



MAY 19 1987

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
26th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 12 November 1986
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

P/A COLLECTION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KOUASSI (Togo)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 74: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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

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Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/41/SR.26
20 November 1986
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 74: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/41/21, A/41/562 and Add.1, A/41/582 and Add.1, A/41/120 and Add.1)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (continued)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

(c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)

1. Mr. LESSIR (Tunisia) said that the Committee on Information needed realism and objectivity if it was to overcome its difficulties. In the current period of financial crisis the increasingly divergent positions of the various groups were a disquieting sign that certain accomplishments of the United Nations and, indeed, the very idea of a new world information and communication order were slowly being called into question.

2. His delegation deeply deplored the fact that one group of countries had in July 1986 rejected the series of recommendations proposed, while some, turning the Committee's difficulties to advantage, were trying to impose their points of view for the sole purpose of scoring points. All countries must work together in a spirit of compromise for, whatever some might say, the services of the Committee were of benefit to all.

3. Valuable time had been lost in sterile theoretical arguments over the controversial definition of a new world information and communication order; the time would have been better spent in serious reflection on the dependent status of the third world countries in the realm of communications, which threatened to make the current information revolution more serious still.

4. The most urgent task at present was to apply the measures already advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations in order to enhance the information infrastructure of the developing countries. The need for such a move was now virtually unchallenged. The report of the Secretary-General on the second Round Table held in Copenhagen in April 1986, contained useful ideas, including the proposal that UNESCO should set up a second international committee, on the lines of the McBride Commission, to shoulder part of the necessary deliberative burden. The representative of UNESCO had said that the Round Table had confirmed the validity in the modern world of the concept of the new world information and communication order, which was regarded as an evolving and continuous process. It would appear that delegations had agreed to postpone the definition of the new order since, at the present stage, such a definition could only be approximate and a source of division, and UNESCO should now devote itself to evaluating the work already done - a task of whose utility his delegation was in no doubt.

(Mr. Lessir, Tunisia)

5. His delegation was no less eager to work with others in drawing up a text that would reflect the aspirations of the Group of 77 on the basis of the consensus reached in UNESCO without overlooking the interests of other groups. It was to be hoped that all parties would show the same laudable spirit of compromise as the Group of 77.
6. The developing countries were so insistent in their demand for a new world information and communication order because the existing order did not respond to their aspirations for development, justice and sovereignty, and generated tension and inequalities which did anything but favour understanding between peoples. The unprecedented invasion of third world countries by the mass media of the developed countries was increasing the dependence of the third world and threatening the culture and lifestyle of its peoples. What the third world countries sought was not to close off all foreign influence or challenge the right to information but, with the co-operation of the developed countries, to regulate and restore balance to flows of information in order to be able to call on imported ideas and technologies instead of suffering them passively.
7. In Africa, as the Yaoundé Declaration of 31 July 1980 had stressed, the traditional forms of communication had always been an important vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, know-how and accumulated knowledge - a priceless inheritance - and had in other ways played an essential role in the independence struggle. It was by associating those traditional means of exchange and the most recent communications techniques that the African countries could perpetuate their cultural values while they modernized their infrastructure. His delegation therefore found interest in the UNESCO research programme on the impact of new communication technologies. It considered that the solution to communications problems lay in transfers of technology and a redistribution of resources with due regard for the fundamental freedoms of individuals and peoples.
8. His country urged the Department of Public Information to continue its information activities, in particular on the status of the oppressed peoples in the occupied Palestinian territories, in Namibia and in southern Africa. It did not see why the Department should have to avoid politicizing its work at all costs, when information was by nature highly politicized and the purpose of the United Nations was to keep the general public informed of everything of concern to the international community. More prominence, certainly, should be given to economic issues, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to dissociate politics from economics.
9. His country applauded the valuable co-operation between the Department of Public Information and the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies, and the training of journalists which was one of the most positive aspects of that co-operation. It reaffirmed its support for UNESCO, for those activities, in particular the International Programme for the Development of Communication, it had a high regard.

