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Chairman: Mr. S. Amjad ALI (Pakistan).

Freedom of information (*continued*): (a) Problems of freedom of information, including the study of the draft convention on freedom of information (A/AC.42/7, A/2172, chapter V, section VI, A/2181, A/C.3/L.239, A/C.3/L.242/Rev.1, A/C.3/L.243, A/C.3/L.244, A/C.3/L.252 and Add.1, A/C.3/L.255, A/C.3/L.256) (*continued*)

[Item 29 (a)]*

GENERAL DEBATE (*continued*)

1. Mrs. NOVIKOVA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) noted, as other delegations had done, that a six years' study of the question of freedom of information had produced no results. Some delegations, however, used that fact to argue unconvincingly against the discussion of any text on the subject until the Economic and Social Council had studied its Rapporteur's report. The Byelorussian delegation, for its part, considered it the duty of the General Assembly to welcome and study the draft resolution submitted by the USSR (A/C.3/L.255), which clearly indicated what action the United Nations should take in regard to freedom of information.

2. Under the USSR draft resolution, which was based on the Charter of the United Nations and inspired by General Assembly resolution 110 (II), the Assembly would note that in spite of the Charter and of its resolution, a number of countries were continuing their war propaganda; among them were the United Kingdom, the United States of America and France, countries in which the cinema, the radio and the Press daily called for war. The USSR, the Ukraine and Czechoslovakia had already given specific examples in illustration of that fact and the USSR had shown that in the North Atlantic Treaty countries the Press was controlled by monopolies and used for propaganda and for campaigns of lies against the USSR.

* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

3. In January 1952, a Michigan daily newspaper had published articles slandering the Byelorussian SSR; it had invented the name of a non-existent Byelorussian newspaper which was alleged to have contained a series of articles explaining how the USSR would wage war against the United States of America. The writer had even claimed that Minsk was a port and would be used as a submarine base for an attack on Washington. He was obviously unaware that the Byelorussian SSR had enacted a law prohibiting incitement to war in any form.

4. That was merely one example of the campaigns which were being conducted by the capitalist Press to prepare public opinion for war against the USSR and the peoples' democracies. On the other hand, the capitalist Press said nothing about the efforts for peace that were being made by the USSR and the peoples' democracies, the People's Republic of China in particular, and about their economic successes, but recommended still greater discrimination in trade with them.

5. In the USSR and the Byelorussian SSR, on the other hand, the Press served the interests of the Soviet people and worked for friendly relations among all nations. Under the Constitutions of the USSR and the Byelorussian SSR, all citizens enjoyed the right of freedom of information and of the Press, and the newsprint, printing presses and other physical means made available to the workers enabled them to exercise that right in full. The same spirit inspired the USSR draft resolution, in accordance with the requirements of the Charter; it contained proposals for specific measures to prevent war propaganda as well as provisions designed to consolidate friendly relations among nations. The Byelorussian delegation would accordingly vote in favour of that draft resolution.

6. At the previous meeting the Yugoslav representative had mentioned the pressure exercised by the United States of America in matters of information on the small countries of the American and other conti-

nents. He had probably been speaking with reason, since in the last few years his country had become a colony of the American monopolies; he had made those critical remarks in order to give his statement a semblance of impartiality and prepare the way for the second part of his speech, in which he had attacked the USSR and the peoples' democracies. He had, however, been unable to quote a single fact to prove that the Press in the USSR was conducting propaganda in favour of war or of hatred between nations, and his false statements had, in actual fact, merely demonstrated his interest in life and reconstruction in the USSR.

7. Mr. JONKER (Netherlands) regretted that freedom of information should still be a matter of concern to the Third Committee. That did not prove any lack of interest in the question on the part of the United Nations, whose organs had even succeeded in preparing draft conventions. It was due to profound disagreement on the very concept of freedom of information. The problem was to determine how freedom could be respected and what values had to be safeguarded, since there was no freedom without responsibility.

8. The Netherlands delegation accordingly welcomed the appointment by the Economic and Social Council of a rapporteur who would devote the first part of his report to defining what was meant by freedom of information. It would not be an easy task, but Mr. López, to whom it had been entrusted, was familiar with the problem. The Netherlands delegation therefore considered that the General Assembly should wait until the Rapporteur had submitted his report to the Economic and Social Council before proceeding to take action on the international plane. In the meantime, many countries, including even those in which freedom of information already existed to some extent, might take steps to achieve such freedom in larger measure on the national plane. The more freedom of information was respected in each individual country, the easier it would be to guarantee it internationally.

