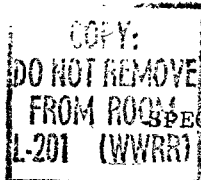


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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
33rd meeting
held on
Thursday, 14 November 1985
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KORHONEN (Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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

1. Mr. ABDI (Ethiopia) expressed satisfaction at the comprehensive report of the Committee on Information (A/40/21) and commended the efforts of UNESCO in carrying out its noble task in spite of the unusual circumstances under which that agency was operating. Developing countries were determined to put an end to the "information imperialism" practised by a small number of western information media and to bring about a new world information and communication order through the establishment of independent national mass-information infrastructures and regional and international media associations. Although a number of information agencies operated successfully in developing countries, those agencies were still largely dependent on other, mostly western, sources of information. Furthermore, owing to lack of funds and technology, developing countries were unable to share in the rapid development of communications technology.

2. He reiterated his country's firm support for the efforts of UNESCO to promote the International Programme for the Development of Communication and the constructive role played by the United Nations information services. The Committee on Information was generally carrying out its mandate satisfactorily and the information disseminated by the United Nations information services was useful and constructive. Nevertheless, the information activities of the Organization should be further strengthened in accordance with the principles set forth in the Charter. That could be best done through strict observance of the principle of equitable geographical distribution in the staffing of United Nations information services, which were dominated by nationals from a limited group of States.

3. He stressed the urgent need to put an end to the interference of foreign information media in the internal affairs of sovereign States and the psychological warfare which they conducted. In that connection, he drew attention to the bitter experience of Ethiopia during the past 10 years. The western information media had subjected Ethiopia to a barrage of unwarranted criticism, deliberate misrepresentation and tendentious slander. The western propaganda directed against Ethiopia was aimed at undermining the revolution and destroying the country's unity and territorial integrity.

4. He expressed satisfaction at the laudable contribution of the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and the Pan-African News Agency, which was playing an extremely important role in redressing imbalances in the field of information. Thanks to such agencies, the peoples of the third world would be able to learn about one another directly, and a serious attempt could be made to understand the aspirations of developing countries in their cultural contexts.

5. Ms. RICHARDSON (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Church continued to encourage persons responsible for information policies to reflect on their grave responsibilities and to promote understanding by objectively explaining all sides of the complex issues confronting modern society. The ultimate aim of information was to provide a continuous source of knowledge of events which human beings needed in order to contribute effectively to the common good and bring about social progress. The right to information was a basic human right and required that the information disseminated must always be factual and complete. Access to information was impaired by a one-sided flow of information, whether imposed arbitrarily or brought about through monopolies. A legitimate pluralism in the field of information based on a consensus concerning the essential value of human coexistence was indispensable.
6. The difficulty facing international bodies dealing with questions relating to information was the fact that information was never neutral. Information and values were intimately linked. In that connection, she stressed the urgent need to put forward the values of a total humanism based on recognition of human rights and social and economic solidarity among persons, groups and nations. Information must rise above partisan considerations in order to create a spirit of understanding and reciprocal solidarity.
7. Professionals in the field of information should strive to promote the dissemination of impartial information and foster dialogue and mutual comprehension. Policy-makers must avoid the temptation to misuse their power in order to manipulate and exploit the public. A realistic vision of the world and its events and adherence to the values of objectivity, compassion and charity were essential in order to evaluate those events properly.
8. Young people were particularly exposed to information and the phenomenon of "media saturation". The dangers resulting from that situation should be carefully studied. Adults should help young people to pass into maturity without being conditioned by the mass media into passive receptivity and to gain an acute awareness of personal dignity and the responsibilities of citizenship. The training and education of young people could be significantly influenced by the decisions of policy-makers in the field of information.
9. In a new world information order, information must transmit to youth the authentic life-giving values which were the basis for every genuine culture. True religious values must not be betrayed or trivialized. In enabling young people to discern what was healthy from what was not, information should contribute to the complete development of youth and their awareness of growing human solidarity. In short, information should promote reconciliation among the peoples and promote open dialogue and co-operation in solving world problems.
10. Mr. BAAISA (Democratic Yemen) said that the establishment of a new world information and communication order was one of the initiatives undertaken by developing and newly independent countries in order to establish a system of international relations based on justice and equality. Their initiative was natural in view of the enormous power wielded by the media and news agencies of a

(Mr. Baaisa, Democratic Yemen)

small number of industrialized countries. Furthermore, there was a basic difference of opinion between industrialized and developing countries over the role of information itself. The developing countries looked to the United Nations for assistance in redressing the imbalance, as they had done in the past when they were struggling for their independence. Although the world had changed considerably since that time, the former colonial Powers remained determined to exert their hegemony through the use of information, exploiting the widespread illiteracy and economic crises which made it impossible for the developing countries to respond in like measure. The efforts of the latter countries were directed towards the establishment of balanced relations between all States, but differences in capacities, priorities and goals had frustrated the achievement of solutions based on consensus. Although there was general agreement that flows of information were unbalanced, little progress had been made towards the establishment of a new world information and communication order.

