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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE  
21st meeting  
held on  
Thursday, 6 November 1986  
at 10.30 a.m.  
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KOUASSI (Togo)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.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)

(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. CABALLERO (Cuba) said he regretted that the documents submitted to the Committee under the item on the agenda had had to be adopted by vote, rather than by consensus, because the conditions imposed on the Group of 77 amounted to an ultimatum. That was a result of the fact that the dominant countries did not wish to change the transnational information system, which explained why they were against UNESCO and were putting systematic pressure on the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information. But those countries seemed to forget that the decolonization of information was not the isolated aim of a group of radical countries but the objective of more than 120 nations making up the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Group of 77. In face of the pressure and blackmail aimed at imposing a consensus that could amount to abdicating the right to development, his delegation reminded the Committee that information was not just a technical question and that the narrow role that people wished to assign to the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information was unacceptable.

2. A few figures explained why representatives of certain Western countries persisted in defending the free flow theory, even though, to do that, they had to give a false picture of the efforts being made by developing countries to eliminate inequalities and injustices in the information field. Four Western news agencies controlled 80 per cent of the news circulated round the world daily; a small group of developed countries controlled 80 per cent of the printed press, 90 per cent of radio broadcasts and more than 95 per cent of television broadcasts; the United States of America alone controlled 75 per cent of television broadcasts, 50 per cent of all cinemas, 62 per cent of the production and marketing of computers and 89 per cent of the commercial information stored in data banks. Under those conditions, the doctrine of the free flow of information was merely a way of giving the transnationals in the information field absolute freedom to violate the sovereignty of other States and to impose their political opinions, their values, their ideologies and their ways of life without any restriction whatsoever. That largely explained why, over the last 10 years, despite the efforts of UNESCO and of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Group of 77, the consideration of international information flows and appraisal of global communications structures had been violently rejected by spokesmen for the transnationals.

3. That new form of colonization was also threatening some industrialized countries. The third world countries struggling to establish a new world

(Mr. Caballero, Cuba)

information and communication order were at the same time defending the interests of Western European countries for which the problems of automated information and trans-border data flows no longer arose only in terms of technical progress and competition, but also in political terms, with unforeseeable social and economic consequences. The processes in question were effecting radical changes in production relations, manufacturing and control systems, productivity levels and the labour force; but the danger was that they were controlled at the global level by a tiny group of gigantic private supranational enterprises, the majority of which had their parent companies in the United States of America. The Head of State of a Western European nation had himself warned against the control exercised by a score of companies over the new communication and data processing techniques, a situation that could compromise the decision-making power of countries and, consequently, their sovereignty. In that connection, the Under-Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology, Mr. William Salmon, had recognized in February 1982 that various Governments were beginning to react to the threat posed to their security and economic interests by United States policy on international information and communication activities; moreover, the closest industrial and trading allies of the United States were beginning to distance themselves from it on that point.

4. But what was more hypocritical and dangerous than the so-called "free flow" doctrine was the wish to impose a new world information and communication order conceived as "an evolutionary process", at a time when a profound scientific and technological revolution was taking place that was transforming the social, economic and political structures of the world. New information, communication and data-processing techniques were progressing exponentially, whereas the developing countries, which were continuing to suffer the consequences of their colonial past in the communications field, were obliged to put off urgent economic and social transformations indefinitely. They could not be made to compete with the great metropolitan countries that controlled the geostationary orbit and were advancing with giant strides; yet that was the real meaning of the new information order conceived as an evolutionary process.

5. At their Eighth Conference of Heads of State and Government held at Harare, the non-aligned countries had reaffirmed that co-operation in the information field was essential for establishing new and fairer international relations and, in particular, for establishing a new world information and communication order, which required the decolonization of information. Such a new order, like the new international economic order, represented the fundamental aim of the struggle being waged by the peoples of developing countries for decolonization and for political, economic, cultural and social liberation.