9. Mr. ORBAN (Belgium) associated himself with the remarks made at the 422nd meeting by the Swedish representative, whose views were on the whole shared by the Belgian delegation. The Belgian Constitution laid down categorical and precise rules for the regulation of freedom of information and expression. Abuses of that freedom were matters not for the ordinary courts, but for a jury which, reflecting the mind of the people, determined on a less rigorous basis whether the freedom had been lawfully or unlawfully used, thus assuring the defendant the maximum safeguards. Nevertheless, such cases were not common.

10. His delegation therefore saw no need for an international convention on freedom of information. On the contrary, it would consider it dangerous to adopt a convention which envisaged limitations in principle such as those contained in article 2 of the draft convention (A/AC.42/7, annex), and it would be afraid that by subscribing to the convention it might give the impression that it approved of limitations on principles cherished by public opinion and Press organizations in Belgium.

11. He was well aware that unlimited freedom also presented dangers, but they were inherent in the democratic system, which was an attempt to find a balance

between order and freedom. The Belgian idea of democracy was that of Lincoln—"government by the people for the people"—and Belgium was not afraid to allow a wide measure of freedom, even if freedom made the defence of democracy very difficult.

12. He wished to emphasize a point brought out by the Egyptian representative (423rd meeting). Since the "cold war", words had changed their meaning according to the camp in which they were used, and there was no longer any common denominator in the concepts of the peoples. It was therefore useless to adopt a convention on freedom of information, which certain countries would apply only in one direction, when some countries admitted all kinds of information and ideologies while others regarded the fact of thinking differently from the government as an attack on national security and treated freedom of opinion as subversive propaganda. A convention was possible only if based on the principle of reciprocity and only in an atmosphere of liberty, free from any governmental pressure. It was therefore better provisionally to aim at more limited and more precise objectives, until such time as the report of the Rapporteur, whose personal qualities were a guarantee of success, had introduced new elements on which to achieve a compromise.

13. The Belgian delegation associated itself with certain of the French representative's arguments and was in favour of the technical assistance to which he had referred, regarding it as an objective which could be attained without delay.

14. Mr. MARINHO (Brazil) recalled that his delegation had always considered that the General Assembly should discuss the provisions of the convention on freedom of information in detail.

15. He questioned the validity of the argument that agreement on the draft was impossible because article 2 contained restrictions: treaties and conventions were inevitably restrictive, since they always represented attempts at compromise. That did not mean that the Brazilian delegation did not associate itself with the legitimate objections to article 2. On the contrary, it considered inadmissible the exceptions provided for in that article because they might allow freedom of information to be infringed. His delegation considered that governments should be left to determine those exceptions because it would rather have no convention at all than have one which would defeat the purpose for which it had been drafted. It felt, however, that once such difficulties had been overcome, it would not be impossible, in view of the general belief that an honest Press was an important factor in maintaining international peace, to reach an agreement in principle on a text which would guarantee that information would be objective and truthful, while protecting the Press against State despotism.

16. It was therefore better to await the results of the inquiry to be made by the Rapporteur appointed by the Economic and Social Council before determining whether such an agreement could be achieved. As for the draft code of ethics, the Brazilian representative considered that it was for the journalists themselves to draft a text regulating their activities.

17. Mrs. HARMAN (Israel) noted with satisfaction that, far from discouraging the Committee, the differ-

ences of opinion between its members had strengthened its determination to find the best means of dealing with the problem, having regard to its vital importance.

18. She had been greatly impressed by the Philippine representative's survey (423rd meeting) of what had been done. He had stated that progress could be made if basically social or cultural problems were not dealt with from a political point of view. In the prevailing political climate, however, that was unrealistic. The question was whether a convention could help to change the political climate or whether the climate had to change before a convention could be effective. The Committee's prolonged debates suggested that a draft convention on freedom of information could not of itself create the necessary climate of mutual trust and confidence, in the absence of which it might prove impossible to draft a convention acceptable to a great number of countries.

19. It was essential in the first place that each government should critically review its own practice. Israel did not erect any barriers to freedom of information. It welcomed foreign correspondents from all countries and placed at their disposal every facility for the free transmission of news to or from Israel. If Israel acceded to conventions on freedom of information, it would not alter the practices it followed in the interests of the nation.