10. Mr. LAGORIO (Argentina) said that the Committee was considering one of the most important and sensitive items on its agenda, and that there seemed to be the political will to break the deadlock which had gripped the Committee for two years. The issue facing Committee members was how to define the new world information and communication order; but the question must be considered with due regard for technical progress because the distinguishing feature of the new order over the old was, precisely, the potential influence of computer science and satellites on the mass communications media. The asymmetry in international relations was reinforced by a technological imbalance deriving from different levels of development. Co-operation and collaboration by all concerned, with respect for the legal equality of all States, was needed to end the current imbalances in the circulation of information and allow all countries to benefit by the latest progress in that field.

11. The principle of State equality, with such others as the freedom of information, the absence of censorship and the right of access to sources of information were, to his country, the foundations of the new order and it had accordingly joined all the consensuses reached in UNESCO. There was no contradiction in regarding the new world information and communication order as an evolving and continuous process, for to do so was to recognize the impact of technical progress on communications media without in any way altering the order contemplated. The new order should rest on the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular article 19 which called for freedom of information, tolerance, equality of rights, the abolition of censorship and the free circulation of information, all principles enshrined in the 1853 Constitution of Argentina.

12. The Chairman of the Working Group had recently presented delegations with a seven-point proposal; it had been accepted by the Group of 77, to which Argentina belonged. The substance of the proposal would certainly not satisfy all the aspirations of every group, but it would, at least, if not producing consensus, break the vicious circle in which the Committee had been trapped and allow progress towards more specific and stable accords. The present favourable situation should be seized before time hardened positions.

13. His country supported the work of the Department of Public Information and had agreed to put about 15 minutes' worth of broadcasting time per week on its radio network at the Department's disposal.

14. Mrs. MIRANDA (Chile) expressed her regret that, despite the hopes of many countries, the discussions in the Committee on Information had not resulted in consensus. Recent consultations had been based on a proposal by the Chairman of the Working Group which identified seven areas for action; the Group of 77 had unanimously adopted that proposal and was ready to demonstrate the necessary political will to reach consensus, thus making the Department of Public Information more effective by putting its work on a solid political footing.

15. The developing countries wanted freedom of the press and concrete, objective, balanced information, but reality made a change - gradual of course - in the

(Mrs. Miranda, Chile)

current information order essential. Some parties maintained that the introduction of the new order suggested might result in greater control over information, and that was a risk, but her country was certain that the great majority of countries would opt for greater freedom of information.

16. The current information order was not meeting the basic needs of the developing countries, which were mostly passive onlookers in the area of technological progress, in which they were lagging behind. Africa, Asia and Latin America virtually did not exist in the eyes of the developed world, and some countries were only in the headlines when they were the victims of disasters or when they were of particular political interest. The developed countries' media gave an inaccurate picture of the developing peoples and either distorted facts or passed over them in silence. At the same time, they sought to inculcate the values of a consumer society, which gave rise to false hopes in societies that were in a constant state of economic crisis. If the image of the developing countries reflected by the free press was to be corrected, a new world information and communication order must be established.

17. In his statement the representative of the Soviet Union had indicated that the peoples of the world were tiring of propaganda and that there must be a radical change in the quality and content of the information provided. He had added that all the media should help to reinforce positive trends on the international scene. Her delegation hoped that that statement was indicative of a major change in Soviet policy on the radio broadcasts directed against her country, particularly by Radio Moscow, which had for 13 years incessantly called upon the Chilean people to rise up against their Government and encourage the terrorists; if one were to add that the largest arsenal of weapons in Latin America had just been found on Chilean soil - a discovery that had been brought to the attention of the Security Council and the Organization of American States at the proper time - it would be acknowledged that change was necessary.

18. The Committee on Information should consider questions relating to the new world order on a parallel with technical arrangements to enable the Department of Public Information to carry out its functions. However, it should refrain from taking up political questions that had no bearing on the issue of information and should leave the analysis of such issues to more appropriate forums.

