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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1 - 3	2
II. CO-OPERATION WITH THE NEWS AGENCIES POOL OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES	4 - 6	2
III. ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS	7 - 11	3
IV. SHORTWAVE RADIO BROADCASTING AND TELEPHONE NEWS BULLETINS	12 - 14	4
V. WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR MEDIA	15 - 16	4
VI. FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATORS	17	5
VII. PRESS RELEASES	18	5
VIII. UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES	19 - 20	5

* A/42/150.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In resolution 41/68 A of 3 December 1986, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its forty-second session on the implementation of the recommendations relating to the activities of the Department of Public Information contained in the resolution. The Secretary-General was also requested to report to the Committee on Information, at its substantive session in 1987, on the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

2. The following documents related to topics covered by General Assembly resolution 41/68 A, were submitted to the Committee on Information at its substantive session, held from 15 June to 2 July 1987:

(a) Progress report on the situation regarding the staff of the Department of Public Information in posts subject to geographical distribution (A/AC.198/116);

(b) Report on the curtailment of radio programmes of the Department of Public Information and the improvement in the distribution of taped radio programmes (A/AC.198/117);

(c) Report on the timeliness and effectiveness of coverage publications produced by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/118);

(d) Report on the charges for use of video tapes, audio tapes and news photographs by Member States (A/AC.198/119);

(e) Report on the programmes and activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (A/AC.198/120).

3. The deliberations of the Committee on Information on the above topics and other topics on its agenda, as well as its recommendations, are contained in its report to the General Assembly. 1/ As in the past, the present report avoids, as much as possible, repetition of the contents of the reports submitted to the Committee on Information and deals mainly with items not dealt with by the Committee and additional information bringing up to date the reports submitted to the Committee.

II. CO-OPERATION WITH THE NEWS AGENCIES POOL OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES

4. In recommendations 6, 7, 8, 13 and 18 contained in paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 41/68 A, the Department of Public Information was requested to strengthen its co-operation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned countries and to monitor the important meetings of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

5. In response to those requests, the Department has further endeavoured in the past year to reinforce its co-operation with the Pool by sending news dispatches to the various agencies of the Pool on subjects of interest to them. In this connection, the Department has pursued vigorously its co-operation with the newly

established Eco-Pool by dispatching news covering the activities of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and, during the forty-first session of the General Assembly, the work of the Second Committee. In addition, the Department undertook a recent initiative to establish co-operation with radio broadcasting organizations of the Non-Aligned Countries.

6. Regarding attendance at meetings of the Movement, a representative of the Department attended, as an observer, the Second Conference of Ministers of Information of the Non-Aligned Countries, held at Harare in 1987. The Department was also represented at the General Conference of the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries held at Havana at 1986.

III. ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS

7. In recommendations 14 and 15, the Department was requested to publicize as widely as possible the real dimensions of the plight of the African people, the tremendous efforts of the African countries and the critical economic situation in Africa.

8. In response to this mandate and in line with the adoption of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (General Assembly resolution S-13/2, annex), the Department has established a comprehensive information programme on Africa. The Department began publication of a quarterly magazine entitled Africa Recovery. The aim of the publication is to keep the international community informed of developments within Africa relating to the Programme of Action and of the actions requested or being taken by the donor countries.

9. The "Crisis in Africa" photographic exhibit was displayed in Africa Hall at Addis Ababa. A photo feature exhibit entitled "Continuing crisis in the Sahel" was produced and distributed. Thirty-three television news packages on the African economic situation were produced and widely distributed by international news syndicators. Television news magazines in Chinese, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish dealing with the various issues pertaining to the African crisis were transmitted and broadcast internationally.

10. Radio news and taped programmes highlighted various developments and activities pertaining to the economic recovery of Africa. In particular, telephone news updates were produced twice a week and provided to broadcasting organizations in North America and elsewhere.