20. The French representative had recommended that the draft convention on the right of correction should be opened for signature immediately. The Israel delegation approved the draft convention as a whole and agreed with the French representative that the implementation of the convention would do much to prevent the spreading of false reports.

21. In that connexion she was pleased to note that two Middle Eastern countries were among the sponsors of the joint draft resolution (A/C.3/L.252) which proposed that the draft convention on the right of correction should be opened for signature immediately. That meant, she presumed, that they were prepared to take steps to combat propaganda designed or likely to provoke or encourage any threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression and that they wished, in accordance with the preamble of the draft convention, to increase understanding between their peoples and the peoples of other countries. The Government of Israel was encouraged by their initiative, because it had for some time been the subject of attacks and false and distorted reports in certain countries which were especially keen that the draft convention should enter into force as soon as possible.

22. The situation was paradoxical. There was agreement on general principles, but not on enunciating generally acceptable formulations. It might be better, instead of drafting general texts, to prepare specific agreements in regard to matters on which there was already an agreement in practice, which was more important than an agreement in theory. The object of the report to be submitted by the Philippine representative was, she understood, to determine, on the basis of a detailed comparative analysis of existing practices in the various States, the cases in which there was a generally accepted practice and common needs. When the facts had been assembled in a report, the Committee should give official form to the agreement

which existed in practice so as to provide it with an attainable and uniform international standard. A conference of plenipotentiaries might be of value in that connexion. The Committee should next find means of assisting States to satisfy practical needs which were general enough to be felt by a large part of the population and concrete enough to lend themselves to appropriate action. She agreed with the delegations which had stressed the possibility of technical assistance programmes.

23. The Israel delegation was convinced that a convention on freedom of information was an essential factor in promoting peace. It fully agreed with the sixteen sponsors of the draft resolution (A/C.3/L.256) that a detailed consideration of the draft convention should be undertaken "with a view to reaching agreement". It was not sure, however, that a sixty-member Committee could in the current circumstances reach agreement without the assistance of the Philippine representative's detailed report, which would show where agreement substantially existed and would therefore be capable of formulation. It could not therefore support the joint draft resolution, for the very reason that it regarded agreement as being of primary importance. In that connexion, she drew attention to paragraphs 13 and 14 of annex II to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which warned Main Committees against the dangers of drafting conventions in full committee.

24. The delegation of Israel could not take the same position with regard to the draft resolution contained in document A/C.3/L.252. The draft referred to a convention already approved by the General Assembly and seemed therefore to express a consensus of opinion. The delegation of Israel regretted that it could not foresee any changes in the situation with regard to freedom of information in the immediate future. It associated itself with all delegations which were interested in achieving steady and genuine progress.

25. Mr. LAMBROS (Greece) said that his country had not been represented on the Economic and Social Council, the Sub-Commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press, or the Committee on the Draft Convention on Freedom of Information and so it was not familiar with all the ramifications of the problem. Greece was nevertheless traditionally jealous of the right to "use and abuse" freedom of information.

26. His delegation felt that the Economic and Social Council had acted wisely in appointing a rapporteur and that Mr. López was an excellent choice. The appointment was for an experimental period of one year and the least that could be done was to give the Rapporteur a chance to complete his task successfully by allowing him to study every aspect of the problem. The subject had to be treated as a whole and not dealt with piecemeal, since it was a live problem with serious implications, as was clear from the remarks of the representatives of Yugoslavia, Chile, the United Kingdom and Lebanon. In any case, delay was not synonymous with condemnation. The problem had been threshed out in four years of intensive discussion and had been placed before the conscience of the world. The Rapporteur's report would show how the conflicting elements could be synthesized.

27. Any decision taken before the Economic and Social Council received the report would merely confuse the issue. At its eighth session, the General Assembly would be in a better position to decide on the best course. The Greek delegation did not, of course, consider that the existing situation was satisfactory or such as to promote the interests of small countries like its own, but it was better to extend the exploratory period for a few months than precipitately to conclude a limited agreement to which States of major importance in the matter of information might not adhere. Premature agreements might perpetuate the disequilibrium between large and small countries.

28. Mr. SECADES (Cuba) said that he had wished to hear the views of other members of the Committee before stating his delegation's views on the draft convention on freedom of information, and so to avoid taking a hasty decision. He had followed the debate carefully and had been particularly interested in the remarks of the Egyptian representative, who had stressed the point (423rd meeting) that freedom of opinion came before freedom of information.