19. Ms. GIBSON (Canada) said that she wished to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information for his lucid opening remarks. She welcomed the efforts that he was making to improve the management of the Department of Public Information and to make optimal use of the limited financial and human resources available to him. In the current situation it was essential that both the Department and Member States should redefine their priorities in the area of information activities. At a time when the Organization was the target of much criticism, the Department must endeavour to foster a greater awareness of the concrete achievements of the United Nations.

(Ms. Gibson, Canada)

20. Her delegation had listened with interest to the proposals for streamlining and merging the United Nations Information Centres and would like them to be explored in detail so that their implications became clear. Since there were no United Nations Information Centres in Canada, the United Nations Association of Canada was endeavouring to fill that gap and its information office in Ottawa, which was the principal centre for the distribution of United Nations publications, was making an energetic attempt to make the Organization better known. Although such an arrangement did not meet all the criteria for a United Nations information centre, in view of the current financial constraints it represented a realistic and acceptable compromise.

21. Canada, which was very concerned about both the tone and the substance of the Committee's debate on the question of information, welcomed the fact that it had been possible to overcome differences of opinion by means of the negotiations that had taken place at the summer session of the Committee on Information. It was to be hoped that the realistic and constructive approach adopted by consensus at Sofia at the most recent UNESCO General Conference would also prevail in the Committee.

22. Canada was very much aware of the impact of the new technologies and the electronic media on the economic, social, cultural and political developments of a country. It therefore shared many of the concerns expressed in the debate on the imbalances in the field of information and communication. In the international environment of free-flowing information it was extremely difficult to maintain a national identity. Faced with that problem, the Canadian Government had endeavoured to foster a climate in which the Canadian communications and cultural sectors would flourish. It advocated that same approach at the international level, where attention should be focused on the practical aspects of a new world information and communication order seen as a continuing and evolving process.

23. In the summer of 1986 Canada had hosted an international symposium for ministers of communications on the theme of the challenge of change, within the framework of the 1986 universal exposition at Vancouver. The ministers, who had represented all the regional groups, had adopted a final document entitled "The Vancouver Declaration", which placed particular emphasis on the need for greater co-operation and commitment in order to close the gap between the developed and the developing countries.

24. The international community must refrain from focusing on theoretical considerations and should instead stress action-oriented programmes that promoted development, such as the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication, to which Canada was giving financial support, and the activities of the International Telecommunication Union. Canada would also continue to support the training programme for journalists from developing countries.

25. Her delegation hoped that it would be possible to reach a consensus that echoed the consensus achieved in the case of UNESCO the previous year, thus facilitating the strengthening of the effectiveness of the information activities of the Department of Public Information and the entire United Nations system.

26. Mrs. COHEN-ORANTES (Guatemala) said that her delegation was willing to co-operate in any endeavour and to show the greatest possible flexibility with a view to reaching a consensus.

27. One of the issues that was a matter of the greatest concern to the international community was the clarification and application of a new world information and communication order. The participants in the second round table on the new information order, held in April at Copenhagen, had endeavoured to consider the question in a pragmatic manner and had recommended that problems that arose from the lack of technical skills in the developing countries, particularly rural areas, should be tackled as a matter of priority. The statistics of the International Telecommunication Union showed that 20 countries had in their possession 90 per cent of the telecommunications material in the world, whereas the remaining 10 per cent was spread over 135 countries. Participants had therefore insisted that the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication should be strengthened in order to put an end to such inequalities through the execution of technical co-operation projects beneficial to all countries. UNESCO and the Department, together with a number of organizations in the United Nations system, were alone, so far, in having implemented some of the most useful principles underlying the new world information and communication order with a view to reducing the gap in the field of communication.

28. The United Nations must improve its public image throughout the world. It was clear that the strongest criticism of the Organization was based on a political determination to discredit the United Nations. The Organization's reactions to that campaign were not energetic enough. It must disseminate and defend its work in the economic and social fields, where its achievements were exceptional. Remaining silent, adopting a passive approach and maintaining a low profile were not appropriate ways of improving the Organization's image. The authorized voices of the United Nations must make themselves heard in all the fields where the Organization was carrying out specific socio-economic development activities. The Department of Public Information had a major role to play in that connection and must have the unconditional support of all Member States. The highest priority must therefore be accorded to United Nations information activities, as a matter of urgency.

