

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THIRTEENTH SESSION

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Chairman: Mrs. Lina P. TSALDARIS (Greece).

AGENDA ITEM 35

Freedom of information: report of the Secretary-General on consultations concerning the draft Convention on Freedom of Information (A/3868 and Add.1-8) (concluded)

1. Mr. SHALIZI (Afghanistan) said that his Government had already stated its views on the general subject of freedom of information. He would therefore merely explain his votes on the various draft resolutions relating to agenda item 35.

2. His Government, backed by the entire Afghan people, was in favour of any measure designed to promote peace, co-operation and true understanding between nations. The draft Convention on Freedom of Information was an important means of achieving those objectives; that was why his delegation had co-sponsored the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.707), which the Committee had adopted. That was also why it had voted against the Australian-Irish amendments (A/C.3/L.708). It had voted in favour of draft resolution A submitted by the United States (A/C.3/L.706/Rev.1) as amended by the Soviet delegation. It had abstained on draft resolution B on the grounds that its provisions were already being applied by Member States.

3. Mr. CUEVAS CANCINO (Mexico) said that his delegation had not taken part in the general debate on freedom of information as such, because it considered that the very terms of agenda item 35 called for freedom of information to be studied only in so far as it related to the results of the Secretary-General's consultations. His delegation's position on freedom of information was in any event well known.

4. His delegation had voted for the eight-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.707) because the debate had shown that there was a majority in favour of discussing the draft prepared by the Committee on the draft Convention on Freedom of Information (A/AC.42/7, annex). It had also been favourably disposed towards the United States draft resolutions (A/C.3/L.706/Rev.1), which provided for concrete measures to promote freedom of information. However, it had had to vote against the Soviet amendment to operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution A, which introduced the new idea that the Commission on Human Rights was competent to consider not only freedom of information in general

but also the technical assistance which might be given to under-developed countries in that sphere. There was nowadays a regrettable tendency to expand technical assistance activities in a rather haphazard way, regardless of the consequences. It should be borne in mind in that connexion that the technical assistance programme for 1959 showed a deficit of some \$3 million. His delegation had therefore considered the USSR representative's addition inappropriate, particularly as it had not been carefully considered by the Committee. As it had been adopted, he had been obliged to abstain from voting on draft resolution A.

5. Miss HAMPTON (New Zealand) said that her delegation had no desire to prevent other countries from enjoying true freedom of information; but as the Chilean representative had emphasized (902nd meeting), it was to be feared that the draft prepared by the Committee on the draft Convention on Freedom of Information, far from protecting and promoting freedom of information, would have exactly the opposite result. Furthermore, consideration of the draft might progress as slowly as consideration of the draft International Covenants on Human Rights, and thus absorb too much of the Committee's time. Her delegation could have accepted a text providing for the draft Convention to be considered at a future session, but it thought that the terms of the eight-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.707), which made express reference to the fourteenth session, were too categorical. She had taken pleasure in supporting the United States draft resolutions (A/C.3/L.706/Rev.1).

6. Miss FUJITA (Japan) wished to explain two of her delegation's votes. She had supported the Australian-Irish amendments (A/C.3/L.708) because, as her Government had emphasized on various occasions, any draft convention that might be prepared must be acceptable to the majority of States. Nevertheless, she had not voted against the eight-Power draft resolution (A/C.3/L.707), but had merely abstained, as she did not wish to stand in the way of the development efforts that were being made by various countries.

Conclusion of the Committee's work

7. Mr. BARODY (Saudi Arabia), after congratulating the Committee on the progress made at the thirteenth session, drew attention to the increasing participation of women in the Committee's work, and stressed the valuable contribution which, because of their special qualities, they could make to its humanitarian work.

8. Mr. SHALIZI (Afghanistan), Mr. YEOH (Federation of Malaya), speaking on behalf of the Commonwealth countries, Miss FAROUK (Tunisia), speaking also on behalf of Turkey and several African delegations, Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic), who at the same time expressed the hope that the discussion on the draft International Covenants on Human Rights

might be speeded at the fourteenth session, Mr. FOMIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of all the Soviet Socialist Republics, Mrs. LORD (United States of America), Mr. SUTANTO (Indonesia), speaking also for the delegations of Indonesia's sister nations, Mrs. LOPEZ (Colombia), Mr. SAPOZHNIKOV (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic), speaking also on behalf of his country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. THIERRY (France), speaking also on behalf of Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, Mrs. DE ARENAS (Guatemala), Mr. CUNHA MELLO (Brazil), Miss FUENTES (El Salvador), Mr. KETRZYNSKI (Poland), Mr. YAPOU (Israel), Mrs. KHADDURI (Iraq), Mr. MAHMUD (Ceylon), Mr. RIOSECO (Chile), and Mr. BRILLANTES (Philippines) paid a tribute to the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the Rapporteur for the outstanding capacities they had demonstrated during the debates, and thanked the Secretariat officials for their co-operation.

