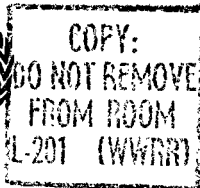




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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
30th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 13 November 1985
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KORHONEN (Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

- (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. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would first see a film entitled "Why?", produced by the Department of Public Information for the Organization's fortieth anniversary, and would then hear those delegations which wished to speak on item 78

2. Mr. OTT (German Democratic Republic) said that never since 1945 had the international situation been as tense and dangerous as it was now. The mass media had an essential contribution to make to the search for solutions for preventing a nuclear catastrophe. Through their rapidly growing influence on the thinking and behaviour of people, they could promote policies of peace and disarmament, provided that they were not misused for the opposite ends.

3. Questions of information and communication had become an integral part of international relations and it was vital, therefore, that the purposes and principles of the Charter should be respected in that field also, and that an international code should be established which would govern the new potential of information and communication. They should, inter alia, respect the principles of non-interference, self-determination and the sovereign equality of nations. The doctrine of the free flow of information could only intensify existing relationships of dependency, since it extended to the information and communications field the principle of the law of the strongest which ruled in the so-called free market economies.

4. By participating in the bodies which dealt with questions of information and communication, his country was seeking to make a substantial contribution to the establishment of a new world information and communication order, free of inequality and injustice, under which all States would be able to preserve their national integrity and cultural identity as equal participants in the international exchange of information.

5. His delegation whole-heartedly endorsed the recommendations adopted by the Committee on Information at its substantive session, over which a representative of his country had presided. Unfortunately, those recommendations had not been supported by certain States. Perhaps their insistence on a particular formula had been no more than a pretext to veil their negative attitude towards essential passages of the document.

6. Since the work of the Department of Public Information was governed by the

(Mr. Ott, German Democratic Republic)

- resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other United Nations bodies, its information policies and activities must reflect the priorities set in those resolutions, while making the best possible use of existing resources and skills. Those who wanted the United Nations to improve its communications systems should perhaps be reminded that the most advanced and costly technologies did not automatically give the best results. Moreover, funds were necessarily limited.
7. A solution to the problem of a more equitable geographical distribution of posts in the Department of Public Information had yet to be found. The socialist countries for instance, including his own, were still considerably under-represented and that imbalance should be corrected.
8. Turning to UNESCO, which had recently held the twenty-third session of its General Conference in Sofia, he said that its activities should be in conformity with its Constitution and the guidelines embodied in its second medium-term plan. By adopting its decisions by consensus, UNESCO could contribute to a new world information and communication order. In that connection, his delegation supported the comments in the recommendations of the Committee on Information regarding UNESCO's activities. The resolution to be prepared on that question should acknowledge UNESCO's contribution to the formulation of conceptual foundations for a new world information and communication order, without any one-sided interpretation of the provisions contained in UNESCO documents.
9. He noted that the vast potential offered by satellite communications technology was threatened by the Strategic Defence Initiative. The orbiting of anti-satellite and anti-missile weapons would make the peaceful exploration and use of outer space impossible. His delegation therefore supported the proposal of the Soviet Union regarding the main lines and principles of international co-operation in the peaceful exploitation of outer space under conditions of non-militarization.
10. Mr. GONZALEZ MANET (Cuba), after reviewing the background of the various UNESCO instruments or programmes in the information field, including the new world information and communication order and the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), said that the decolonization of information was not the isolated aim of a group of radical countries but the major objective of more than 100 countries belonging to the Group of 77 and the Movement of Non-aligned Countries.
11. Mankind was standing on the threshold of a new era. Far-reaching changes in the social, economic and cultural fields would give birth to new forms of civilization, new methods of production and hitherto unimagined resources. Powerful means would be available for solving age-old problems of ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment. Such a development could come to pass, however, only if clearly-defined policies were adopted and all society's forces harnessed to change the existing structures. The adoption of new technologies did not have material dimensions alone. Society as a whole must be prepared for the advent of a revolutionary way of life - whether through educational reform or the restructuring of development strategies.

(Mr. Gonzalez Manet, Cuba)

12. As the Director-General of UNESCO had stated, at a conference on information policies and strategies held in Spain in May 1978, the dangers of the new communications technologies, resulting primarily from the way in which they were used, might even undermine national sovereignty. By giving that kind of warning, UNESCO had come under criticism from some countries. At a time when disparities between the regions were escalating dangerously - witness the colossal foreign debt of the third world - the new communications technologies were jeopardizing the very existence of the rules of law and the democratic nature of international relations. Those concerns were reflected in the documents before the Committee, in the report of the Committee on Information and in the statements of delegations at the twenty-third General Conference of UNESCO, which had sought, despite the pressure to which it was subjected, to promote the necessary reforms in that field in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

13. The crucial problem was not one of simply purchasing technology but of the right to information as a factor in autonomous development. Appropriate political decision-making depended on it. It was vital to the functioning of the machinery of State, even to respect for sovereignty, to be able to draw up national policies that provided for access to genuinely objective information.