29. He did not intend to discuss the code of ethics and the right of reply. The draft convention on freedom of information raised an extremely complex problem, which had not perhaps been sufficiently explored. He did not agree with the pessimistic views of representatives who held that valuable time had been wasted and that immediate approval of the convention was necessary. Even if the United Nations did not succeed in approving a convention, it could not be said that the time had been wasted. Human progress was not continuous and in a straight line; halts, apparent retreats even, might in fact help mankind to go forward more confidently. As the Mexican representative had said (425th meeting), the members of the Committee were in agreement on substance. The disagreement related merely to questions of application and a little patience would contribute to their solution more than haste. If action was delayed until more countries had approved a draft convention, more ratifications would be secured and the final result would be of greater advantage even to those who were prepared to ratify in any case.

30. Moreover, if the Committee adopted a draft convention immediately it would be depriving itself of the advantages it would certainly derive from Mr. López's work. The Cuban delegation had taken part in the selection of the Rapporteur by the Economic and Social Council and it was familiar with his high qualifications and sense of duty. The Committee should invite governments to facilitate his work so as to enable him to submit a complete and detailed text to the Economic and Social Council. Man's work was imperfect, but could always be perfected. At its next session the General Assembly would be able to use Mr. López's report as the basis for a more thorough study of the problem of freedom of information, and would thus be able to take more considered decisions.

31. Mr. CASTILLO (Ecuador) said that many countries had chosen to be represented in the Third Committee by journalists, who were in a position to express the views of those professionally concerned with freedom of information. As a journalist himself, he

would venture to make a few remarks on freedom of information in his country.

32. In Ecuador, freedom of information was regarded as one of the pillars of democracy. Political freedom was inconceivable without freedom of information and of the Press. Ecuador revered the memory of Francisco Espejo, the great precursor of independence and the first free journalist in Ecuador. Issues of his paper, the first example of printing at Quito, were carefully preserved. Espejo had been persecuted because of his work and other journalists had suffered for the same cause during the early years of freedom in Ecuador. The period of martyrdom was over, and the Press had come to be regarded in Ecuador as the shield of political freedom. Ecuadorean journalists were not subject to any outside influence. They did their utmost to provide the best possible information for their readers. If they made mistakes, they did so in good faith and lost no time in correcting reports when an error was pointed out. In Ecuador the Press was independent, strong and respected.

33. Like several other members of the Committee he had been disquieted to note at the beginning of the discussion on freedom of information that apparently every door had been closed. In view of the Economic and Social Council's decision to appoint a rapporteur, it seemed necessary for the General Assembly to postpone the discussion to a later session. Although the study which Mr. López had outlined to the Committee was undoubtedly important, he would suggest that the Third Committee should nevertheless continue its consideration of the problem. Two proposals had been submitted, in regard to draft conventions, in particular to a convention on the right of correction. The delegation of Ecuador reserved the right to speak on those points at the appropriate time.

34. He approved the Secretary-General's suggestion regarding the calling of an international conference of journalists to draft a professional code of ethics on the basis of the draft prepared by the Sub-Commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press. He would be prepared to submit a resolution on that subject. The conference of American journalists, which had met at Chicago, had discussed the draft and approved it.

35. His delegation's position was similar to that of a number of others and was consistent with the views expressed in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly. He hoped therefore that the Committee would adopt that point of view and so justify the presence of so many journalists in the Third Committee.

36. Mr. SPRAGUE (United States of America) said that he was not intervening in order to defend his country's position; on that point he had nothing to add to what he had already said at the 423rd meeting. In his statement he had carefully eschewed any political allusions and any criticism of other countries. Unfortunately the USSR representative and the representatives of other countries of the "Soviet bloc" had seen fit to make violent attacks on the United States Press. It was to those attacks that he wished to reply.

37. He knew that the United States Press had its shortcomings; he had acknowledged that in his previous statement. Whatever the shortcomings, however, they

had nothing in common with the picture drawn by the representatives of the "Soviet bloc" — a picture which was completely absurd and a masterpiece of surrealist art. He was confident that the members of the Committee who were familiar with the facts about the Press and the radio in the United States of America would have appreciated the extravagant allegations of the representatives in question at their true worth.