29. Mr. IRUMBA (Uganda) said that information and communications were important tools in international relations that could contribute enormously to international understanding, political stability, economic growth, and the protection and development of the cultural identity of peoples. However, they could also undermine those very objectives, as demonstrated by many instances in which information had been used in order to increase tension and conflict through the deliberate creation of false perceptions of reality.

30. For years the United Nations had been debating the need to establish a new world information and communication order that reflected the developing countries' aspirations and redressed imbalances. Considerable progress had been achieved and there was recognition - albeit somewhat grudging - that the existing world information order was inequitable and must be changed. Unfortunately, the

(Mr. Irumba, Uganda)

political will required in order to bring about the desired change was lacking and a rearguard struggle to prevent the new order from emerging was often encountered.

31. With the emergence of communications and computer technologies, information had become a prerequisite for technological progress and a central element of economic growth. Needless to say, technological progress and the high cost of developing and acquiring technologies had done nothing but increase the gap between the developed and the developing countries and reinforce the one-way flow of information and the developing countries' dependence.

32. It had been asserted by some that the new world information and communication order would embody restrictions on the free flow of information and the freedom of the press. Inordinate concerns on that score had greatly hampered the work of the Committee on Information. His country, which had a flourishing free press, strongly believed in the principles of freedom. However, that ideal should not be allowed to mask the reality of a structure whereby communication flowed in only one direction - to the developing countries - with all the negative political, economic and cultural consequences which that entailed.

33. The free circulation of information imposed certain responsibilities. Every profession was bound by ethical standards, and the press had a moral obligation to be objective and balanced. It was regrettable that the efforts of UNESCO in that connection had been dismissed by Western journalists.

34. There was now a better appreciation of the potential benefits of a balanced two-way flow of information for developed and developing countries alike. For that purpose, it was essential that the information infrastructure of the developing countries should be strengthened and modernized. The International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO played a significant role in that context and it was to be hoped that the resources provided to the Programme would be increased in order that it might be expanded. The training programme for young journalists and broadcasters from developing countries also deserved praise and should be expanded.

35. The United Nations information centres performed useful work and should be strengthened. The Committee was reminded, in that context, that Uganda's request for the assignment of an information officer to serve in his country had not yet been fulfilled.

36. The Department of Public Information had an important part to play, particularly in the developed countries, in making the public aware of the real role of the Organization and the scope of its activities. The United Nations had been the object of a campaign of denigration, deliberately orchestrated by countries such as South Africa whose policies of racism and oppression had been condemned by the Organization, as well as by other groups which had never accepted the positions adopted by newly independent and non-aligned countries. All Member States should therefore assist the Department of Public Information in giving a correct view of the Organization's role.

37. Mr. RODRIGUEZ-MEDINA (Colombia) said that the conciliatory spirit displayed by most of the delegations which had spoken permitted some optimism as to the outcome of negotiations on the draft resolution and the future of the Committee on Information. Aware that the strengthening of international peace and co-operation depended on information, the Group of 77 had endeavoured to reach an agreement acceptable to all, provided that extremist positions did not compromise the final text. His country, which had taken part in the second round table on a new world information and communication order, held at Copenhagen, hoped that the mutual respect for differences and the good will which had prevailed there would be a source of inspiration for the work of the Committee.

38. In an interdependent world, where the interests of all men were intertwined, ideologies or economic interests should not be allowed to dominate when there was an urgent need to address the serious imbalance in the area of information and communication. His country had actively assisted in the establishment and deliberations of the Committee on Information because it was convinced not only of the importance of the United Nations information programmes but also of the urgent need to establish a new world information and communication order which would make it possible to erase inequalities and bring about harmony between nations.