9. Mr. ROSSIDES (Greece), after associating himself with the congratulations addressed to the Committee's officers and to the Secretariat, said that the Committee should also give some attention to the weaknesses which might be noted in its work. Recalling the proposal made by Greece at the General Assembly's eleventh session and the objections which had been raised to it, he said that his delegation's doubts regarding the early adoption of the draft International Covenants on Human Rights had not been unfounded. At the pace maintained so far, it would take ten or fifteen years to complete work on the sixty-four articles still to be considered—perhaps even longer, in fact, for some of the articles might need a great deal of consideration by the Committee.

10. The United Nations had recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but nothing concrete had been done to ensure the practical application of the rights proclaimed in the Declaration. It was very regrettable that, after the enthusiastic start ten years previously, the work on the draft Covenants had so greatly slowed down. In the circumstances he hoped that when, at the fourteenth session, his delegation again presented—as it intended to do—its proposal regarding provisional measures of implementation, the proposal would receive a warmer welcome. At a time when violations of human rights remained frequent and when even torture was still practised, the Committee responsible for humanitarian questions could not disclaim interest in the defence of human rights or forget the trust which the peoples of the world placed in the United Nations.

11. Mr. SIMPSON (Liberia) shared the Greek representative's hope that the Committee's work on the draft Covenants would proceed at a faster pace. The study of the draft Convention on Freedom of Information should also be expedited. He associated himself with the other speakers who had congratulated the Committee's officers and thanked the Secretariat.

12. Mr. MEZINCESCU (Romania), speaking on behalf of his delegation and of the delegations of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, thanked the Chairman for the wise and objective manner in which she had guided the discussions and helped the Com-

mittee to achieve positive results. He also congratulated the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Calamari, for the energy he had shown when need arose, and the Rapporteur, Miss Addison, for the excellent work which she had accomplished. He wished to offer special thanks to the members of the Secretariat and to voice his gratitude to all the representatives who had co-operated in the work done at the thirteenth session. All the Committee's decisions reflected its attachment to humanitarian principles, to international co-operation and to social progress.

13. The delegations of Romania and of the other socialist countries shared the Greek representative's wish to see the draft International Covenants on Human Rights completed, ratified and, above all, carried into effect as soon as possible. His delegation, he pointed out, was ready to adopt the text submitted by the Commission on Human Rights (E/2573, annex I B). He had consequently always refrained from proposing too many improvements or from seeking to bring the existing draft too closely into line with his own country's legislation. Experience had shown that an excessive number of amendments made the discussion much longer and more difficult than most representatives desired.

14. Mr. CALAMARI (Panama) associated himself with the warm tribute paid to the Chairman and the Rapporteur, and to the members of the Secretariat. He thanked all the representatives, who had set a magnificent practical example of international co-operation, and thanked them for the flattering words which they had kindly addressed to him.

15. Miss ADDISON (Ghana), Rapporteur, speaking on behalf of her country, thanked the representatives who had spoken of her in extremely kind terms. She had served the Committee in all humility, and could not have performed her task satisfactorily without the devoted co-operation of the Secretariat.

16. The CHAIRMAN said she was deeply moved by the words of praise addressed to her. She wholeheartedly endorsed the thanks expressed to the Vice-Chairman and to the Rapporteur, whose co-operation she had found very valuable. She wished to offer her very sincere congratulations to all the representatives, who had exercised their complete freedom of speech with moderation in order to avoid overheated controversy and to work in a constructive atmosphere. She warmly thanked all the members of the Secretariat, whose selflessness and ability had helped the Committee in its work.

17. In conclusion, she stressed that the problem of the draft International Covenants on Human Rights was one of the most important and urgent of those which the Committee would have to settle at the next session of the General Assembly. If the members of the Committee agreed, a paragraph to that effect could be included in the report on the agenda item concerned.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.