38. He wished to draw attention to a number of particularly ridiculous charges. In the first place, the USSR representative had spoken of a monopoly of information in the United States of America. A monopoly could apply to either the financing or the control of the Press and the radio. In fact, the situation was as follows: in the United States of America there were 1,773 daily newspapers, 543 Sunday newspapers, 9,591 weekly newspapers, 1,421 weekly magazines, 221 semi-monthly magazines, 3,643 monthly magazines, 625 quarterly reviews, 3 Press agencies of national importance, 4 radio networks and more than 3,000 radio broadcasting stations, including television stations. Most of those information enterprises were the property of small private owners. The McCormick Press, which had been cited, comprised three newspapers, and the Hearst Press from 12 to 14 newspapers, out of a total of 1,773 newspapers in the United States. It was ridiculous to speak of a monopoly, either of ownership or of control. His own case was typical: he was publisher and editor of a small newspaper, which belonged to his family, with a circulation of 20,000 copies in a city of less than 50,000 inhabitants, with one other daily newspaper, a weekly paper and three radio stations. That exemplified the characteristic diversity of small ownership of information enterprises in the United States of America. Ownership was largely personal, family, corporate; only in a few cases were their shares quoted on the stock exchange. Generally speaking, information enterprises were in the hands of private owners and under the direction of professionals.

39. Mention had been made of advertising; it had been alleged that newspapers and radio stations were owned and controlled by the advertisers. That might be true in some cases, but was not common. In fact there was a very sharp separation in all American information undertakings between the commercial and the editorial side. One of the essential principles of the professional code of ethics was that the editorial side must always be kept apart from the advertising side. Some advertisers had tried to influence information services; he knew personally of cases of that kind, but such attempts had always ended in failure. That was the situation in most of the information enterprises in the United States of America.

40. He wished to impress on members of the Committee the importance of freedom of information in the United States and the high value that all Americans placed on that principle. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution provided explicitly for freedom of the Press, and the Constitutions of the states of New York and Oregon, among others, explicitly repeated the same principle. As early as 1773, during the British occupation, a jury had acquitted a journalist prosecuted for having freely expressed his opinions. That memory was dear to the hearts of

Americans. In the United States the word "freedom" meant freedom pure and simple, without any qualification: the freedom to express opinions on all matters of public interest. There might sometimes be abuses. There might be irresponsible individuals, emotionally unstable persons, inexperienced people who indulged in regrettable sensationalism and abused the freedom of the Press. That was the price of freedom, a price which the United States was prepared to pay because it cared enough for freedom.

41. The United States Press had reached a high level in the dissemination of impartial and objective news. In New York the gamut of newspapers ran from the *Daily News*, which was ultra-conservative, to the *Daily Worker*, which was communist. The success of an American newspaper depended on the number of its readers, not on the Government or the banks, but on the people who bought it. The two major factors in the financial stability of an American newspaper were circulation and advertising; and in the last resort advertising depended on circulation. Hence it was the public which made the success of a Press or radio enterprise.

42. Extracts from American publications had been quoted in support of the attacks on the United States Press. There were of course abuses, but efforts were being made in professional circles to correct such abuses and constantly to raise the value and the truthfulness and objectivity of newspapers.

43. The countries of the "Soviet bloc" had accused American information enterprises of engaging in war propaganda. American journalists had been called "war-mongers", and extracts from articles had been quoted to support those charges. But by isolating extracts from their context, people could be made to say anything; that kind of evidence was worthless. Persons who used such methods were in fact fabricating out of thin air the alleged crime of which they were complaining. No judgment could be made of the American Press and radio on the basis of arbitrary extracts; he personally, as director of a small information enterprise, had always advocated the principle of negotiation for the solution of international conflicts and had always defended the ideals of the United Nations. His was not an isolated case; to his knowledge there were no American newspapers worthy of the name which were consciously advocating a third world war. If the American Press spoke of bombing China or blockading the Chinese coast, that was because the United Nations had declared the North Koreans to be the aggressors. What American newspapers were demanding was the use of the most effective methods to bring the war of aggression against the United Nations to a speedy and honourable conclusion. He could not stress that point too strongly; public opinion and the Press in the United States were not war-mongering; on the contrary, they were sincerely devoted to the cause of peace and justice.

44. He reserved his reply with reference to statements made by the representatives of the "Soviet bloc" concerning the devotion of their publications to the cause of peace until the Committee considered the draft resolution submitted by the USSR emphasizing the need for condemnation of war propaganda (A/C.3/L.255).

45. Mrs. AFNAN (Iraq) thought that the real problem was whether there were enough delegations desirous of a convention on freedom of information to ensure that such a convention would be concluded. Six years before a large number of countries had considered such a convention necessary, but such differences of opinion had been manifested that the conclusion of an acceptable convention appeared impossible.