39. The new order must, of course, be based on the freedom of information, which implied freedom of access to sources of information, without discrimination, the free circulation and dissemination of information, protection of the journalistic profession and a guarantee of the right to be informed, which must be accompanied by the duty to provide information without the imposition of ideologies or the practice of State censorship or control. There was no doubt that the right to information and communication constituted one of the fundamental rights of the individual.

40. His country, which was proud of its own exemplary press, was well aware of the role which could be played by the media in promoting peace and development. It regretted the fact that foreign correspondents were undermining the efforts of developing countries by spreading biased or untruthful information, and had often requested that journalists from the industrialized world should submit more honest, reliable and constructive reports on the historic future and socio-economic progress of peoples in the developing countries. The political and cultural manipulation of information should be categorically condemned, and improper monopolies on communication, whether of a technical, scientific or economic nature, should be penalized.

41. The Under-Secretary-General for Public Information deserved commendation for his efforts to strengthen the professional and technical standards of the Department of Public Information. Nevertheless, the Department must be provided with a larger and more flexible budget in order to enable it to fulfil its ever-increasing obligations. The Spanish-language press and broadcasting services, particularly those intended for Latin America, should also be strengthened. He noted with concern the reduction in the use of Spanish in United Nations meetings and publications, the lack of information policies for the "electronic" media of Latin America and production costs at Headquarters, which continued to be prohibitive for a large number of countries and stations.

(Mr. Rodriguez-Medina, Colombia)

42. It was to be hoped that the situation would be speedily corrected and that, with the restructuring of the Secretariat, the Department of Public Information would be injected with new energy allowing the United Nations to deal successfully with the waves of hostile public opinion against it which were systematically instigated by its detractors.

43. Mr. MONTGOMERY (United States of America) noted that the Committee on Information, which had in the summer of 1986 once again become bogged down in a conceptual debate on an issue already resolved by consensus in 1985, had been unable to make progress towards what should be a common goal: the development of effective, pragmatic and objective guidelines for the Department of Public Information.

44. The divisions had been so wide on that occasion that, despite the willingness of the Group of Western European and other States to provide practical assistance for the strengthening of communication capabilities in the developing world, not a single member of that Group had been able to vote in favour of the proposed set of recommendations, which were manifestly biased, incomplete and offensive, and disregarded Western views. The proven intransigence and ill will of the Group of 77 showed to what extent the Committee on Information had become ineffectual and how much the efficiency and objectivity of the Department of Public Information had been eroded.

45. Three areas of continuing dispute must be resolved in order to achieve a true consensus, without which the activities of the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee would be of little value.

46. The first issue related to the free flow of information. Any attempt to stifle the free flow of information and to block a dynamic process of change by establishing a codified and institutionalized international order was both futile and unrealistic.

47. His country recognized the existence of an imbalance, which was particularly apparent in the impediments to the free flow of ideas still imposed by some, and understood the legitimate desire of developing countries to strengthen their infrastructure. However, those chronic disparities would not be corrected by endless incantations of meaningless and purely rhetorical catch-phrases, or by imposing restraints and restrictions; rather, the solution was to be found in practical measures to promote freer and fuller flows of information in and among nations, an undeniable contribution to which was made by the private-sector media.

48. The time was long overdue for an updating of the mandate of the Committee on Information, the real role of which was to publicize the activities of the United Nations and to promote a free flow of information. The refusal to accept that reality was the single most important reason why the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee no longer enjoyed a consensus and had lost its sense of direction.

