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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
32nd meeting
held on
Thursday, 14 November 1985
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KORHONEN (Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.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. Mrs. MIRANDA (Chile) said that changes must be made in the world information and communication order to ensure a fairer and better balanced flow of information, particularly in respect of third world countries, which received media attention only when the news to be had was sensational. Mindful of the increasing gap between North and South, Chile, like the Group of 77, had constantly sought a consensus as the only means of achieving better information in the world and hoped that further efforts would be undertaken in that direction.

2. Not having sufficient economic resources to acquire the necessary technology, the developing countries were dominated by the technologically advanced countries which in some cases used the media for purposes that were prejudicial to their national sovereignty. In the case of Chile, Radio Moscow had for the past 12 years been broadcasting false or distorted reports on a daily basis as an instrument of hostile propaganda against the country's sovereignty, and it constantly urged armed insurrection and an uprising by the people against their Government. In so doing Radio Moscow was clearly not fostering peace, mutual respect, non-interference and self-determination. Chile, for its part, condemned all radio stations that failed to observe recommendation 34 of the Committee on Information as contained in its report to the General Assembly (A/40/21).

3. Concerning the Department of Public Information, she recognized that the tasks of the Department were complex and often overwhelming. While the results of its work were often excellent, they occasionally left something to be desired, particularly as far as publicizing the United Nations and its work was concerned. The United Nations had, of course, been given attention in newspapers throughout the world on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary but, apart from such exceptional circumstances, it must be said that the Organization, like the third world countries, was a victim of the prevailing information order: the media did not talk about or express interest in it.

4. A way must be found to disseminate information about the Organization on a permanent basis through the best existing channels of communication. To that end, it would be desirable for the Department of Public Information, within the limits of its budget, to undertake a study to determine the best way of reaching out to public opinion. There was a need for a United Nations public relations department which would centralize information and disseminate it in the form of news bulletins rather than publications that were difficult to read and often boring for the public at large.

(Mrs. Miranda, Chile)

5. The Organization's activities were not well known in Latin America because information materials sent through the diplomatic pouch or through UNDP often arrived too late to be disseminated by the nine United Nations information centres. In the circumstances, it was essential to broadcast information daily on short wave, even if that required renting a wavelength from Voice of America because high costs prevented the Organization from having its own station.
6. She hoped that her suggestions would enable the Department of Public Information to develop its activities in the field of international communications, which were of inestimable importance when they served just causes.
7. Mr. LAPITSKI (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the prevention of a global nuclear war was the most important and pressing issue of the present day. In view of the tensions fanned by militaristic imperialist circles, all countries that cherished peace and freedom must unite their efforts to stop mankind from sliding towards a nuclear catastrophe and to prevent a further escalation of the arms race. That was the objective of the socialist countries, as could be seen from the numerous documents to that effect to be presented to the next congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the many important peace initiatives taken by the USSR which were to be found in the programme adopted at the Sofia meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the States Parties to the Warsaw Treaty.
8. By virtue of the unprecedented speed of its dissemination and the very modern facilities that it employed, information had become an extremely powerful force and the international community must ensure that it was used for the benefit of mankind and served to remove the danger of war. Considering that ideological differences must not influence relations among States and that only truthful information could restore an atmosphere of mutual trust and co-operation, the media of the socialist countries, and those of the Ukrainian SSR in particular, saw their role as being to foster peace. The General Assembly too had recently adopted resolutions condemning propaganda in favour of atomic weapons and the unleashing of a nuclear war.
9. It should be noted that some leading NATO circles continued to misuse the information media to create a war psychosis, promote the cult of force and interfere in the internal affairs of States. In order to justify its unprecedented arms programme and its pursuit of supremacy, the United States was spreading such lies as "the Soviet military threat", "the Soviet military supremacy", "Soviet expansionism" and "violations" of human rights in the socialist countries, without hesitating itself to engage in acts of violence and State terrorism, trample on the rights of peoples and export counter-revolution, even going so far as to claim that "Star Wars" was the only way to prevent a nuclear war.
10. Such psychological warfare made particular use of radio broadcasting stations such as Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, whose many "experts" were former Nazi collaborators and an assortment of anti-Soviet emigrés. New subversive radio stations were also being directed at Cuba and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

(Mr. Lapitski, Ukrainian SSR)

11. His delegation condemned that imperialist psychological warfare and was sure that sovereign States and peoples would know to reject such practices, the danger being that such propaganda poisoned the international climate. The international community must therefore take effective measures to prohibit the use of information for non-peaceful purposes or to disseminate militaristic propaganda, defend intolerable systems such as apartheid and interfere in the internal affairs of States. Rules of international law could, for instance, be adopted within the framework of the United Nations to govern the activities of the information media and place them at the service of peace, security and international co-operation, in conformity with the Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Declaration on information adopted by UNESCO in 1978. The recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Information could serve as a basis for the elaboration of draft resolutions on information to be submitted to the General Assembly.