46. The value of international undertakings depended on the goodwill of the governments which entered into them, and the general application of recognized principles was not always as easy as might be hoped. The practical value of an international undertaking was based on the number and the strength of the governments which were parties to it. But all the large countries possessing highly developed technical information media were in one camp and the small underdeveloped countries in another. That was what gave the discussions in the Third Committee, and in other organs where the same situation existed, an air of unreality; a fact which, it might be noted, was also of great concern to the representatives of the technically developed and politically advanced countries. The frequent recurrence of that state of affairs was not fortuitous, but in every case a different explanation was given. In the Third Committee it was asserted that there were insurmountable differences of opinion on the actual principle of freedom of information.

47. The Iraqi delegation did not believe in irreconcilable differences of opinion; there could be no fundamental divergences on the meaning of a particular freedom. Freedom was neither the prerogative nor the peculiar ideal of any one people; all peoples had struggled to achieve it. The freedom of every individual must be limited by the freedom of others, and the peoples which enjoyed the greatest freedom were those which had accepted the greatest number of voluntary and reasonable restrictions on that freedom. To ensure the freedom of the weak, the freedom of the strong or of those endowed with exceptional powers had to be restricted. The same problem arose in the relations between nations; a reasonable balance, guaranteeing the freedom of the less advanced countries and according them the opportunity of self-development, had to be found. The difficulty was not, as had been said, to balance countries which had a tradition of slavery against those which had a democratic tradition. In fact, peoples which had enjoyed freedom only for a short time sometimes understood it better than those which had enjoyed it too long to be still conscious of it. The essential difference was that between the peoples which had nothing and those which had everything.

48. It was easy to understand the position of countries like Sweden, which had struggled for their freedom for centuries — with all the responsibilities and voluntary restrictions that implied — and which were reluctant to undertake any new effort of adaptation in order to fit their freedom into the wider frame of international freedom. Yet, so long as some countries had powerful information media with which to disseminate their own ideas of the truth while other countries did not, freedom of information would remain a myth.

49. In Iraq a number of political parties were waging a parliamentary struggle against certain private interests which wished to discipline the Press. Freedom of information was incompatible with monopoly, whether governmental or private. Freedom was the possession not of a group, but of the entire population. Likewise, at the international level, it must not be the privilege of a country or group of countries, but the common heritage of all nations. The small countries were as much interested as others, if not more so, in freedom of information, and they too wished to enjoy its benefits. They wished the peoples which did not yet enjoy autonomy, and those which had been enjoying it only for a short time, to be able to receive information and to make their own views known.

50. If it proved impossible to conclude a convention with the support of those countries which in fact controlled the media of information and opposed any limitations of their prerogatives, the small countries which were fighting for freedom of information at home could continue the fight in the United Nations. The small countries considered they had the right to declare that the unlimited media available to the Press and radio of other States were endangering the very freedom of the under-developed countries.

51. To remedy that situation, an international professional conference of journalists from all over the world should be convened with a view to drawing up a code of ethics. Similarly, a convention on freedom of information should be concluded, limiting the powers which some countries had used in an irresponsible manner.

52. Ato Haddis ALEMAYEHOU (Ethiopia) said that his country had not been represented in any of the United Nations organs which had studied the problem of freedom of information. However, the Ethiopian delegation had examined the report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee (A/AC.42/7), the draft international code of ethics for journalists (E/2190, annex A) and the relevant part of the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/2172), with the greatest care.

53. Three main schools of thought appeared to emerge from those documents and from the statements made in the Third Committee. Some considered that freedom of information should not be placed under any restrictions, and that it would accordingly be better to refrain from drafting a convention on freedom of information unless the convention laid down the principle of absolute freedom. Others thought that freedom of information should serve certain clearly defined aims, such as friendly relations between peoples, the maintenance of peace and security and the struggle against ideologies which appeared to conflict with those aims. Lastly, a third group thought that freedom of information was a right essential to the existence and progress of society, equally with other rights such as security and the protection of reputation; and they concluded from that that freedom of information could be granted provided that the other fundamental rights of the individual were similarly guaranteed.

54. He could not accept the first view. To adopt a convention laying down the right of absolute freedom would be to give journalists a free hand. But journalists were human beings who could be influenced by

their patriotism, their prejudices or their personal interests, and such a convention would facilitate the dissemination of false reports and thus run counter to the aims it was desired to achieve.