11. Even the United Nations had not been spared the effects of an irrational and exaggerated information campaign. Some Member States considered the Organization to be useful only when it voted in favour of their own policies and rejected any vote against those policies as the opinion of a "mechanical" or "immoral" majority.

12. The Secretary-General had written in his annual report on the item (A/40/617) of the difficulties experienced by some Governments in making the United Nations work to their satisfaction and of the tendency to make the Organization a scapegoat for current problems rather than an instrument for co-operation in addressing those problems. A positive and balanced use of information should concentrate attention on the problems faced by the peoples of many developing countries, including those of famine and drought in Africa and the external debt and their effect on development, and on the need to establish a new international economic order.

13. He expressed his support for the endeavours to establish such an order made by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, the Chairman of the Committee on Information and the representative of UNESCO. Efforts must also be increased to demonstrate the expansionist and racist nature of Zionist policy and to draw attention to the struggle of the Palestinian people and United Nations resolutions relating to that people's national rights. Similar efforts should be made to expose the actions of the racist régime in Pretoria and to support the struggle of the Namibian people to achieve full independence. It was also important to continue co-operation and co-ordination in the field of information with national and regional information agencies, particularly the news agencies of the non-aligned States, to train national staff and to provide appropriate technical and material support for the promotion of communications in the developing countries. Particular attention should be given to expansion of the Middle East and Arabic Radio Unit.

14. His delegation expressed its appreciation for the important and effective role played in the field of information by UNESCO, despite the unjustified pressures brought to bear upon it. The support and facilities provided to developing countries were particularly appreciated. He hoped that the efforts of UNESCO and

(Mr. Baaisa, Democratic Yemen)

of the international community as a whole to establish the new world information and communication order would be crowned with success.

15. Mr. CAVE (Barbados) expressed his country's support for UNESCO, to which it owed much of its competence and confidence. UNESCO was concerned with human development, the foundation of which was information and communication. The call by the developing States for a new world information and communication order had not been favourably received by the developed States, which wished to preserve the existing "free flow of information", although that flow was anything but free.

16. The problem lay in the ownership of technology. The Caribbean countries, because of their proximity to the centre of the world's communications technology, lived as mice under the paw of a lion. Barbados had tried to use the mass media in its national development programmes, seeking to shake off the colonial condition in which its outlook had been shaped by the attitudes of another society. Escape from political colonization had been followed by exposure to cultural colonization. More than 70 per cent of the content of the electronic media to which his people were exposed originated outside the Caribbean region, with political and economic as well as cultural consequences. Moreover, the mass media in the metropolitan centres showed little concern with the preoccupations of the peoples of the so-called third world. The scant coverage given by the media in the United States to the death of the Prime Minister of Barbados in March 1985 was a graphic illustration of the situation. The reality of the free flow of information was that the peoples of the Caribbean must acquiesce in the societal agenda of another country.

17. The development of direct-broadcast satellites compounded the dangers he had described. Of course, advances in communications involved large sums of money and commercial considerations inevitably prevailed. Nevertheless, his delegation asserted that no system of well-balanced international communications could be based on the commercial control of communications technology.

18. The peoples of the Caribbean had benefited from the activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI), which was the prototype of a desirable international information system, and he welcomed the establishment of the Caribbean Unit. If his delegation was to accept the proposed changes in the structure of DPI, specifically in the Radio and Visual Services Division, it must be persuaded that the changes were not merely a bureaucratic exercise designed to favour certain staff members and that they would not result in undesirable increases in expenditure or reduction in expenditure on programme production. It must also be persuaded that the Department would be enhanced and that the Caribbean Unit would not be adversely affected. He requested, in particular, an explanation for the suggested removal of one P-3 post from the Unit and for the neglect of the DPI regional office at Port of Spain for nearly 10 years. He noted that the Unit's budget had been cut in 1984 and that the Caribbean region's broadcast time had been reduced by 50 per cent.