(Mr. Montgomery, United States)

49. The second issue concerned the Department of Public Information. The task of the Department - to provide an impartial interpretation of the activities of the United Nations to the world - required skill and objectivity. However, the Department of Public Information was becoming steadily less credible, firstly as a result of having permitted serious distortions of that principle and also because it had been instructed, by means of resolutions on information which duplicated resolutions of the General Assembly, to carry out political functions which were not within its mandate. Mr. Akashi had stated, in that connection, that the Department of Public Information did not require instructions from the Special Political Committee and the Committee on Information on matters which had already been addressed by the General Assembly. The deletion of political paragraphs from the draft resolutions would help to re-establish consensus.
50. The recent assurances by the Department of Public Information of its concern to achieve objectivity must be welcomed. His delegation would continue to monitor the situation closely and to report its findings periodically to the United States Congress.
51. Third, there was the budgetary issue. His delegation had been appalled to find among the proposals adopted by the Group of 77 the previous summer several items requiring increased expenditures. His Government's position was perfectly clear on that point: there was to be no increase in the United Nations budget during the current financial crisis. A most logical way to finance new programmes within existing resources was to eliminate redundant, outmoded and ineffective programmes, beginning with those designated in the budget as having "lowest priority", and to accord priority to programmes mandated by consensus and reaching the largest audience. DPI could maximize the efficiency of its operations by regularly reviewing the costs and benefits of its programmes and by critically scrutinizing its administrative and personnel costs.
52. His delegation wished, lastly, to clarify its position on the free press issue. Several delegations had accused the United States and other industrialized nations of wanting to establish a new colonial age based on control of the communications system, and of promoting a free flow of information and freedom of the press as a subterfuge for perpetuating Western economic dominance. To put it bluntly, that was hog-wash; those self-serving allegations were pure fantasy, because no one country or group of countries could possibly exercise such control over the world's channels of communication.
53. Indeed, his Government expected that new technologies would create an abundance of diversified sources of information, and the greater the number of competing sources, the more likely individuals and nations would be to develop their full potential, in an atmosphere of peace, understanding and freedom.
54. On the opposite side, there were those who would continue to restrict the flow of information in an abuse of power. Those who accused the industrialized countries of monopolizing information, who spoke of the "decolonization" of information, were often the ones who had an exclusive control over information because they feared the impact of the truth on their closed societies.

(Mr. Montgomery, United States)

55. Attempts to limit freedom of information, an inherent element of liberty, were short-sighted and ultimately futile. They denied the evidence that people everywhere wanted more control over their own destinies, that people everywhere realized that the free flow of information gave them the means to improve the quality of their lives and to form their own judgements. History had proven time and again the value of independent media and shown that government-controlled media provided, at best, bland fare or, at worst, malicious propaganda. It should be noted that the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had had the audacity to accuse other countries of disinformation, forgetting that his own had excelled at that game.

56. The United States, then, opposed all attempts to set an agenda for the media in the Committee on Information, the Special Political Committee or elsewhere. To demand of the media that they should support a particular cause could only lead to abuse. A Government genuinely committed to the welfare of its citizens did not hesitate to allow all points of view to be heard, confident that an informed and perceptive electorate had the ultimate good sense to judge for itself the validity of disparate points of view.

57. The United States, where freedom of thought and freedom of the press, guaranteed by the Constitution, were rooted in long tradition, would not yield on those values.

58. Mr. OSMAN (Egypt) said that in order to be really free, information should flow two ways. That was unfortunately not the case at the moment. A situation of dependency still existed in many parts of the world, although there was a growing determination in many quarters to transform dependency into interdependency as harmoniously as possible.

59. In seeking a more balanced information system, the third world countries in no way proposed to regulate the circulation of information. At the same time, however, they could not accept the inequities in that area, which only added to existing disparities. Their goal was simply to be heard and to ensure that their political, economic or social aspirations were accurately reflected in the Western media and that they stopped bandying about stereotypes and prejudices.

60. It was encouraging that the spokesman for the European Community had recognized the legitimate concern of all countries, and especially the developing countries, about trivialization and distortion of news concerning them. Egypt agreed with the European Community that the United Nations could not adequately carry out its task without the support of the peoples of the world, and that DPI could do much to foster understanding of the major problems of the day, particularly those which had a direct bearing on international peace and security. As long as they were not solved, problems such as apartheid and the questions of Namibia and Palestine must remain a focus of concern for the international community.

