

Sixth session
Agenda item 47UNITED NATIONS TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM: REPORT OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERALReport of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Rafik ASHA (Syria)

1. Under resolution 460 (V), adopted by the General Assembly on 12 December 1950, the Secretary-General was instructed to proceed with the implementation of the proposals for a modified telecommunications system as outlined in his report to the General Assembly at its fifth session (A/1454), provided that the capital expenditure involved would not constitute a net addition to the United Nations budget. For the purpose of carrying out the proposals in whole or in part, the Secretary-General was authorized to accept voluntary contributions and/or donations on the understanding that any or all of the facilities or funds thus made available would become the exclusive property and be put under the full control of the United Nations. The resolution further requested the Secretary-General to report on this matter to the sixth session of the General Assembly.
2. At its 323rd meeting held on 7 January 1952, the Fifth Committee considered the report presented by the Secretary-General in accordance with the terms of the above resolution (A/1919). The Committee was informed that during 1951 exploratory conversations had been undertaken with a view to ascertaining the possibility of securing such voluntary contributions and/or donations as would be appropriate to give effect to the General Assembly's proposals, but that the Secretary-General was unable at this stage to report any positive results and did not anticipate further developments within the immediate future. The Committee was assured that should the situation in this respect undergo any change, the General Assembly would be informed accordingly.
3. Reference was also made in the Secretary-General's report to the effect that, while no developments had taken place with respect to radio broadcasting

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facilities, progress had been made, contrary to earlier expectations, in the development of point-to-point facilities between political missions in the field on the one hand, and Geneva and Bangkok on the other, through the use of equipment already in the possession of the United Nations and the transfer of personnel who, when not operating control stations established by the United Nations Field Service for handling the local communications of the missions, are employed on other duties. In this manner, it was reported, by using normal commercial channels between New York and Geneva, a high proportion of United Nations traffic beyond Geneva, with various field missions and with Bangkok was now being carried on a United Nations system at a substantially lesser overall cost than would otherwise have to be borne by the United Nations budget.

4. Discussion in the Fifth Committee was concerned, for the most part, with the development, as reported by the Secretary-General, of point-to-point communication facilities. Concern was expressed by a number of delegations that the arrangements made for communications between Headquarters and field missions was contrary to the Secretary-General's earlier recommendation, as endorsed by the Fifth Committee (A/1635), that "the development of such facilities should not be proceeded with for the time being since existing commercial arrangements appeared to be adequate and the present volume of traffic did not warrant the additional expenditure involved". The Committee was informed by the Secretary-General's representative that the arrangements which had been completed during 1951 had reference primarily to political missions and had been undertaken solely in the interests of economy. They were of limited scope and were not regarded as coming within the framework of the more comprehensive telecommunications plan which had previously been envisaged. The view was expressed, nevertheless, that while there could be no objection to the establishment of communication facilities within a mission area or between mobile units, the development of extensive point-to-point facilities should not be undertaken without specific authorization of the General Assembly and a prior decision as to the circumstances under which authorization should be given. It was suggested, in this connexion, that such considerations as the adequacy of existing facilities, the question of relative costs, the extent to which the problem of overcrowding of frequencies might tend to be aggravated, and similar criteria would need to be taken into account in deciding the appropriate policy to be followed.

5. The majority of delegations were of the opinion, however, that this matter could not usefully be examined in the absence of more detailed information from the Secretary-General as to the arrangements already in force, and accordingly it was agreed that a further report should be furnished through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the basis of which the Fifth Committee would review the situation at a later meeting. It was further agreed that such a report, together with the observations thereon of the Advisory Committee, should be discussed in conjunction with the Fifth Committee's consideration of the estimates for Section 5a of the budget (United Nations Field Service).
6. The representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic voiced the objection of his delegation to the use by the United Nations Secretariat, through the Field Service, of communications facilities for the servicing of certain political missions which, in its opinion, had been illegally constituted.
7. On the understanding that the question of point-to-point facilities would be the subject of further consideration, the Fifth Committee, by 41 votes to 5, with no abstentions, decided to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following resolution:

UNITED NATIONS TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

The General Assembly

Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations telecommunications system (A/1919).