14. The opposition of the Western countries to the new information order was readily explained, therefore. Yet there could be no question of returning to the colonial authoritarianism of the nineteenth century. A neo-Fascist strategy aimed at consolidating the position of the transnational corporations, which were the world's real power centres, was beginning to emerge very clearly. The Western countries were seeking to condemn three quarters of mankind to a passive existence, while the transnational corporations constructed for their own use an information order designed to protect their interests. The cultural identity and the very existence of societies in many countries was threatened by such complex forms of neo-colonialism, which were rendered far more dangerous by their global and totalitarian character. It was not partisan positions, therefore, but specific threats which had motivated the adoption of the new information order. In his statement to the Committee, Mr. Kandil, Director of UNESCO's Division of Free Flow of Information and Communications Policies, had described the consequences that the launching of the first satellite for the direct transmission of information would undoubtedly have on relations between States. The developing countries would be well advised, he had said, to reach appropriate decisions with regard to the use of new telecommunication technologies after taking their social consequences duly into account. The representative of Belgium to the twenty-third General Conference of UNESCO had made a statement in which she said that there was a risk, if not of a complete monopoly by the wealthier States or the largest international corporations, at least of a tendency for the economically, linguistically or demographically less important countries to find themselves locked into the situation of passive buyers or consumers. A report issued by the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, entitled "Policy analysis and research: the role of transnational corporations in transborder data flows" (E/C.10/1984/14), made no mention of risks of that kind, which could affect even countries like Belgium.

(Mr. Gonzalez Manet, Cuba)

15. A study by Professor Andrew Robertson of the London Polytechnic and the University of Sussex, entitled "Technological innovations and their social impacts" and published in the International Social Science Journal (vol. 33, No. 3, 1981) warned against the consequences of technical innovations such as microelectronics and telecommunications, arguing that they must be matched by social innovations. Science 85, a recent publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, was devoted to 25 discoveries which were going to revolutionize present ways of life. Such transformations would have a marked effect in all areas, especially in politics: on self-determination, for example, and on development strategies, national education policies, communication, culture, etc. In view of the attempts to paralyse the process of information decolonization and prevent communication from becoming a vital element in the new international economic order, it was difficult not to believe that the developing countries were the object of a conspiracy. Countries which practiced State terrorism against international organizations, i.e., against a body of countries, were hardly justified in disputing the credibility of UNESCO or the United Nations. A powerful country like the United States which encouraged Cuban expatriates to take part in psychological warfare against Cuba could hardly inspire confidence or claim to be promoting the strengthening of good-neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes among States. In document A/40/323, his Government had made its position clear concerning subversive broadcasting by Radio Martí. Such broadcasts were a waste of time and money, although they did help to strengthen the unity of the Cuban people and inform it about the nature of imperialism and its methods.

16. That explained the importance of the role of the Committee on Information in considering questions which were far from being exclusively technical in nature. Despite the great difficulties impeding consensus as well as the future work of the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information, the Group of 77 had been trying since June 1985 to overcome the differences in the Committee and to deal effectively with concrete problems, as could be seen from the recommendations adopted. As in many other situations, his country would not fail to make its contribution to achieving balanced agreements.

17. Mr. BAALI (Algeria) said that information, far from being the communication for which mankind had always felt the need, had now become a propaganda tool and an instrument of alienation and domination in the hands of the strongest, who sought to impose their own values on other people.

18. The present information order was a profoundly unjust one owing to the total domination exercised by a few press and television barons, a domination which exacerbated the state of dependence of the countries of the third world, whose very identity and values were threatened. The prodigious development of information, telematics and satellite communications benefited a small number who had total control over the whole of the market and directed the world's technological destiny as it saw fit. In those circumstances the new world information and communication order remained a priority despite the virulent criticism to which it was subjected. The press of one country pedalled the belief that the new order was a

(Mr. Baali, Algeria)

huge conspiracy against democratic values and the freedom of the press, and it asserted the tendentious notion that the new order had been imposed by an automatic majority of "non-democratic States". Nevertheless, the need to replace the present order with a new order based on justice and equity had been recognized by all the members of UNESCO, as could be seen from the adoption by consensus of resolution 4/19.

19. Furthermore, in the name of the principles of free competition, the small press agencies of the third-world countries had been invited to compete with the big Western agencies, under the pretext of reducing the disparities between developing and developed countries and establishing plurality and diversity of information sources and circuits.