55. The second view merited serious consideration since it was based in essence on the principle of the security of peoples, or, more generally, on the principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations. However, the Ethiopian delegation could not support it because it was based on an erroneous conception of information. The journalist's task was to communicate the facts without any omission or distortion, and if the facts roused public indignation or dissatisfaction, the fault lay with those responsible for the facts and not with those who reported them.

56. Hence the Ethiopian delegation rejected both the principle of absolute freedom, which could lead only to confusion and anarchy, and the principle of freedom serving specific aims, which amounted to no freedom at all. It agreed with the third school of thought, that freedom of information should be guaranteed, subject to certain restrictions prescribed by law and applied in accordance with the law.

57. Ethiopia, a small country which did not have any highly organized Press and information enterprises, welcomed the suggestion of using the United Nations technical assistance programme to supply the underdeveloped countries with the media they lacked.

58. Ato Haddis Alemayehou wished to make some observations with regard to foreign correspondents. Ethiopia had always welcomed foreign correspondents and given them all the facilities necessary for their work. It still did so, although several foreign correspondents had abused the hospitality offered them. Voicing the views of his Government and the Ethiopian people, he asked all foreign correspondents who visited his country not to lose sight of their responsibilities and their duties.

59. The Ethiopian delegation supported the principles laid down in the draft convention on freedom of information, but believed that the draft might be improved, either by the Third Committee or by a conference of plenipotentiaries called for that purpose. It was for the Committee to decide whether it preferred to wait until the Rapporteur appointed by the Economic and Social Council had completed his work before taking up the study of the draft convention. Whatever the decision on that point, the Ethiopian delegation's views remained unchanged: it would give its support to any draft resolution conforming to the principles which he had just outlined and which should be strictly adhered to.

60. Miss BERNARDINO (Dominican Republic) stated that, after listening with great interest to what had been said by the preceding speakers, she had arrived at the conclusion that, in spite of conflicting interests and divergent views, the nations were pursuing the common ideal of promoting throughout the world a correct interpretation of the phrase "freedom of information".

61. Her delegation shared the view that freedom of information should not be thought of as the right of those who transmitted news to disguise the truth or to make slanderous statements and accusations without

any right on the part of the victim himself to answer or refute them. On the other hand, she was convinced that freedom of information was one of the most effective means for keeping the peace and furthering understanding and mutual respect among peoples. She therefore hoped that it would soon be possible to arrive at a compromise acceptable, if not to all members of the Committee, at least to a majority of them.

62. The delegation of the Dominican Republic was convinced that the labours of the United Nations would not be in vain, and would vote for the draft resolution which was most faithful to the interpretation that should be given to the expression "freedom of information".

63. With regard to the Economic and Social Council's decision concerning the appointment of a rapporteur, it was for the Committee to decide whether it would wait for Mr. López's report before continuing with its task, bearing in mind the observations put forward in that report, or whether it should set to work forthwith to determine specific means for solving the problem of freedom of information. That was a question of prime importance, which the Committee should study without further delay.

64. Her delegation would spare no effort to help to complete a task of which the United Nations could be proud in time to come.

65. Mr. BAROODY (Saudi Arabia) recalled that in his previous speeches he had emphasized the strangeness of the procedure adopted by the Economic and Social Council regarding the study of the question of freedom of information. Before entering into the substance of the matter, he wished to reiterate that it was not the first time that the Council had used delaying tactics in order to avoid implementing the recommendations and instructions of the General Assembly. If the Council persisted in having recourse to such procedures, its recommendations would, so far as the Third Committee was concerned, in the end become the equivalent of instructions to be docilely carried out. It was therefore high time for the Committee to decide whether it should put an end to that situation, or whether it was prepared to do no more than endorse the Council's decisions. Except for a minority which had the power of manoeuvring the Council as it wished, he did not believe that the members of the Third Committee were willing to let themselves be dispossessed of their prerogatives. Though the Council was unquestionably the master of its own decisions, it was none the less true that it ought not to take steps contrary to the decisions and recommendations of the General Assembly.

66. The Committee consequently had a choice between two courses: on the one hand, it could capitulate and renounce its powers for the benefit of a minority of approximately twelve members; and on the other hand it could ask the Economic and Social Council to give the Third Committee's recommendations the attention that was due to them. If the Committee chose the first solution, there was no doubt that any draft convention on freedom of information prepared by the Committee and likely to lead to positive results would be torpedoed by the Council and replaced by a document full of vague formulas and platonic declarations which would be presented to the Committee by way of consolation.

