

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. PIBULSONGGRAM

(Thailand)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (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 DC-230, United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

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

Distr. GENERAL  
A/SPC/46/SR.8  
28 October 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 75: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/46/21, A/46/449; A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6)

1. Mr. BEJO (Albania) said that the dissemination and exchange of information on the political, social, economic and cultural life of countries and peoples contributed to the improvement of international relations. Although progress had been made during the past decade, there was still a gap between the abilities of the developed and the developing countries to disseminate information. Improved access to more advanced information technology would enable the developing countries to narrow that gap and would consolidate cultural pluralism, thereby further strengthening international understanding. It was imperative to establish a new, more just and effective communication order, based on the free and balanced dissemination of information.
2. The sweeping political, economic and social changes in his country had been accompanied by quantitative and qualitative improvements in the field of information. His country was committed to the principles of the United Nations Charter, including the fundamental principles of freedom of information, expression and opinion. Full freedom of information was regarded as a basic human right, and the Albanian people had full access to foreign radio and television programmes. The pluralistic mass media reflected viewpoints of the various political parties, non-governmental organizations, groups and individuals. However, owing to its economic difficulties, Albania required international assistance to develop its information infrastructure.
3. It was deplorable that, notwithstanding the international trend towards greater democracy, the Serbian majority in Yugoslavia was suppressing the Albanian population - the third largest in that country - and that Albanian language information media in Yugoslavia had been closed down, a clear violation of the freedom of information. It would be in keeping with international law to send a United Nations information mission to investigate the violation of the rights of Albanians in Yugoslavia.
4. In conclusion, he said that his country would spare no effort in helping the international community to strengthen international peace and security and friendly relations among peoples.
5. Mr. SOUVANNAVONG (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that at a time when the world was experiencing rapid and profound changes, the task of informing world public opinion, in a timely and accurate manner, of what really happened was of paramount importance. The Department of Public Information (DPI) of the United Nations had an important role to play, for the legitimate interests of developing countries, and in particular the least developed among them, generally were not adequately covered by the private

(Mr. Souvannavong, Lao People's  
Democratic Republic)

international press. For example, the private press would readily publicize a coup or a failed coup in any poor developing country, but would very rarely inform the world about the basic needs or poverty of the people of the third world. General Assembly resolution 45/76 was highly relevant in that regard, and he drew particular attention to subparagraph (a) of the operative paragraph. To attain the objectives outlined in that paragraph, the developed countries with advanced information and communication technology should expand their cooperation with developing countries with respect to financing, technology and equipment, in order to redress existing imbalances between the two categories of countries for the purpose of promoting understanding and friendship among nations.

6. His country's new Constitution proclaimed the right of all Lao citizens to enjoy freedom of speech, the press and assembly. The full exercise of those rights would help improve the information and communication media in his country. Additional assistance, including training programmes and seminars, from the international community and the United Nations system would help to strengthen his country's information and communication capacities.

7. In the process of building a balanced and equitable world information and communication order, it was essential to adhere to the sacrosanct principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular, the principles of equality, respect for each country's independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. Information should not be used to violate the independence and sovereignty of States. His delegation hoped that the resolution on questions relating to information to be adopted at the current session would mark the beginning of a new stage in the development of world information and communication.

8. Mr. MOTOMURA (Japan) stressed the importance of the free flow of information for all societies, in times of peace as well as discord. In the contemporary highly interdependent world, the free flow of information and the maintenance of adequate channels of communication were essential for economic development and social progress, and increased efforts were needed at the national and international levels to enable the media to achieve those objectives. His delegation hoped that the draft resolutions before the Committee (A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6) would be adopted unanimously, thus consolidating the hard-won consensus on conceptual issues relating to information and fostering a new spirit of international cooperation.

9. In order to broaden that consensus, the Committee should consider how to ensure a freer, wider and better balanced flow of information and should review United Nations public information policies and activities, while avoiding ideological and philosophical debate. The best way to correct imbalances in the field of information and communication and to ensure the broader dissemination of information concerning all countries was not by adopting declarations and resolutions but, rather, by undertaking

(Mr. Motomura, Japan)

international cooperative efforts. His own country provided financial and technical cooperation in the field of information and communication through bilateral and multilateral channels, including training activities both in Japan and in the developing countries themselves, and by providing assistance to improve telecommunications infrastructures and broadcasting systems. The telecommunications sector would continue to occupy an important place in its future official development assistance.