20. But what the countries of the third world had always claimed was a juster and more balanced flow of information between North and South which would enable them to be informed objectively and not fed the traditional neo-colonialist or paternalistic clichés. They also asked for a more active role in the management and restructuring of the information world, which implied that generous efforts should be made to develop their information capacities and that their profound aspirations for justice and equity should be taken into account. And they asked for respect for the identity, values and genius of every people, the sum of which constituted civilization.

21. That was why for some years now the developing countries had been establishing coherent national information and communication policies and trying to acquire the necessary structures. Young national agencies, still fragile and vulnerable, had joined together at the regional and continental levels, thus enhancing the exchanges among the countries of the South. The Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies had given a new boost to co-operation and harmonization among the agencies of the non-aligned countries and therefore deserved to be encouraged and strengthened.

22. If those efforts were to succeed, they must be supported by three kinds of action on the part of the Western and the socialist countries. First of all, the technical and financial assistance which those countries gave to the agencies and groups of agencies of the third-world countries must be increased. Secondly, structural reforms must be made in the area of information to produce more democratic management of the production and circulation of information, a more equitable redistribution of radio frequencies, renegotiation of communication tariffs, which were still excessively high, and easier access on reasonable terms to communication satellites and new technologies. Lastly, genuine co-operation must be established between North and South.

23. Such efforts must be linked with those of the United Nations and other international organizations with a view to establishing an atmosphere of trust; his delegation stressed the role played by UNESCO in promoting the establishment of a new world information and communication order guaranteeing everyone the right to communicate in freedom and dignity. The International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) also did useful work.

(Mr. Baali, Algeria)

24. The United Nations Department of Public Information had an essential role to play in promoting dialogue and strengthening the press agencies of the third world. His delegation welcomed the existing co-operation in that area and hoped that it would be continued and become more systematic with regard to the training of journalists.
25. One of the most important tasks of the Department of Public Information was to make the Organization's achievements and its vital contribution to peace and development better known. The United Nations information centres were a useful tool for promoting a balanced and objective image of the Organization, especially on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary.
26. His delegation also reaffirmed its support for Development Forum and the World Newspaper Supplement, which published objective information about the efforts of young nations to take up the challenges confronting them. It was regrettable that the Committee on Information had not been able to adopt its recommendations by consensus owing to the insistence of one regional group on a certain wording and its categorical opposition to a number of vital elements. The Algerian delegation, which had been involved in the conciliation efforts of the Group of 77, was sorry that intransigence had prevailed over the spirit of openness and compromise. It hoped that the Committee would regain its cohesion and unity.
27. The new world information and communication order could become a reality only by the common will. His delegation therefore appealed to all States to seek together, true to the purposes and principles of the Charter, the means of reducing differences and injustices and to work resolutely for the establishment of a society of peace, progress and justice.
28. Mr. PAPUCIU (Albania) said that a non-discriminatory exchange of information could really serve the cause of peace, friendship and understanding among peoples. The achievements of the scientific and technological revolution could have made the development of such an exchange possible, had the developing countries not come up against the information monopoly exercised by the United States and the Soviet Union, which inundated the world with a colossal amount of news encouraging violence, despair and immorality and used their technological advantage to impose their views and filter information as they saw fit.
29. Under the guise of assistance, the two imperialist super-Powers were now attacking national cultures and seeking to repudiate values opposed to their expansion and hegemonism. The attitude of the United States towards UNESCO was explicit in that regard. Ideological pressures in the field of information were, moreover, the prelude to military aggression.
30. Sovereign peoples who cherished freedom and independence were not so easily duped, however. Nor could they tolerate those hegemonistic and neo-colonialist practices, and they were endeavouring to oppose them by promoting their national cultural values. In a desire to establish an equitable exchange of information which served the noble goals of humanity, they were seeking to develop their own information services.

(Mr. Papuciu, Albania)

31. The dissemination of information must be based on the principles of mutual benefit and non-interference. Albania, which had been pursuing an independent policy resolutely for over four decades, was ready to co-operate with the progressive countries, whose culture was valuable to mankind. It had formulated and developed a non-sensationalist information system which served the interests and drew on the rich diversity of its people. The press had grown and 23 newspapers and 77 magazines were now published, as against six before 1944. The Albanian Telegraph Agency and Radio Tirana disseminated news throughout the world. The entire population, without distinction, could follow radio and television broadcasts and learn about progressive and democratic developments around the world.

32. His delegation would support the democratic countries which were opposed to the super-Powers' policy of cultural assimilation, and looked forward to the establishment of a system of information which assisted the struggle of peoples for justice and national independence and promoted justice and social progress.