Such a convention would not only nullify all the efforts that had hitherto been made, but would also give the world the impression that the United Nations was no more than a forum for the expression and the mere recording of disagreements. The Committee should endeavour to arrive at concrete results and, to that end, try once more to reach an agreement on the text of the convention.

67. The main difficulties were due to the various interpretations given to the expression "freedom of information". He proposed to define each of the terms which made up that expression.

68. Many people were inclined to think that the word "freedom" meant the right of everyone to act as he thought fit without any consideration for others. It could be held that that was exemplified by freedom of feeling and freedom of thought, which were inherent in human beings. When feelings or thoughts were communicated orally or in writing, the individual was thereby exercising his right to freedom of expression. So long as he did not express feelings or thoughts likely to harm others, the individual exercised his right as it were inoffensively; but when he offered insults or accusations, the individual—and more particularly the journalist—was using his right of expression to pass a possibly unfounded judgment on others. When the place of the individual was taken by a group of individuals with considerable means at their disposal—in the case under consideration, the Press—the possible consequences of absolute freedom of expression were infinitely graver: they might include a veritable campaign which could lead to tension, to disputes and even to conflicts.

69. On the national level, to be sure, there were courts to which the injured party could turn and which could award compensation for the damage he had been caused. Nevertheless, quite apart from the fact that individuals did not always have the time and means to undertake such an action in court or were sometimes loath to do so, the harm that had been done could never be completely remedied. The individual, group or country concerned was the victim of a false conception of freedom.

70. No one could deny that freedom, when not to some extent disciplined and restricted, could have the most fatal effects. Otherwise peoples would not need laws to protect themselves against the abuses to which liberty could lead. The world had by no means reached a stage of development where anarchy—in the political and social meaning of the word—could be safely instituted. Furthermore, thought itself needed to be disciplined, and feelings that were subjected to no restraint led to hysteria. It therefore seemed perfectly normal to demand that the expression of those thoughts or feelings should also be subjected to a certain discipline.

71. The word "information" denoted, on the one hand, news and, on the other hand, opinions; it was clearly the word "opinion" to which attention should be paid. An opinion, even an incorrect one, could be expressed in perfectly good faith and in complete innocence; but, when it concealed definite motives of a more or less unworthy nature, it entered the sphere of

propaganda, that is, of a system the aim of which was to indoctrinate the peoples so as to facilitate interference in the domestic affairs of States. Propaganda, which overcame all obstacles, had become an art, the art of disguising the truth, of exaggerating or minimizing it as the case required, of using innuendoes or even of organizing a veritable conspiracy of silence. In order to reach the masses and deceive them, propaganda did not hesitate to make use of music, art and literature. There, too, the peoples were the victims of the false interpretation of a word.

72. He wished to offer some remarks concerning the views put forward during the debate. In the first place, he regretted that there should too often be a tendency to attribute to governments the responsibility for mistakes made in the field of freedom of information. It should be borne in mind that governments themselves were often the victims of journalists who, in the current period of international tension, saw fit to stir up disputes and provoke bad feeling and discontent. Moreover, peoples had the governments they deserved, and to condemn the governments was to condemn the peoples.

73. With regard to the assistance to be given to countries which lacked adequate means of information, he would naturally support any resolution providing for the use of technical assistance to that end. That, however, was not the way to solve a problem due not so much to a lack of means of information as to the way some people used those means; no illusions should be entertained on that subject.

74. As for the right of correction, he wished to repeat that the evil could never be completely remedied. For instance, a person whose house had been burnt down as a result of a campaign directed against him would feel but little satisfaction when it was discovered that the charges levelled at him had been baseless and that an appropriate correction would appear in a newspaper. The same was true of a person whose reputation had been destroyed. It was very probable, moreover, that in most cases no attention would even be paid to the correction by the readers, whose curiosity was attracted by news in the strict sense of the term. The Saudi Arabian delegation would, however, support the draft resolution (A/C.3/L.252) relating to the draft convention on the right of correction, while emphasizing that it did not yet constitute a solution of the problem.

75. Lastly, he reiterated the importance of preparing a convention on freedom of information and of securing the adoption of an effective code of ethics for journalists as soon as possible.

76. He reserved the right to speak again when the draft resolutions were debated.

77. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the report of the Committee on the draft protocol relating to the status of stateless persons (A/C.3/L.253). The document had evoked no comments or suggestions from members of the Committee; it would therefore be transmitted to the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.