



UN LIBRARY

MAY 19 1987

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
24th meeting
held on
Monday, 10 November 1986
at 3 p.m.
New York

IN / A COLLECTION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th 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)

*This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate fascicle for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/41/SR.24
12 November 1986

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

/...

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

AGENDA ITEM 74: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/41/21, 120 and Add.1, A/41/562 and Add.1, A/41/582 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. TSIMBA (Zimbabwe) said that his delegation supported the call for a new information and communication order because of the urgent need to change the dependent status of the developing countries in that area. Although the concept meant different things to different people, there could be no dispute that a new world information and communication order had long been needed to rectify the imbalances of the past.
2. For the developing countries, it would be an important complement to efforts to attain a new international economic order. Under the existing system, the multinational news agencies enjoyed a virtual monopoly in news gathering and dissemination, which reduced some of the developing countries to mere receptacles of imbalanced information and served the interests of the industrialized countries.
3. Extraneous ideological issues and the lack of political will on the part of certain members of the Committee on Information posed a threat to its effectiveness. It was preposterous to claim that the Committee was politicized. He wondered what ideology had to do with its demands that the Department of Public Information (DPI) and other specialized organs of the United Nations should give priority to informing the world about the vital issues of the day. His delegation fully supported the view that news flow must be in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter, human rights instruments and the norms of international law.
4. His Government was concerned by the report of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information that budgetary constraints had seriously handicapped the effective operations of DPI. Without the United Nations information centres in many third world countries, the struggles of oppressed peoples would be forgotten. Liberation and self-determination were the sine qua non for the attainment and preservation of peace.
5. His delegation fully endorsed the Department's programme of co-operation with various regional news agencies, the importance of which had recently been underlined at the Eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries. The attempt must be made to rectify past imbalances while bearing in mind the ability of nations to pay, the availability of skills and the feasibility of interchange of news between countries.

6. Mr. BWAKIRA (Burundi) said that his delegation welcomed the collaboration between UNESCO and DPI in promoting the establishment of a new world information order and paid warm tribute to UNESCO for its efforts to reinstate the culture of third world countries. It had become inconceivable to speak of international relations without evoking the inequalities between North and South in the area of information. International communication was based on an imbalance and a deliberate distortion of the facts to the detriment of the poor countries. Although information could be a factor for peace and international understanding, it could also be manipulated to serve the ideological interest of certain groups, in which case it bore the germ of confrontation and even war. The existing monopoly on information was often a vehicle for imposing barriers and cultivating prejudices and stereotypes in the third world, where cultural values had been distorted or even destroyed. A correlation existed between lack of information and poverty, and information, like development, was a legitimate right. North and South must work in a spirit of compromise towards abolishing the inequalities in the exchange of information.

7. His delegation was pleased that efforts had been made to carry out the General Assembly directives concerning the dissemination of information on the important issues of the day. DPI must pursue the task of promoting understanding for the aims and activities of the United Nations, especially in circles critical of the Organization and in those developing countries where information was inadequate. In that connection, the information centres made a valuable contribution, and his delegation did not support the suggestion to reduce their number or to merge them with other field offices, because that might deprive the United Nations of its ability to defend its image. The functions of the centres were not identical with those of the offices of UNDP resident representatives, who had very different areas of competence. In many countries where the resident representative was the acting director of the centre, the Government had requested the appointment of centre directors, and his own Government was pleased that DPI had appointed a director of the Information Centre at Bujumbura. Current limited natural resources precluded the establishment of centres in many other countries, and existing centres should bear in mind the real needs and geographic and linguistic situation of the countries where they were located. Many United Nations services dealt with information, a proliferation that dissipated limited efforts and resources. The Department of Public Information should be in charge of all such activities.

8. Any reduction in DPI personnel should be carried out in a way that enabled the Department to continue its operations, while bearing in mind the interests of all the regional groups. Regardless of the current reductions, the recruitment of new talents should not be held up for long, because that would deprive the Department of its dynamism.

9. Dialogue was needed if the Committee on Information was to overcome the differences of opinion now dividing it. Real international co-operation in the field of information required recognition of the rights and obligations of all parties. Evolution and revolution in the field of information were impossible unless the need for change was recognized as a factor contributing to peace and international understanding.

10. Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan) said that the item on information was potentially one of the most significant on the agenda of the General Assembly. Unfortunately, the attitude of certain countries had been deliberately obstructive, and efforts to reach a consensus had been stymied. The developed countries had resorted to time-consuming debates on the definition of a new world information and communication order. Certain words and phrases from UNESCO resolutions had been taken out of context to create confusion and add new interpretations which had never been intended when the General Assembly had first set forth the concept.

11. The current world order pre-dated the creation of many developing countries, which was why the call for the establishment of a new information and communication order was perceived by some as a challenge to their entrenched interests. Never in the march of human civilization had mankind been faced with such interdependence, compounded by the challenges of scientific and technological advances. Changed circumstances dictated a new and fresher approach.

12. The unidirectional flow of information from the developed to the developing countries relegated the priorities and legitimate interests of the third world to the background, with harmful consequences for its political, economic and social development. The present imbalances and distortions must be rectified through participation by the developing countries in the gains of the current revolution in the fields of information and communication. To that end, those countries which propagated the principle of the free flow of information should assist all countries in acquiring and developing the relevant technologies on the basis of non-discrimination.

13. It was regrettable that, at a time when the capabilities of the United Nations were being severely taxed and called in question, the activities of DPI were being curtailed. He referred in particular to the 15-minute weekly programme in the Urdu language, which at minimal cost had rendered useful services to more than 100 million people, particularly in southern Asia. The programme had been extremely constructive in promoting United Nations activities and international understanding between different peoples and cultures, and his delegation called for its immediate resumption.