33. Mr. ABRAHAM (Hungary) said that he attached great importance to the useful work of the Committee on Information and pointed out that relations in the field of international communications, as well as the flow of information, should be consistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter and the generally recognized rules of international law.

34. Growing tensions and the increasing role of information in international relations made it particularly necessary to disseminate objective and responsible information which, by promoting a climate of confidence and mutual co-operation among peoples, made it possible to re-establish détente. The relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States was decisive in that regard and his Government hoped that the forthcoming summit meeting would contribute to a relaxation of tensions.

35. As a European nation, Hungary believed that the implementation by all participating States of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, including those relating to information, was the best means of strengthening peace and co-operation in Europe. The activities carried out by his country to that end over the past decade were proof that small countries also had a contribution to make. Given the importance of cultural co-operation, Hungary was making every effort to ensure that the European Cultural Forum now underway at Budapest would promote the spirit of Helsinki.

36. Since it was equally capable of enhancing or damaging international understanding and co-operation, according to whether it was used responsibly and fairly or otherwise information was not just a technical issue but was also closely linked to the political realities which it must faithfully reflect. The time and space devoted by the Hungarian media to the objective presentation of national and international events was a measure of the importance which Hungary attached to the cause of information.

37. His Government welcomed the progress made by the United Nations and UNESCO in

(Mr. Abraham, Hungary)

their noble task of establishing a new world information and communication order which would serve social progress and peaceful co-operation. Within the means at its disposal, his country would continue to give them its support. The recent attacks against an organization as active and useful as UNESCO struck a blow at the United Nations system as a whole. Given the achievements of the General Conference just held at Sofia, Hungary expected that the concept of collective responsibility for UNESCO would ultimately prevail.

38. Hungary supported the efforts of the developing countries to establish independent information systems and centres which were in keeping with their interests and promoted a free and more balanced flow of ideas and information, the strengthening of peace and understanding and the improvement of relations among States.

39. In that connection, his delegation was strongly in favour of norms which were based on equality, justice, mutual benefit and the principles of international law and were directed towards a democratic restructuring of relations in the field of information. It was not a question of eliminating opposing points of view but rather of presenting views in a balanced manner. The Hungarian media therefore also pursued mutually beneficial professional contacts with their Western counterparts.

40. The Department of Public Information had done useful and, at times, difficult work in informing world public opinion about United Nations activities. The editors' round table organized by the United Nations Secretariat had been very useful in bringing together journalists from leading newspapers of the world broadly familiar with the activities and problems of the United Nations and providing them with background information so that they could contribute to more authentic coverage of the Organization. His delegation believed that the Department of Public Information would achieve a great deal more if the diversity of the world was reflected more adequately in its staff. It welcomed the fact that the Department had strengthened its co-operation with UNESCO, the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and other news agencies.

41. Mr. FREUDENSCHUSS (Austria) said that his country had constantly supported the justified aspirations of developing countries for a wider and better balanced flow of information. The establishment of a new information order should be based on the principles of free access to information and freedom of the media. That involved a continuous and evolving process in which progress was slow but could be accelerated by improving the information and communication infrastructure of the developing countries. Austria therefore endorsed the activities carried out by the United Nations and UNESCO in that respect and had itself taken measures to that end. The Austrian Press Agency co-operated with a number of news agencies in developing countries and, like the Austrian Broadcasting and Television Corporation, offered working facilities for journalists from the third world. His country had also participated in the programmes of the School for the Training of Journalists at Nairobi since its foundation by UNESCO in 1970.

(Mr. Freudenschuss, Austria)

42. While welcoming the results of the UNESCO General Conference and endorsing in particular its proposal with regard to the training of communication professionals, his delegation wished to point out that all UNESCO activities in the field of communication should be based on full respect for the principle of freedom of expression.

43. He congratulated the Department of Public Information on having succeeded in giving the fortieth anniversary an international coverage that was probably without precedent. He wished to emphasize the importance of objectivity and impartiality for the Department's activities, including the need to reflect differing points of view. That was a difficult task which the Department had sought to accomplish in commendable fashion.

44. Concerning the United Nations Information Service at Vienna, his delegation wished to know whether the increased appropriations for 1986-1987, if approved by the General Assembly, would be sufficient to remedy the excessive and very unsatisfactory delays in the issuance of press releases on meetings held at Vienna.

45. Mr. NWANEAMPEH (Ghana) said that, had his delegation been present during the vote on draft resolutions A/SPC/40/L.8-14 relating to agenda item 75, it would have voted in favour of operative paragraph 1 of draft resolution L.9, operative paragraphs 6 and 21 of draft resolution L.2, operative paragraph 1 of draft resolution L.12/Rev.1, and operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution L.14.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.