10. DPI clearly was striving to meet the ever-growing demands being placed on it, and his delegation commended the Department for its efforts to improve its effectiveness by rationalizing its work and administrative structure. The activities and programmes of DPI should not result in an expansion of its administrative structure, nor should they entail excessive financial obligations. It would be helpful if DPI established priorities among the items on its agenda according to their relevance and cost-effectiveness.

11. His delegation welcomed the pragmatic nature of the discussions held in the Committee on Information during the past year. The discussions focusing on the activities of the United Nations information centres, the Yearbook of the United Nations and the question of the flexibility of DPI activities in times of crisis had been especially fruitful, and his delegation hoped that the pragmatic approach would continue.

12. Mr. FAWZY (Egypt) said that imbalances in the field of information must be redressed so as to restructure the existing information order to ensure a free and balanced flow of information with the participation of all nations. To promote that goal, DPI could help organize the reciprocal flow of information between regions, which could play a role in preventive diplomacy and set the stage for successful peacemaking. While his delegation appreciated the Department's efforts to improve the work of the United Nations information centres, a comprehensive plan was needed to enhance their effectiveness; by listing the needs of each centre and indicating how it served its country and region, such a plan could provide a clearer vision of its role. Innovative thinking was essential to achieve that goal.

13. The training programmes organized by DPI for broadcasters and journalists were commendable, and the Cairo Institute for African Broadcasters was prepared to cooperate with DPI in organizing similar programmes in the future. His delegation also welcomed the efforts of DPI, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in organizing the Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, held at Windhoek, Namibia. Lastly, his delegation appreciated the activities conducted by DPI to implement General Assembly resolutions on the struggle against apartheid, the question of Palestine, the Palestinian intifadah and social and economic questions.

14. Mr. KHANI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the activities and responsibilities of the Department of Public Information should be increased, as should its cooperation with the developing countries, in order to help eliminate the current distortion of facts and disparate flow of information. The new UNESCO strategy emphasized wider cooperation based on dialogue and mutual understanding, and any new world information and communications order should naturally be in keeping with the principles of the United Nations Charter and other relevant international instruments. In disseminating information and guaranteeing freedom of publication, the sovereignty, social values and cultural traditions of all States should be respected in order to promote friendship and peace.

15. Referring to document A/46/21, he underlined the fundamental importance of DPI in publicizing the aims and principles of the United Nations, particularly in those countries which disregarded or defied its resolutions. The Department should focus more attention on that aspect of its work. It would, however, be unable to carry out its role to maximum effect unless it were strengthened and assured of the requisite financial and technical resources.

16. Efforts should also be made to increase cooperation between UNESCO and DPI, with continued technical assistance and improvement of the communications infrastructure of the developing countries occurring within the framework of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication.

17. Cooperation between DPI and regional organizations, and between it and the News Agencies Pool of the Non-Aligned Countries, should also be increased, and increased efforts should be made to reflect the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement, publish its resolutions, and implement the programmes intended to develop information in the developing countries, where special attention should be given to journalistic training. The Middle Eastern Unit should be strengthened by providing it with adequate financial resources and appropriate expertise to ensure its effectiveness. The United Nations should continue to send press missions to areas, such as the occupied Arab territories, where United Nations resolutions were disregarded and international conventions violated.

18. His delegation welcomed the issue of press releases in the official languages, and their reissue in cooperation with publishing houses in the third world. He stressed that resolutions 44/50 and 45/67 represented the minimum basis for cooperation between the developing and the industrialized countries, and emphasized that DPI staff should be engaged on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, since those originating from a particular area were better equipped to select the type of news and information to be broadcast to the area concerned and better able to present it to the public in an appropriate manner.

(Mr. Khani, Syrian Arab Republic)

19. The role of the United Nations information centres should be strengthened, particularly in the third world, as the voice of the United Nations would otherwise go unheard. The recommendation to publish in Arabic and Spanish the annual press release containing the resolutions, decisions and voting results adopted at each General Assembly was also important, since that would facilitate the work of foreign ministries and other institutions in the Arab world elsewhere.

20. Mr. MIRDHA (India) said that free media were important catalysts for human freedom and development at the national and global levels. Recent dramatic changes in the global political environment and the increasing urgency of the world's economic and social problems made the work of DPI even more relevant. His delegation was pleased that DPI had been able to respond to some extent to that urgency and hoped that its continuing efforts would lead to the optimal use of its limited resources.