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(Mr. Cave, Barbados)

19. As in the case of the changes which some States wished to make in UNESCO, his delegation warned against changes which might jeopardize the effectiveness and credibility of DPI and its broadcasting services to developing States. The responsibility of the United Nations to pay special attention to the interests of small States rested heavily on its information organs. His delegation was not against change as such and would welcome a modification of the patterns of international communications and a refuge from the "free flow". Such a modification would require respect for the principles of multilateralism and recognition that information was not a weapon but a tool of progress. Advances in communications must benefit the entire world community, and the appropriate United Nations agency was a worthy depository of technological developments. The acquisition by the United Nations of a communications satellite might become a symbol of a new order and transmit a resounding message to present and future generations.

20. Mr. TERNOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) reaffirmed the importance which his delegation attached to information questions and noted the important role played by the communications media in people's lives, influencing individual attitudes and actions as well as the world political climate. The information media had the enormous responsibility of reporting the world situation truthfully, especially with regard to the threat of nuclear war, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and the ending of the arms race on earth. They must ask and seek answers to questions about the origins of such threats and how to eliminate them.

21. The role of the information media was to serve mankind's higher aspirations and fight against the notion of the inevitability of war. All propaganda in favour of war and national and other forms of superiority must be prohibited. His country's Constitution contained such a prohibition, and the new draft Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union specified such a role for the information media. Similar attitudes were reflected in many decisions of the United Nations and UNESCO and other international bodies.

22. The alarming world situation had shown no improvement over the past year. There had been, in particular, a massive propaganda attack on the concept of détente by certain militarist forces seeking to shift the guilt for their evil actions on to others. Every day saw an increase in the psychological warfare waged against the socialist and many developing countries, which amounted to interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States. Information imperialism had become a foreign-policy tool of imperialism and was pushing the world towards the brink of disaster. The great lie of imperialist propaganda began with the myth of the "military threat" represented by the Soviet Union and the other members of the Warsaw Treaty. The danger of that lie was that it provided a cover for new spirals in the arms race and false justification for first nuclear strikes, limited nuclear war and the extension of the arms race into outer space.

23. War propaganda had been repeatedly condemned in United Nations decisions, notably the resolutions on condemnation of nuclear war and on the inadmissibility of State terrorism. The responsibility of the media in that respect was even

(Mr. Ternov, Byelorussian SSR)

greater in the present world situation. It must be noted, however, that the decisions of the United Nations, UNESCO and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe concerning international information relations were disregarded in imperialist propaganda.

24. In the anniversary year of the United Nations, the Soviet Union had proposed a number of constructive measures for a breakthrough in the development of international relations. The information media of the socialist countries sought to make their contribution to peaceful coexistence among nations, the need for which had again been stressed by Mr. Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in a recent address to French parliamentarians. That attitude was consistent with the decisions he had already mentioned and with the decisions of the non-aligned countries.

25. The establishment of a new world information and communication order was taking an unjustifiably long time and there was a danger that the developing countries might become even more dependent for information on the former metropolitan countries and transnational information corporations. The developing countries must step up their own efforts to develop means of information and work for the adoption by the United Nations and UNESCO of the new world information and communications order. His country would continue to help them in that effort. The few channels of communication belonging to the developing countries were filled with distorted information from Western States. The non-aligned countries had drawn attention to the harmful effects of the domination of the world's communications media by transnational information agencies and corporations. The international community must try to correct that unequal situation and to strengthen the information systems of the developing countries, for sovereignty over information was an integral part of genuine independence.

26. The peoples of the world must continue to fight against information imperialism. A number of the suggestions in the documents before the Committee might be used in draft resolutions designed to improve the information activities of the United Nations. His delegation noted with satisfaction the work done by DPI in informing the world about the United Nations, and it supported the Department's efforts to carry out the relevant decisions of the General Assembly. UNESCO also made a valuable contribution, especially in international communications. The attempts of certain States to blackmail UNESCO must be condemned. His delegation hoped that the Committee would adopt decisions which would help to solve the problems of international information in the interests of peace, mutual understanding and co-operation among nations.

27. Mr. ALSHAWKANI (Yemen) said that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had played a major role in calling for the establishment of a new world information and communication order. However, the establishment of such an order would make it necessary for the industrialized countries to accept that information could flow in more than one direction. At present, a limited number of news agencies in those countries monopolized the collection and distribution of news almost entirely, while developing countries acted only as recipients. Furthermore, rapid

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(Mr. Alshawkani, Yemen)

technological advances in the field of communications tended to be restricted to the industrialized States and thus to widen the gap between those States and the developing countries.

28. The right to information was a basic human right. The developing countries, by attempting to establish a new world information and communication order, aimed to move from a position of dependence to one of effective participation. He shared the hopes of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information that the broad and positive media coverage of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations would lead to further coverage of the problems addressed by that body, foremost among which were the questions of Palestine, Namibia and racial discrimination in South Africa. An example of the injustice of the current information and communication order was provided by the media coverage of matters relating to the Palestinian and Namibian peoples, as a result of restrictions imposed by the two racist régimes in Palestine and South Africa for fear that details of their aggressive practices would be revealed to international public opinion.