12. His delegation attached great importance to the establishment of a new world information and communication order designed to eliminate inequalities in that area and restructure the flow of information according to democratic and fair principles. His country supported the efforts of the developing countries to free themselves from the yoke of imperialism in the field of information, operate their own information systems and acquire the basic material and technical means to safeguard their sovereignty and equality in that area. His delegation also endorsed the decisions relating to information adopted at the meetings of heads of State or ministers of non-aligned countries held at Havana, New Delhi, Jakarta and Luanda, and expressed satisfaction at the efforts of the international community to establish a new world information and communication order, in particular activities under the International Programme for the Development of Communication aimed at meeting the information needs of the developing countries.

13. Nevertheless, those efforts of the international community were encountering increasing resistance, and UNESCO was the object of blackmail and pressure because of the active role it played in the struggle for the establishment of that new order. The Ukrainian SSR condemned those unworthy attacks on UNESCO and asked the international community to defend it so that it might carry out its noble mission of supporting the struggle of the peoples against imperialism in the field of information and promoting the establishment of a more democratic and just information order.

14. It must also be noted that for some time efforts had been made to complicate consideration of the new world information and communication order in the United Nations and, in particular, in the Committee on Information. Some delegations were trying to subordinate the establishment of that new order to what they called the elimination of internal and external obstacles to the free flow of information. That "freedom of information" was in fact intended only to protect the strongest in that field, i.e., the international information monopolies, to disarm the adversaries of those monopolies and to deprive the new world information and communication order of its anti-imperialist content. All those efforts had indeed failed, but the international community must continue to be very vigilant.

(Mr. Lapitski, Ukrainian SSR)

15. The United Nations Department of Information had an important role to play in that connection by strengthening its co-operation with the press agencies of the developing countries by helping them to train personnel and develop their exchanges with each other and with UNESCO and by helping them to propagate the idea of the new order. United Nations information services, like those of other bodies within the United Nations system, must supplement their normal programme of work with efforts to create a wider and more balanced awareness of the noble goals of the Organization and its struggle for international peace and security. The activities of the United Nations information services must, however, be conducted with strict observance of the priorities established by the Organization and within the limits of available resources.

16. Member States should also contribute to that information task, as the Ukrainian SSR had done through a special committee for the International Year of Peace chaired by the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic. The fortieth anniversary of the United Nations, despite the attacks on the Organization in certain circles and despite the continuing lies and disinformation, should be the occasion for new efforts on the part of the international community to enhance the effectiveness of its activities.

17. To conclude, the Ukrainian delegation wished to stress that the unworthy slanders against Soviet radio broadcasting, particularly when they came from an anti-democratic Chilean régime which stifled the freedoms of its own people, could in no way diminish the authority and respect which Soviet radio enjoyed both in the USSR and abroad.

18. Mr. JOUSHAN (Afghanistan) said that it was more necessary than ever to correct the imbalance in the flow of information and to overcome the gap between the developed and the developing countries. While the latter were trying to strengthen their national independence, the imperialist media were broadcasting false information to them, particularly to the countries which had chosen social and economic systems which were not to the liking of the capitalists.

19. Information and communication were integral parts of international relations and should be based on a number of principles. In particular, all countries had to be in a position to maintain their own national information system and to participate in better-balanced international exchanges on an equal footing and without any discrimination.

20. UNESCO played a major role in the establishment of a new world information and communication order, and the formulation of the International Programme for the Development of Communication was an important step in that direction. His delegation paid tribute to UNESCO for the valuable services it had rendered to the international community in that field and felt that its work should be strongly supported. His delegation therefore categorically condemned the position of certain countries, in particular the United States, which was trying to exert pressure on that organization.

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(Mr. Joushan, Afghanistan)

21. Co-operation between the United Nations, UNESCO and the press agencies of the developing countries could serve as a basis for the establishment of that new order and should be continued on a more consistent basis.

22. The psychological warfare waged by the CIA and the United States Information Agency had assumed an unprecedented scale. Through their subversive propaganda, United States media such as Radio Martí, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, whose activities were directed and controlled by the CIA and the Voice of America, as well as the media of other Western countries, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Deutsche Welle of the Federal Republic of Germany, were slandering the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries of Europe, which represented the forces of peace and progress. In doing so, information imperialism was trying to strengthen its position and to keep people fighting for their liberation under the yoke of systematic exploitation.