6. Any use of the media for purposes contrary to the aims of the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law should be banned. But the information transnationals and the official media of certain Western countries, hypocritically invoking "freedom of expression" and the so-called "free flow" doctrine, were seeking to favour neo-colonialist interests and to bring about the political and ideological demobilization of the peoples of the third world; they were falsifying the image of those peoples, distorting the struggle that they were

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waging to establish a new international economic order and ignoring the efforts that they were making to find solutions to the problems created by the international economic crisis, in particular the enormous external debt problem. Some media, especially in the United States of America, were becoming the tools of a psychological war being waged by officialdom and reactionary circles against the socialist countries, the third world countries freed from the colonial and imperialist yoke and national liberation movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization or those of southern Africa. The practice often acquired the standing of State policy, witness the establishment by the Washington authorities of a subversive station cynically called "Radio-Martí". That desperate gesture, symbolic of the short-sighted policy of the present United States Administration, was perhaps the best proof of the failure of a policy of hostility, aggression and systematic interference in the internal affairs of the Cuban people that had lasted more than 25 years. The Heads of State and Government of the non-aligned countries, meeting at Harare, had condemned the use of radio broadcasting as an instrument of hostile propaganda against other States and had demanded an immediate halt to all subversive radio transmissions aimed at non-aligned countries.

7. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of UNESCO, his delegation congratulated the organization and its Director-General on their remarkable work for third world countries, in particular for their work to establish a new world information and communication order, despite the pressure and blackmail exerted by the United States Administration in particular. Faced with imperialism's assault, which was aimed not only at UNESCO but also at all the machinery for multilateral co-operation, the Group of 77 would close ranks and struggle resolutely to win its rights, without renouncing its principles and despite all difficulties and obstacles.

8. In that same spirit, his delegation supported the work done by the Department of Public Information, the Committee on Information and the United Nations system in general for the development of international co-operation and in such priority areas as the establishment of a new world information and communication order.

9. Mr. BUI XUAN NHAT (Viet Nam) said that the imperialist media, taking advantage of their monopoly, were continuing their psychological warfare against socialist and developing countries whose Governments were not to their liking and refused to bend to their diktats, for example, by transmitting subversive broadcasts detrimental to their cultural identities so as to succeed by propaganda where military, economic and other means had failed.

10. One of the most important factors helping to maintain that unjust situation was the big gap between the developing and the developed countries in terms of their information and communication capabilities, to which the figures of ITU testified, and which continued to widen, despite spectacular technological progress

11. The idea of a new world information and communication order that had been making headway for 10 years, thanks to the combined efforts of developing countries, in particular the non-aligned countries, was continuing to meet very

(Mr. Bui Xuan Nhat, Viet Nam)

active resistance from those who were using their monopoly in the information field to wage a crusade against socialism and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, to interfere in the internal affairs of States and to foment hostilities among nations.

12. The situation was not rosy but pessimism or cynicism was not justified; what was needed was a new intensified, forward-looking approach in order to accelerate the establishment of the new world information and communication order, in particular through assisting the developing countries to strengthen their communication and information infrastructure. In that connection, his delegation approved the recommendations of the Committee on Information, which by and large conformed to those of the non-aligned countries.

13. In spite of the financial difficulties of the Organization, the role of the Department of Public Information should be strengthened in order to enable it to continue to discharge its essential task, in particular through the wider dissemination of information on the most burning issues of the times, namely, peace, disarmament, national independence and economic development.

14. The new world information and communication order and the new international economic order were closely linked, and it was therefore essential to intensify information activities concerning the latter. The Department of Public Information should therefore intensify its co-operation with UNDP, UNESCO and with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies. His delegation supported the arrangements for a third round table on the new international economic order, as earlier round tables had achieved positive results.

15. The outstanding role played by UNESCO in the establishment of a new world information and communication order had not, however, been to the liking of certain Western powers which, after withdrawing from the organization because they had not been able to impose their will on it, had orchestrated a large-scale disinformation campaign aimed at discrediting it. Viet Nam supported the proposal of Mongolia that the General Assembly, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of UNESCO, should reaffirm its full support for the efforts made by UNESCO. The Department of Public Information should pay particular attention to that event and disseminate information on the establishment of the new world information order.

16. Mr. JHA (Nepal) said that he would confine his intervention to the special information problems facing least developed countries such as Nepal.

17. It was certainly urgent to establish a new world information and communication order in order to correct the well-known discrepancies which existed at the international level in the field of information, but it should not be forgotten that the least developed countries also suffered from a gap in the dissemination of information at the national level. The old disparities between urban and rural areas were aggravated further in the least developed countries by longstanding poverty and illiteracy. There were also disparities at the regional level. The special needs of the least developed countries in the information sphere should therefore be given as much attention as their economic needs, as it was true that the establishment of a new world information and communication order was an essential component of the new international economic order.