(Mr. Osman, Egypt)

61. The third-world countries, which were aware that the new relations they hoped for would not come about automatically, were actively engaged in improving their own information systems as a prerequisite for the establishment of a new world information and communication order. Arrangements had been made, for instance, between news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing and non-aligned countries for a wider dissemination of news from and about them, and there were plans to establish regional news agencies.
62. His delegation was well aware of the difficulties which had prevented the Committee on Information from reaching consensus. At the same time, it knew that nothing worthwhile was achieved without patience and hard work.
63. The fact of the matter was that all groups had tried to hide their differences under the guise of consensus. The illusion had soon been dispelled, and that semblance of consensus had gradually given way to a veto among groups and within the groups themselves. It was obvious that the most difficult thing was to have the courage to be moderate; it was easy to take an extreme position.
64. During the 1986 substantive session, the Committee on Information had agreed on 51 recommendations out of a total of 57. The six recommendations outstanding fell into three areas. First, there was the financial aspect. Knowing the zero-growth budget allocation for DPI, the Group of 77 had accepted the insertion of the phrase "within the existing resources" wherever applicable.
65. Secondly, there was the problem of defining the new order. Taking the view that the new world information and communication order could be effective and credible only if it was supported by all parties concerned, the Group of 77 had adopted a very constructive attitude in the current negotiations. In particular, it had gone out of its way to agree to a seven-point proposal put forward by the Chairman of the Working Group, even including the amendment submitted by Finland emphasizing almost exclusively the establishment of a new world information and communication order "seen as an evolving and continuous process".
66. Thirdly, there was the political side of the question. It should be stressed that the activities of DPI reflected the will of the majority of countries composing the United Nations and that any attempt to depoliticize information could only be characterized as selective.
67. There again, the Group of 77 had shown great flexibility by accepting the proposals made by the Chairman of the Working Group. But far from being satisfied with those signs of good will, certain quarters would like to deny any place in the recommendations to references to issues like Palestine, Namibia or the debt problem. The Group of 77 could accept compromise but could not compromise its principles.
68. Although disappointed at the results of the negotiations, his delegation felt that efforts should be pursued, especially because the Committee on Information was so close to success. If suspicion and mistrust could be dispelled, it would be easy to reach an agreement on providing DPI with the clear-cut mandate it needed to perform its delicate mission.

69. Mr. FARTAS (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that at the 25th meeting he had cited the disinformation campaign launched against his country by the Government of the United States as an example to show how much such an action could damage the credibility of the information media and the value of the information they disseminated. In that regard, he had referred to numerous newspapers articles and statements in which American journalists had condemned that campaign. He had dwelled upon the abusive use of the information media because it was an attack on the sovereignty of an independent State and interference in its domestic affairs, which ran counter to the general principles of the new world information and communication order which the Committee was seeking to establish.

70. Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) thanked all the delegations for the invaluable encouragement they had given to the Department of Public Information; that encouragement would be of great help to it accomplishing its difficult mission. He welcomed the approval of the various DPI activities, in particular the co-operation with the pool of regional news agencies, the training programme for journalists from developing countries and the dialogue with the main information agencies of the world, as well as the positive remarks made on the work performed in information by DPI in the economic and social sphere and the comments praising Development Forum.

71. With regard to efforts aimed at maximizing the utilization of DPI resources, he wished to once again assure all delegations that no effort was spared to rationalize the management of activities.

72. He agreed with the representative of Burundi that it would be ill-advised to integrate the functions of the United Nations information centres with those of the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme. When, owing to the lack of financial resources, such functions must be entrusted to the UNDP representative, it was imperative to maintain the autonomy of information activities.

73. Replying to a question posed by the representative of Bangladesh, he said that it was for historical reasons that the centres operating in the developed countries were not subsidized by the host countries. Such centres had been created at a time when their expenditures could be charged to the United Nations ordinary budget. Owing to the financial crisis, it had since been decided that all new centres must be paid for partially by the host country. Furthermore, a number of industrialized countries felt that, as they were regularly paying their contributions to the United Nations, they saw no reason to finance the activities of the centres. Owing to the skeptical attitude of a segment of Western opinion with regard to United Nations activities, the Department of Public Information should constantly undertake a wide range of activities in such countries.

