermine mutual trust and prejudice the dignity, culture, ideals and fundamental rights of peoples.

58. The Syrian Arab Republic once more declared its total support for the positions taken by the delegations of the developing countries during the deliberations of the Committee on Information. It approved without reservation the

(Mr. Abouchaer, Syrian Arab Republic)

Committee's 70 recommendations, as contained in the report (A/40/21), which his delegation had helped to draft as a member of the Working Group set up for the purpose.

59. The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirmed its support for the establishment of a new world information and communication order intended to strengthen international peace and security, called upon all developing countries to increase co-operation in the exchange of information and the improvement of basic infrastructure, and stressed the need to work towards the elimination of the developing countries' dependence in that field.

60. UNESCO was playing a primary role in the preparation of the new world information and communication order. The International Programme for the Development of Communication was an important step in that direction. The Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the high degree of co-operation between the United Nations and UNESCO secretariats and the part played in that respect by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information.

61. Like all delegations from developing countries, his delegation attached a very high degree of importance to the principle of equitable geographical distribution in appointments to the Department of Public Information. In view of the special nature of the Department's duties and the way in which its staff was at present constituted, it was no longer possible to wait, as requested in paragraph 115 of the Committee's report, for equitable geographical balance to be attained on a Secretariat-wide basis. The statistics given in document A/AC.198/86 admittedly showed that some progress had been made, but those figures were too general to reflect the situation existing in a number of departments, where Westerners evidently continued to predominate. His delegation approved the Under-Secretary-General's pledge to achieve an equitable geographical distribution which was consonant with the highest standards of professional competence, efficiency and integrity required from officials.

62. The Syrian Arab Republic supported the work of the Department of Public Information, in particular in the following priority fields: international peace and security, disarmament, peace-keeping operations, decolonization, strengthening of human rights, the effort to eliminate racism and racial discrimination, the establishment of a new international economic order and a new world information and communication order, and the work of the United Nations Council for Namibia. It attached particular importance to the dissemination of information on Israeli policies and practices that had repercussions on the human rights of the people living in the occupied Arab territories, such as those preventing the Palestinian people from exercising their national, legitimate and inalienable rights, and it requested the Department of Public Information to continue and develop its activities in that area and in other similar fields, such as the struggle against apartheid and the practices of the South African racist régime.

63. The Syrian Arab Republic called again for implementation of the recommendation on the strengthening and expansion of the Middle East and Arabic Radio Unit as a producer of Arabic radio and television programmes. The Syrian delegation regretted that there had been no development of such programmes and hoped that the

(Mr. Abouchaer, Syrian Arab Republic)

situation could be remedied in order to allow the Middle East and Arabic Unit to accomplish its task effectively.

64. With regard to the proposal to divide the Radio and Visual Services Division in two, his delegation considered that implementation of that proposal should be delayed, not to the date mentioned in paragraph 12 of document A/40/841, but until the Committee on Information had considered all aspects of the proposal and made a clear and specific recommendation in the matter. In any event, the Radio Service and the Visual Service should continue to collaborate on the production of programmes in Arabic. The delegation also reiterated the need to keep the Middle East and Arabic Radio Unit a single entity.

65. With regard to the adoption of recommendations by the Committee on Information, his delegation noted that, for the first time, there had been a departure from the rule of consensus. It was clear from paragraphs 22 to 25 of the Committee's report, that the failure to comply with that established practice was due to the negative attitude of the group of Western countries, which had not hesitated to set a precedent, had assumed a right of veto, even with respect to the recommendations in whose preparation they had taken part, and had neglected the most basic rules of democracy, such as the law of majority. Under those conditions, the Group of 77 would have done better to maintain its positions of principle, without making any concession to countries which did not see beyond their narrow egoistical interests and disregarded the legitimate interests and aspirations of the developing countries. Politicization was an argument that in reality only served to prevent references to national liberation struggles, in particular that of the Palestinian people, and the question of the occupied Arab territories. The Syrian delegation hoped that the recommendations and resolutions on the subject would be adopted by the Committee without a vote.

66. In conclusion, his delegation reaffirmed the need to support the Department of Public Information and to provide it with the additional resources it needed to strengthen its activities and effectively play its part as the co-ordinating centre for United Nations information activities.

67. Mr. SIMENI (Nigeria) asked whether, in view of its importance, the text of the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information could be distributed to delegations.

68. Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) said that he would be pleased to arrange for copies of the statement to be distributed but that distribution in the other official languages of the Organization would have financial implications.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.