14. The Department should adequately cover in its programmes the plight of all peoples and countries under colonial and alien domination and foreign occupation, in conformity with the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations. Efforts to secure better representation in DPI for nationals from developing countries should also continue.

15. His delegation attached great importance to the projection of United Nations activities in Member States. The United Nations Correspondents' Association carried out activities which promoted and stimulated information about their world body. His delegation urged DPI to extend all facilities to UNCA in the pursuit of its professional activities, which should not be affected by the financial crisis.

16. In conclusion, it was his delegation's earnest hope that the recommendations of the Committee on Information would be adopted by consensus.

17. Mr. WOLDIE (Ethiopia) stated that the world was witnessing a carefully planned programme of action to preserve and perpetuate the system of neo-colonial exploitation of the developing countries in the interest of transnational monopolies. The political and socio-economic changes of developing countries were being checked through the intensification of inequitable trade, the export of inflation and the raising of foreign debts. The domination of information by a handful of multinational news agencies had widened the disparity of economic and technological development between the developed and developing countries. It had opened the way to political manoeuvring and interference in the internal affairs of other countries and blocked promotion of peace, justice, equality and the enhancement of international understanding.

18. A decade earlier, the non-aligned countries had called for the establishment of a new world information and communication order and had established the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies in order to rectify imbalances in the field of information and communications. At the recent Conference of Heads of State or Governments of Non-Aligned Countries at Harare, they had renewed their appeal and reiterated the need to strengthen co-ordination with the Department of Public Information.

19. The Department had continued to strengthen its co-operation with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and with regional agencies such as the Pan African News Agency. It had also shown its determination to make its practical contribution to the new order by continuing its training programmes for young journalists and broadcasters from developing countries despite the financial crisis facing the Organization. In normal circumstances, DPI should concentrate its efforts on the coverage of the United Nations and its work, especially in priority areas including preservation of peace, decolonization, development, the struggle against apartheid and racial discrimination, the question of Namibia and the Middle East and other issues of grave concern to mankind.

20. UNESCO was also playing a pioneer role in establishing the new world information and communication order through the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). While his delegation appreciated the remarkable achievements already registered, it was concerned that the number of projects submitted to IPDC for financing was increasing rapidly while contributions to the Special Account were at a standstill. The international donor community should respond to the appeal of the Director-General in that respect. DPI should continue to extend its full support to IPDC and should broaden its co-operation with UNESCO.

21. The Committee on Information had done valuable work, and he hoped that its recommendations would be accepted by all without reservation. His delegation, for its part, would spare no effort in continuing its co-operation with the Committee on Information, DPI and UNESCO towards the realization of a new world information and communication order.

22. Mr. NAVARRO (Nicaragua) said that his country was participating in the debate because of its membership in the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Group of 77 and its desire to denounce injustices wherever and however they occurred. If no consensus had been reached on the documents before the Committee, that had not been for lack of co-operation and flexibility on the part of the Group of 77. The attempt by certain delegations to impose unacceptable conditions had amounted to a boycott of the Committee's work and had made it impossible to reach an agreement.

23. The new world information communication order was a pillar in the struggle of third world peoples for progress, development, justice and peace. As his delegation had stated in the Fourth Committee, the fact that information came almost exclusively from the metropolises kept a large number of supposedly independent countries in a state of colonization. The Eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries had declared that co-operation in the field of information was closely connected with the struggle of the non-aligned countries and other developing countries to establish new and more just international relations in general, and the new international information and communication order.

24. Yet some delegations were continuing to put forward their usual sermon on the free flow of information. Although that was a basic principle of his country's revolution, in the context in which it was being applied it was simply a gross attempt to distract attention for the purpose of perpetuating the current information order. Those delegations were in fact advocating a state of anarchy in which the powerful countries would be able to permeate the information with their interests and values and prevent the developing countries, which lacked the necessary information and communications infrastructure, from sending their message to the metropolises.

25. One clear example was the subversive and misnamed Radio Martí and the radio station which the Government of the United States was attempting to set up in territories adjoining Nicaragua as one more tool in its immoral war of aggression against his people. Another was the campaign of silence in the international press and local periodicals on a matter of such importance as the condemnation of the United States by the International Court of Justice and the subsequent historical vote in the General Assembly calling for compliance with the Judgement. The magnitude of the problem was illustrated by the fact that a handful of news agencies controlled nearly 80 per cent of the daily news transmitted throughout the world.

26. The "evolutionary process" theory amounted to colonialism in information and communications. Like apartheid, it should not merely be reformed: what was needed was a radical transformation of the international information and communication structure.

27. In conclusion, he expressed his delegation's recognition of the work carried out by UNESCO throughout its 40 years, despite pressure and blackmail on the part of certain countries. Similarly, he commended the work carried out by DPI, to which it gave full support and co-operation in the discharge of its important task.

28. Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria) said that although it had not been possible to achieve consensus concerning the report of the Committee on Information, most delegations had expressed their support for the invaluable work performed by the United Nations information centres. His country, in which the information media were among the freest in the world, welcomed the contribution of UNESCO towards the establishment of a new world information and communication order.
29. His country supported measures to strengthen the communication capabilities of the developing countries. Whatever information was disseminated should be just, impartial and designed to promote international peace and security and the right of peoples to self-determination, especially in the Middle East, Namibia and South Africa. To that end, the information media throughout the world had a basic responsibility to disseminate objective and non-biased information for the good of humanity. Despite limited facilities, his country had made a modest contribution to assist United Nations information activities in the region.
30. The revelation by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information that some information activities had had to be curtailed because of financial constraint was a matter of great concern to his delegation. Such measures should be based on consultations with Member States and on criteria to be established by the Committee on Information. He hoped that the financial crisis would not affect the basic information objective.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.