23. Intensifying its hostile propaganda, the United States had established subversive radio stations in Central America, Asia and other regions. The Government in Tel Aviv had recently authorized the construction on Israeli territory of a radio station which would broadcast mainly to the Asian republics of the Soviet Union.

24. Since the triumph of the revolution of April 1978, Afghanistan had also been the object of massive propaganda from the media of the United States and the other Western countries. At the instigation of the United States Information Agency, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe - which broadcast from Pakistan - and the Voice of America had greatly increased their broadcasts in Pushtu and Dari, the two official languages of the country. On 1 October 1985, a new station, Radio Free Afghanistan, had joined the chorus of slander, thus bringing the number of hours of anti-Afghan programmes broadcast weekly in the Afghan languages alone to 300. The Voice of America, which also broadcast in Persian, intended to increase the number of languages in which it broadcast its programmes, and its already large budget would be further increased.

25. Despite the relentless efforts of its enemies, the Afghan people continued to move ahead along its chosen path. The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan supported the efforts to establish a world information and communication order aimed at strengthening peace, security and understanding among nations, at intensifying the struggle against racism, apartheid, colonialism and war, particularly nuclear war, and at ensuring disarmament.

26. His delegation attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Information and fully supported the recommendations contained in its report (A/40/21) as well as the work of the Department of Public Information.

27. Mr. IRTEMCELİK (Turkey) said that his country attached great importance to the free flow of information between and within nations. Free access to varied sources of information was not only a basic human right but also a wise investment that would enable future generations to co-operate without first having to overcome the

(Mr. Irtemcelik, Turkey)

detrimental effects of censorship and propaganda. National frontiers, far from constituting barriers which accentuated divisions, would then be simple demarcation lines within which nations could develop in a spirit of peaceful competition, friendship, understanding and mutual respect.

28. His delegation therefore supported efforts aimed at establishing a new, more just and more humanitarian world information and communication order, but, for such efforts to bear fruit, the existing order, which no longer met the needs of the modern world, must be democratized.

29. Turkey understood and shared the legitimate concerns expressed by the members of the Group of 77, whose requests fell on deaf ears whenever they asked the very ones who espoused the virtues of free information to give the developing countries access to the technology they needed in order to improve their capabilities in the field of information.

30. Unfortunately, that new framework had little chance of seeing the light of day as long as certain Governments, in the empty hope of hiding their inhuman and oppressive policies, sealed their countries off from the media of the rest of the world, and the fact that some of them opposed even the dissemination of materials prepared by the Department of Public Information was not encouraging either.

31. The discussion in the Committee so far offered little hope of fruitful co-operation focused on the long-term mutual advantages which the new world information and communication order would bring. It might perhaps be time to abandon sterile polemics, the product of ossified attitudes, and to resist the temptation of offering apparently easy solutions which could not help to reconcile views or promote progress in the attainment of goals. The establishment of a new world information and communication order was not a process which could be imposed but a long-term undertaking requiring the adoption of sincere measures by consensus.

32. It was with those considerations in mind that his delegation had taken an active part in the substantive session of the Committee on Information, and it was those same considerations which had prompted it to abstain in the votes on the recommendations contained in the Committee's report, even though it supported the majority of them.

33. Despite everything, his country remained cautiously optimistic; it hoped that all delegations would keep in mind the results of the recent General Conference of UNESCO, an organization which had a central role to play in the establishment of the new world information and communication order, and it trusted that, learning from past failures, the Special Political Committee would reach agreement on the basic elements on which the new world information and communication order would rest.

34. Mr. XU Liugen (China) said that the international situation had undergone fundamental change since the establishment of the United Nations. The small countries had taken their place on the political stage and played an increasingly

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(Mr. Xu Liugen, China)

important role in resistance to hegemonies. But that change was not reflected in the area of information and communication, where many developing countries remained in a position of dependence and inequality. Information and communication were still dominated by a small number of developed countries which had more than 80 per cent of the press, more than 90 per cent of radio programmes and more than 95 per cent of television programmes.

35. Scientific and technological progress, far from helping the developing countries to overcome their backwardness, were merely making the gap wider. Certain developed countries took advantage of their position of superiority to try to impose their political views, their ideologies and their way of life. Some of them even interfered in the internal affairs of other countries, undermining their sovereignty and depriving them of their rightful security and of their economic and social rights and their cultural traditions.

36. In order to change that unfair situation, the developing countries had called for the establishment of a new, more just and more balanced world information and communication order designed to strengthen peace and international understanding and advance the purposes and principles of the Charter.