21. His delegation welcomed the consensus reached in the Committee on Information on its recommendations to the General Assembly, and would continue to work to build on that consensus. India's free, pluralistic and active press had been a pillar of strength for its democratic system and a vehicle for economic progress for all segments of the population, and his delegation therefore encouraged the convening of seminars similar to the Windhoek Seminar in other parts of the world. Moreover, his Government would be pleased to share its many years of experience in the organization and operation of a free, independent press in whatever manner DPI deemed appropriate.

22. To redress the serious imbalance which existed in the field of information, technological communication infrastructures needed to be built up in many developing countries. In that context, his delegation supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication administered by UNESCO and urged DPI, intergovernmental organizations and developed countries to provide increased support to that programme and directly to developing countries.

23. DPI's efforts to give special attention to areas of concern to developing countries were commendable and the Department should continue to focus on the dissemination of information on such issues as the recent developments in South Africa and the Middle East, the promotion of international peace and security, recent developments in nuclear disarmament, United Nations efforts in peacemaking and peace-keeping, the environment, human rights and international economic cooperation, with particular attention to the development of the developing countries. It was particularly important to prepare analytical information on the work of the Organization, a task that called for new strategies and, very probably, greater resources. With the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations only four years away, DPI also should consider the most appropriate means of ensuring the success of the

(Mr. Mirdha, India)

major publicity activities it would be called upon to perform upon that occasion.

24. While his delegation could understand the desire for greater flexibility in choosing priority areas for the dissemination of information on the work of the United Nations expressed by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, it believed that DPI should act within the broad yet flexible guidelines collectively decided upon by Member States. Accordingly, he welcomed the recommendations by the Committee on Information, as reflected in draft resolutions A/SPC/46/L.5 and L.6, that the Bureau of that Committee should periodically consult with DPI with a view to enhancing the Department's efficiency. In conclusion, he emphasized that the independence, freedom and plurality of the media at the national and international levels must be accompanied by balance, objectivity and tolerance of diverse cultural and national values.

25. Mr. Chan Ho HA (Korea) said that much of the international community was still denied participation in the network of global exchange which modern technological advances had made possible. His delegation was therefore pleased to note the consensus attained by the Committee on Information regarding cooperation in that respect. It also looked forward to witnessing the tangible results of the willingness expressed by some developed countries to provide the developing countries with the necessary funds and technology. Meanwhile, the latter should also pursue a self-reliant system of South-South cooperation amongst themselves.

26. Since 1984, Korea had been implementing a successful training programme for media producers under the auspices of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communications. It had also contributed \$US 400,000 to the International Informatics Programme for 1990-1991, and would continue to participate in activities designed to improve the situation in the developing countries, whilst expecting the United Nations to act more effectively to enhance their communications infrastructures and capabilities.

27. DPI should not play a larger role in keeping with the new broader and more varied role of the United Nations itself. His delegation therefore supported the Department's effort to rationalize its work and revitalize its structure, as conducive to promoting a more positive image of the Organization to the world at large. In that connection, it also hoped that the functions of all United Nations information centres would be further strengthened, for the Organization could not hope to fulfil its purpose unless the peoples of the world were fully apprised of its aims and principles. DPI should therefore focus in particular on those of the Organization's activities which had highest priority. Finally, he endorsed the idea of consultations between the Committee on Information and DPI in order to help the latter perform its tasks with the requisite flexibility and expediency.

28. Ms. LUO Xa (China) said that the new international information and communications order, like the new international order, should be based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, with special emphasis on deepening mutual respect and expanding cooperation on an equal footing. Under the new order, the sovereignty of all States should be respected, along with their cultural values and traditions. All countries, despite their inherent differences in character, shared a common interest in promoting international understanding and strengthening friendship and cooperation among nations, in which respect the dissemination of information had an important role to play. The developed countries should ensure that the developing countries were able to contribute more actively to the information process on an international scale by ensuring that they had the necessary funds and technology.

29. Over the past two years, welcome progress had been made in the United Nations with respect to information issues. Much remained to be done, however, and her delegation was prepared to work together with others in seeking common ground.

30. Lastly, her delegation noted the useful work done by DPI over the past year in promoting international cooperation in the information field.