29. His delegation expressed its support for the activities of DPI and its increasing co-operation with non-aligned news agencies. It also called for expansion of the Middle East and Arabic Radio Unit and for further co-operation with the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (ARABSAT). The Organization of the Islamic Conference had, in December 1984, issued three resolutions relating to information, which represented a constructive contribution to efforts to establish the new world information and communication order. He expressed support for the efforts of UNESCO towards the establishment of a new order but also expressed his regret that the Committee on Information had been unable to adopt its resolutions by consensus at its last session.

30. Mr. NDONGO (Congo) said that the need for information had always been one of the greatest concerns of mankind. The current imbalance in the dissemination of information throughout the world was due to the fact that certain Western countries controlled most of the information media. The Western media gave little attention to the efforts of developing countries to achieve economic and social progress, conducted a campaign of silence against multilateralism, and often depicted the United Nations as ineffective and biased. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations, Member States should reaffirm their commitment to the Organization and inform their populations of its objectives and achievements. In that connection, priority should be given to the dissemination of information on international problems such as decolonization, the struggle against racism and apartheid, the defence of human rights, and the situation in Namibia and southern Africa and other occupied territories.

31. Consideration should be given to a number of important issues related to information questions, such as the definition of freedom of the press, the concept of objectivity and media interference in the internal affairs of States. A new world information and communication order would contribute to international peace and understanding and enable everyone to participate effectively in political, economic, social and cultural activities. The developed countries should encourage

(Mr. Ndongu, Congo)

the relevant bodies of the United Nations system, particularly UNESCO, to strengthen information and communication infrastructures in developing countries. That effort should include the training of journalists and technical personnel, ensuring access to the communications technology needed to set up adequate national information systems and establishing regional, subregional and interregional information links.

32. His delegation reaffirmed its strong support for the activities of UNESCO and its efforts to promote the establishment of a new world information and communication order. In that connection, he stressed the need to ensure the flexibility and dynamism of DPI in carrying out the information policies and activities of the Organization. It was unfortunate that the Department faced a number of political and budgetary obstacles in its work. The Committee on Information had highlighted the necessary measures to be taken by the Department in carrying out its mandate. The Congo welcomed the experiment using daily short-wave broadcasts to Africa. The Special Political Committee should take note of the technical results of that experiment so as to enable the General Assembly to make a sound decision in evaluating those broadcasts.

33. Economy measures should not impair the vital activities conducted by DPI. His delegation emphasized the importance of the short-wave radio broadcasts for third world countries and expressed the hope that a positive decision would be taken in that connection. Lastly, he drew attention to the vital link between the establishment of a new international economic order and the promotion of a just and equitable system for the dissemination of information throughout the world.

34. Ms. GROOMS (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she wished to correct the record of the Committee with regard to the slanderous remarks directed, at the previous meeting, by the representative of Afghanistan towards her country and its international broadcasting service. Her response was in no way meant to imply a belief on the part of her delegation that he represented a sovereign, independent, or freely chosen Government. The overwhelming approval by the General Assembly, for the seventh consecutive year, of a resolution on the situation in Afghanistan demonstrated the prevalence of the view that Afghanistan was suffering not under the yoke of the Central Intelligence Agency or the Voice of America (VOA), but of 118,000 Soviet troops.

35. The Charter of VOA, which was based on Public Law 94-350, defined the service's purpose as the presentation of accurate and comprehensive news and a balanced and comprehensive picture of significant American thought, including the policies of the United States and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies. The two hours of broadcasts each day in the Pushtu and Dari languages were all subject to jamming, in violation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The representative of Afghanistan had also expressed alarm about the two 15-minute programmes broadcast each week by a new service, Radio Free Afghanistan. Those programmes, which included Afghan news and feature stories and readings from the Koran, were intended to break through Soviet attempts to black out news of the war and to replace Islamic teaching by dialectic

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(Ms. Grooms, United States)

materialism and Marxist-Leninist propaganda. Without those broadcasts, the Afghan people would have access only to distorted and inaccurate accounts of the news. Despite the lack of accurate figures on listeners to Western broadcasting stations in Afghanistan, it was clear from the outburst by the representative of Afghanistan that their numbers must be substantial. Some indication of the population's dissatisfaction with the so-called Democratic Republic of Afghanistan might be seen in the fact that over 4 million Afghans had already fled the country, representing over one quarter of the pre-war population. If the 12 million others remaining in Afghanistan were listening to VOA, there might still be some hope for the country.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.