11. Two briefings were organized for non-governmental organizations on the economic situation in Africa. The first, held on 18 December 1986, was entitled "Update of the emergency situation in Africa"; the second, held on 2 April 1987, was on the theme "After the famine - Economic prospects for Africa". The Department also co-sponsored a full-day consultation for non-governmental organizations on the subject "Programme for African food security: lessening the burden for women".

IV. SHORTWAVE RADIO BROADCASTING AND TELEPHONE NEWS BULLETINS

12. In line with recommendation 26, the Department continued to provide daily telephone news bulletins in English, Portuguese and Spanish. In addition, it provided twice-weekly updates in English on the African economic recovery and a weekly review in English of United Nations developments pertaining to southern Africa.

13. Regarding shortwave broadcasting, the Department contacted a number of interested countries and radio broadcasting organizations. Radio Cairo is making free-of-charge weekly shortwave broadcasts of United Nations radio news programmes in Arabic, English, French and Swahili. Both Radio Beijing and the Voice of Nigeria continued their shortwave broadcast of weekly United Nations radio news and a weekly news programme in English continued to be broadcast by local radio stations in some 20 Caribbean countries and territories. Discussions are under way with All-India Radio to reach similar agreements.

14. The Department is also conducting a limited operation in Arabic and Russian through the United Nations Information Service at Geneva. It produces a 20-minute news programme in Russian that is fed by telephone line to Geneva and then transmitted to Eastern Europe and a weekly 10-minute news programme in Arabic that is provided to Radio Tunis and Radio Television Italiana (RAI) for free-of-charge broadcast by them to North Africa and the Middle East.

V. WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR MEDIA

15. In recommendation 27, the Department was requested to co-operate closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries to organize a workshop in 1987 for the familiarization of news agencies and for the standardization of teaching methods and syllabuses and to produce training manuals in various languages for the training centres of the Pool. The Department approached UNESCO on the matter and was informed that there was provision in its current programme of activities for training in the application of new technologies and support for the organization of workshops on the establishment and improvement of computerized systems in the news agencies of the developing countries. Owing to financial constraints, however, it will not be feasible to implement this programme in 1987. Various possibilities of collaboration with the Pool in the areas to be covered by the proposed workshop are being explored.

16. With regard to the second part of recommendation 27 on the annual training programme for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries and the request that the last week of the programme be allocated for a visit by them to a developing country, 13 journalists and broadcasters have been invited to attend a seven-week programme at Headquarters in New York from 8 September to 24 October. However, because of financial constraints, participants in the 1987 training programme will not visit a developing country in the last week of the programme.

VI. FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATORS

17. In recommendation 28, the Department was asked to continue to organize a fellowship programme for educators. Because of financial constraints, the annual fellowship programme has been postponed.

VII. PRESS RELEASES

18. The General Assembly was concerned about press release coverage, as reflected in recommendation 33. Under financial stringency, the Department has experienced difficulty in covering all meetings and in covering some meetings in the two working languages of the Secretariat, English and French. Within the framework of the review exercise being undertaken by the Department, attention will be paid to this question.

VIII. UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES

19. In recommendation 35, it was stated that the United Nations information centres should work closely with the press, broadcasters, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and others to produce and distribute information materials in the countries covered, supported by the activities of the Department at Headquarters. Our internal monitoring system shows that, in the second half of 1986, the financial crisis resulted in a 51 per cent decrease in press releases produced by the centres in English and in French, a 28 per cent decrease in press releases produced in local languages, a 22 per cent decrease in the distribution of United Nations publications and a 38 per cent reduction in the number of lectures and speeches for lack of travel funds. However, the information centres continued their efforts to perform their required functions despite the reduced funds.

20. Discussions are currently under way within the Secretariat to consolidate facilities wherever possible and to establish common services with the United Nations Development Programme and other organizations of the United Nations system. This is in line with recommendation 12 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations. 2/ Every effort will be made in this context, and in line with recommendation 35 of General Assembly resolution 41/68 A, to establish close co-ordination with other field offices of the United Nations system in order to avoid duplication of work, within the framework of the review of the functions and methods of work of the United Nations information centres.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21).

2/ Ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).