37. The establishment of the new world information and communication order was an urgent and difficult task calling for a joint effort by the whole international community. The developed countries, with their advantage in the area of information and communication, had a special responsibility and must assist the developing countries by providing the necessary resources, technology and equipment. They had a duty to co-operate on the basis of the principle of respect for sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit. North-South co-operation would help the developing countries to overcome their backwardness and would benefit everyone. The developing countries, for their part, must rely on their own efforts in strengthening their information infrastructures and consolidating their media through co-operation and exchanges of experience.

38. Since its establishment in 1979 the Committee on Information had achieved some results, but it must be recognized that important differences persisted on the very concept of a new world information and communication order. As a result, the Committee had found itself paralysed, and that was a worrying situation.

39. China attached great importance to the development of its own communication system. The creation of the new China had played a great role in its modernization plan and had stimulated co-operation between China and other countries. Chinese technology and equipment were not yet very advanced, and China was very ready to learn through reciprocal exchanges. In 1984 the Department of Public Information had organized at Shanghai, under the auspices of the Chinese Government, a round table of leading media personalities which had proved a great success. In April 1984 a symposium had been held at Peking, at which representatives of all the information units in his country had participated in discussions on various aspects of the new world information and communication order.

(Mr. Xu Liugen, China)

40. In conclusion, he paid a tribute to the Department of Public Information which, despite budgetary constraints, did useful work for the advancement of the Charter and in the dissemination of news about the work of the United Nations; it commended the Department in particular for the quality of the regional programmes broadcast on the occasion of the Organization's fortieth anniversary.
41. Mr. AL-HASSANI (Kuwait) commended the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information on their efforts to increase the effectiveness and usefulness of the information centres, radio services, training programmes and other instruments and activities of the United Nations information services. His delegation was particularly appreciative of the co-operation of the Department of Public Information with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and asked that such co-operation should be strengthened, both with the Pool and with other regional news agencies. It accordingly approved recommendation 39 of the Committee on Information concerning the strengthening and expansion of the Middle East and Arabic Unit of the Radio Service as the producer of Arabic television and radio programmes. The launching of the ARABSAT satellite had opened up new avenues in that area.
42. Kuwait, which had already hosted a United Nations/UNESCO round table on information, attached great importance to that type of meeting and welcomed the holding in 1986 of a round table on the strengthening of co-operation in the field of information and communication between industrialized countries and developing countries and among the developing countries themselves. In that connection his delegation paid a tribute to the tireless efforts made by UNESCO under its International Programme for the Development of Communication and in its other related activities to eliminate inequalities and inadequacies in communication, whether through the strengthening of the infrastructures of the developing countries or through training and exchange programmes.
43. In the imperfect modern world most of the ills of mankind resulted from two main factors: the lack of information and the dissemination of misinformation. The first factor bred lack of understanding, then misunderstanding, and constituted therefore the greatest obstacle to harmony among nations. The second factor bred misconceptions, then prejudices, then hatred, then blindness to justice, which constituted the principal obstacle to the solution of world problems. The situation was made even more complex by the phenomenal advancement of the means of communication - communication satellites and electronic mass media, for example - which had made the world a much smaller place. Accordingly, depending on whether the dissemination of information was based on honesty, objectivity and conscientious evaluation and analysis of events or, conversely, on prejudice and malicious intent, so would peace, harmony and justice be enhanced or hatred and blindness to justice flourish. The way in which the mass media had opened the eyes, hearts and minds of millions of people to the catastrophic drought and famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the African continent and to the tragic situation in South Africa was a shining example of the positive role which the mass media could play. Unfortunately, the same could not be said about the way in which those same media covered the situation in the Middle East and Israel's illegal practices and expansionist policy in the occupied Arab territories.

(Mr. Al-Hassani, Kuwait)

44. His delegation was convinced that the lack of information, and more specifically the lack of truthful and unbiased information, was one of the main reasons for the prejudiced attitude taken towards the Arabs and their causes in certain parts of the world which he need not name. The Department of Public Information should therefore redouble its efforts in carrying out the task assigned to it both by the General Assembly in its resolution 39/98 and by the Committee on Information in its recommendation 38, i.e. to cover adequately Israeli decisions and practices which violated and affected the human rights of the population of the occupied Arab territories, especially the policies and practices which hindered the Palestinian people in attaining and exercising its inalienable national rights. The Department should, in particular, give priority to certain parts of the world where, owing to a deliberate news black-out, people were not aware of the existence of such Israeli policies and practices.

45. The world now possessed increasingly swift means of influencing people's thoughts and deeds, and it needed only to leave its prejudices and personal likes and dislikes aside in order to use those means in the service of truth.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.