(Mr. Jha, Nepal)

18. Nepal, despite the considerable and praiseworthy progress which it had made in the development of communications in the rural areas, would find it difficult, without the help and understanding of the international community, to correct those internal imbalances and to exploit fully the development potential of the communication media.

19. The influence of information in shaping ideas no longer needed to be proved. In the least developed countries that role was even more crucial since the flow, or non-flow, of information could have a direct bearing on questions of national cohesion, creativity and even national identity and could sometimes serve to counterbalance foreign values or beliefs that were incompatible with the national interest. Although his delegation supported a free and multidimensional exchange of information, it firmly believed that measures should be taken to safeguard small countries from becoming victims of socio-economic cultural invasion by more powerful media under the banner of the right to the free flow of information. The best safeguard was a well-developed communications system which could be used for tackling the problems of underdevelopment, particularly illiteracy, and enriching the cultural heritage.

20. In that connection it would perhaps be useful for the Department of Public Information to redefine its priorities to take that need into account. His delegation supported the continuation of practical training programmes under public and private auspices throughout the developing world organized under the aegis of South-South co-operation or by international agencies. He expressed appreciation that a number of Nepali journalists had benefited from them. His delegation also welcomed the convening in Katmandu, early in 1987, of a round table for senior media personnel and hoped that the special problems of the least developed countries might be tackled at it. It urged once again that Nepali be included in the Asian Unit of the Radio Services of the United Nations so as to facilitate the taping of DPI programmes which could reach the Nepalese masses.

21. Mr. COULIBALY (Mali) regretted that the field of information and communication, like that of international relations, suffered from an imbalance that placed the developing countries at a disadvantage. The limited means at their disposal did not permit them to satisfy the legitimate needs of their peoples in the field of information and communication.

22. The extraordinary progress made in that field had made it possible for the international community of States to promote greater multilateral co-operation in the interest of all its members, both industrialized and developing, particularly in the field of weather forecasting and remote sensing, in which communication by satellite could bring enormous benefits to developing countries.

23. The Eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Harare from 1 to 6 September 1986, had provided information on the role played by UNESCO to establish a new world information and communication order in which there would be a more balanced flow of information between developed and developing countries. In that connection, it should be pointed out that, if the growing tide of information from the former to the latter had made it possible

(Mr. Coulibaly, Mali)

to make the international community aware of sometimes tragic situations and to mobilize its solidarity, it had, in other circumstances, seriously prejudiced the stability of States and national development efforts by disseminating tendentious, unverified and sensational information. Decolonization was thus needed in that field too. For its part, Mali was ready to do everything possible to enable the new order to strengthen friendship and understanding between peoples.

24. Mr. EKE (Benin) said that, bearing in mind the many facets of information, including the social, technological and political, the establishment of a new world information and communication order was essential for the strengthening of peace and international understanding and to promote the development of the countries of the third world. The goal, as sought by UNESCO and the Group of 77, was to reduce the enormous disparities existing in the field of information between the developing and the developed countries, by ending the selfish monopoly of the latter.

25. It was a matter for regret that the work of the Committee had foundered on issues on which there was usually virtual unanimity in the General Assembly, as well as on the definition of a new world information and communication order, notwithstanding the untiring efforts made by the Group of 77 to reach a consensus on that point. His delegation hoped that the much-desired consensus might be achieved on the basis of part (b) of the Committee's recommendation 4, which reproduced paragraph 8 of UNESCO resolution 3.1 of 25 November 1983.

26. His delegation generally approved the recommendations of the Committee in its report but nevertheless believed that it would not be wise to reduce information activities which on the contrary, should be strengthened in order to serve the noble ideals in the name of which the United Nations had been created. It welcomed the efforts made by the Department of Public Information to regulate the problem of short-wave radio transmissions, in which it was very interested.

27. With regard to the role of United Nations information centres, far from being a representational structure for ideology, they were instead the connecting link in an objective system of communication, an improvable tool for co-operation and dialogue between peoples. They were useful for the information media of the countries where they were located and gave a first inkling of what the new world information and communication order to which the third world aspired could be. In view of the important role which they had been assigned, the centres should have a substantial degree of autonomy, both organizational and functional; his delegation therefore considered that their efficiency would inevitably be reduced if they were grouped together with UNDP offices.

28. His Government welcomed the opening of a United Nations information centre at Cotonou. It had assigned it the goals of making the role and ideals of the United Nations better known, maintaining fruitful co-operation with local information media and with the various institutions of the country and contributing to the promotion of a new, more just and efficient information order.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.