31. Mr. SERME (Burkina Faso) said that the importance attached to information in today's closely linked world was exemplified by the increase in membership of the Committee on Information over the past 12 years. Burkina Faso shared that emphasis on information, actively publicizing the activities of the United Nations through a broadcast programme which was produced with the cooperation of the United Nations information centre in Ouagadougou. The centre's assistance to the national media and sustained contacts with the local authorities were extremely valuable. The UNESCO Club in Burkina Faso had recently seen its emphasis on environment and development reinforced by UNESCO's decision, which his Government fully supported, to give priority to that issue in preparation for the 1992 Conference on the subject. Burkina Faso was also active in the African National Television and Broadcasting Union.

32. Information was a valuable tool for development. Television and radio were used in Burkina Faso to disseminate information on farming techniques, promote awareness of environmental issues, provide health education and teach national languages. A private broadcasting station had recently been established, an information code governing the rights and duties of journalists had been adopted.

33. The involvement of the written press in the democratization of political life in Burkina Faso had led the Government to support the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press and to recommend that a similar seminar should be held for radio and television journalists. However, the availability of objective written information in developing countries was limited by, inter alia, illiteracy and low levels of school attendance. Transfer of technology was needed in order to democratize



(Mr. Serme, Burkina Faso)

the means of information, which would in turn democratize and balance information itself. The end of the cold war should provide developing countries with the opportunity to dispel inaccurate representations of them in foreign media. They should use the technology of information in order to break out of the rut they were in.

34. Mr. ZVONKO (Belarus) said that the interdependence of the world was in no small measure the product of exchange of information in various fields. Now the super-Powers had stopped trying to throw each other onto the scrap-heap of history, the sphere of information would hopefully be purified of ideological contamination.

35. The attempted coup in the Soviet Union had illustrated the vital importance of accurate information by revealing what a powerful influence could be exercised through control of the media. The independent media had been one of the primary targets of the coup organizers but, by mobilizing public opinion against the plotters they had ensured the victory of democracy. The media in Belarus, in particular, were becoming increasingly objective, unbiased and effective, and the independence they had acquired since the coup attempt was shortly to be given formal expression in a new law on the press.

36. As a new member of the Committee on Information, Belarus found it particularly noteworthy that the Committee had for the second year in succession adopted its recommendations without a vote. That augured well for the continued transition in its work from sterile debate to action-oriented decisions. The call for the facilitation of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market, contained in the draft resolution on information in service of humanity (A/SPC/46/L.5) should be a major priority for the Committee on Information.

37. His delegation particularly wished to endorse the cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNESCO, as detailed in paragraphs 6 to 10 of the Secretary-General's report (A/46/449), and welcomed the Department's focus on such topics as peace-keeping, disarmament, apartheid, decolonization, human rights, narcotics control and economic, social and environmental issues.

38. His delegation hoped that the Department would also show flexibility in tackling other new, but no less important, issues. One such issue was the Chernobyl accident, the disastrous consequences of which for the Belarusian people were now becoming increasingly apparent and which also had transboundary implications. Belarus wished to express its readiness to cooperate with the United Nations information centre in Moscow concerning the Chernobyl incident, since it was essential to overcome barriers of secrecy in the face of a tragedy affecting all of mankind.

39. Mr. REFIRASME (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that information was fundamental to international relations and to all economies, and its free flow could make a substantial contribution to development and to trust among countries. Despite the end of the cold war, there was still a division separating the rest of the world from the industrialized countries, whose monopoly of information technology gave them a dominance which threatened the sovereignty, identity and independence of the developing countries. For that reason his delegation wished to emphasize its commitment to the establishment a new world information and communication order, and to endorse the proposal by Pakistan that the Secretary-General should pay particular attention to that issue. The developing countries should focus attention on encouraging new media not only at the national level but also through regional exchanges, and international bodies, particularly DPI, should support their efforts in that direction. In that context, his delegation noted with satisfaction the seminar which had taken place in Windhoek, Namibia, on developing an independent pluralistic press in Africa, and hoped that similar meetings would be organized for other regions.

40. In view of the increasing responsibilities of the United Nations, the activities of DPI should receive increased support. The United Nations information centres had a pivotal role to play in promoting the image of the Organization, and his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to strengthen the centres: the one in Teheran had for a number of years been understaffed and short of resources. The Committee on Information, at its next session, should focus on the problems connected with information centres, and it might be worth considering the possibility of establishing a working group to find suitable solutions.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.