74. The representative of Canada had pointed out that in her country, the functions that usually devolved upon an information centre were carried out effectively by the United Nations Association of Canada. He fully shared that view and wished to express his warm thanks to the Canadian Government, which subsidized

(Mr. Akashi)

the activities of the Association. The success of the United Nations Pavilion at Expo 86 in Vancouver, whose cost had been entirely defrayed by the Canadian authorities, was an eloquent example of co-operation between Canada and the United Nations.

75. With regard to a question raised by the Yugoslav delegation, he recalled that resolution 38/82 adopted by the General Assembly in 1983 contained criteria governing the creation of information centres.

76. The representative of Bolivia had mentioned that a number of information centres were directed by nationals of the countries where they were located. Such a practice was an exception to the general rule, and information centre directors continued to be international officials first and foremost, responsible not to their Governments but to the United Nations.

77. The representative of Uganda had recalled having asked the Department of Public Information to send an information official to his country. The Under-Secretary-General was fully aware of the needs of Uganda, which no doubt considered that it was not being adequately served by the centre operating in Kenya. Unfortunately, owing to financial difficulties, DPI had been unable as yet to follow up that request.

78. A number of questions had been raised with regard to radio programmes. He noted with satisfaction the positive remarks made on the resumption of short-wave broadcasts and thanked the three Member States that had made it possible.

79. Brazil had regretted the departure of an official in charge of radio programmes in the Portuguese language, who had been asked to direct an information centre. Admittedly, short-wave broadcasts for Latin America could not be carried out normally until that official was replaced.

80. The representative of Pakistan had requested the resumption of radio broadcasts in Urdu. He pointed out that, like programmes disseminated in a number of other languages, those broadcasts were based on contracts to hire services. Owing to lack of resources, such broadcasts had had to be suspended. They would be resumed as soon as the financial situation improved.

81. The delegation of Nepal had requested the dissemination of broadcasts in Nepali. Unfortunately, as long as the financial crisis persisted, it would not be possible to grant that request.

82. The delegation of Colombia had regretted that Spanish was being used less in radio broadcasts, television programmes and publications. Mr. Akashi hoped that the importance of Spanish, which was the language of many Member States, would be maintained. As soon as the United Nations financial situation improved, that language would regain its due place. He expressed the hope that a partial lifting of the freeze on recruitment would enable the reduction in the volume of radio broadcasts for Latin America to be remedied.

(Mr. Akashi)

83. Replying to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who had raised a question of the impartiality of press communiqués, he said that the official reply to that complaint had been given in a letter dated 7 November 1986. He reaffirmed the impartiality and objectivity of DPI personnel. Any departure from its principles was not deliberate but was due to the constraints of work, because the press communiqués must be published two or three hours after the meetings ended.

84. Replying to the delegation of Bangladesh, he said that the reduction in the volume of press communiqués was due to the decrease in funds earmarked for the recruitment of temporary press attachés. He hoped that Member States would understand that the press communiqués must now be drafted from a more selective viewpoint and, at times, according to a thematic approach. He wished to stress how important it was to maintain an equitable balance between meeting coverage and substantive information and to continue devoting 50 per cent of resources to each of the two activities.

85. A number of representatives, including those of Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, had regretted that their countries were not adequately represented in the Department of Public Information. The delegations of Burundi, Bolivia and Pakistan had wished to know why the developing countries were underrepresented. DPI would continue to work towards equitable representation of all Member States on its staff. For the moment, the freeze on recruitment unfortunately did not allow measures to be taken to that end. It would also be much wiser to view the question of geographical balance from the perspective of the Secretariat as a whole.

86. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the intensive negotiations conducted under the chairmanship of the representative of Turkey would be crowned with success. He had been struck by the realism, moderation and flexibility that had marked the speeches of delegations and was convinced that the Committee would want to make the most of the climate of good will so that DPI could receive the support needed to carry out its priority activities.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.