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Seventeenth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 24 February 1961, at 10.50 a.m.

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PRESENT:

Chairman:

Mr. JHA (India)

Members:

Mr. PAZHWAK Afghanistan

Mr. AMADEO Argentina

Mr. ERMACORA Austria

Mr. CHENG PAONAN China

Mr. MADSEN Denmark

Mr. CASSIN France

Mr. VELLODI India

Miss KAMAL Iraq

Miss PELT Netherlands

Mr. HAKIM Pakistan

Mr. ILLEUCA Panama

Mr. BRILLANTES Philippines

Mr. WYZNER Poland

Mr. NEDBAILO Ukrainian Soviet Socialist
Republic

Mr. SAPOZHNIKOV Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics

Sir Samuel HOARE United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Northern Ireland

Mr. KLUTZNICK United States of America

Mr. ARRAIZ Venezuela

Also present:

Mrs. LEFAUCHEUX Commission on the Status of
Women

Observer from a Member State:

Mr. RIOSECO Chile

Representatives of a specialized agency:

Mr. BEHRSTOCK) United Nations Educational,
Mr. SALSAMENDI) Scientific and Cultural
Organization

Secretariat:

Mr. SCHWELB Deputy Director, Division of
Human Rights

Mr. DAS Secretary of the Commission

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (E/CN.4/814 and Add.1) (continued)

Mr. ARRAIZ (Venezuela) said that the UNESCO report (E/CN.4/814 and Add.1) was of great importance. It was a conscientious and methodical survey and set forth a number of valuable conclusions. His delegation had studied with particular interest the section devoted to Latin America which was, in general, a true reflection of the facts. He did not share the view that the report was too technical. All the questions which came before the Commission were bound to be, to some extent, technical in nature; in any case, the terminology used in the report was readily understandable.

Paragraph 88 of the report called attention to the fact that nearly 70 per cent of the world's peoples lacked the barest means of being informed of developments at home, let alone in other countries. That was a situation which people in the developed countries had some difficulty in visualizing. It was, therefore, disappointing to find some representatives suggesting that the report should be put through the slow process of submission to Governments for their comments. Some more expeditious means could surely be found of taking action on it.

He agreed with the view expressed in the report that there was a reciprocal relationship between development of information media and economic and technical development. Since the development of information media encouraged the growth of economic wealth and promoted technical progress, it should be an international responsibility.

The report, however, was lacking in one respect. Its recommendations, while helpful and valuable, were addressed exclusively to the Governments of under-developed countries and made no reference to the responsibilities of the advanced countries. The development of information media in the under-developed countries was frequently hampered not only by internal conditions but by external factors such as the availability of newsprint. He therefore supported the United States representative's proposal that the recommendations contained in the UNESCO report should be embodied in a draft resolution for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, but he also suggested that some clauses should be added concerning the responsibility of the developed countries.

Mr. PAZHWAQ (Afghanistan) associated himself with the representatives who had congratulated UNESCO on producing such an excellent report. However,

(Mr. Pazhwak, Afghanistan)

while the needs of under-developed countries in the field of information media were clearly stated in the report, they were not new discoveries; they had been known for a very long time and had frequently been pointed out by representatives of those countries in United Nations bodies.

Speaking as the representative of an under-developed country, he did not consider that the recommendations in the report were satisfactory in their present form, since they did not go beyond stating existing needs. It was possible that UNESCO had encountered certain difficulties in proposing practical remedies, and the UNESCO representative might perhaps be able to enlighten the Commission in that regard.

He saw no point in submitting the report to member Governments for their consideration and comments. As far as the under-developed countries were concerned, their Governments would simply find in it what they already knew. The Commission should either examine the report in detail and submit a draft resolution to the Economic and Social Council incorporating recommendations or comment briefly on the report and submit a general draft resolution to the Council. He would like to see two principles incorporated in any draft resolution submitted: (1) that the main aim should remain the strengthening of the national media of information in the under-developed countries, and (2) that any assistance provided should be based on the principle of the complete independence of the media of information in those countries, especially in the cultural field. That was of particular importance to the smaller countries, as the question was not simply one of satisfying their needs for information media; there was also the problem of ensuring that such media were used in the national interest. If no precautions were taken to protect a small country's culture and ideology, the expanded media of information might be used to subvert them. Equipping every house in Afghanistan with a radio set, for example, might be a good thing, but not if it meant that foreign propaganda would be brought into every home.

The recommendations in the report concerned measures to be taken by the Governments of the under-developed countries; but it was unfair to place all the burden on them without inviting the co-operation of the advanced countries. Technical assistance to under-developed countries had not increased with their requirements and was being further limited by the assistance given to the newly independent countries.

(Mr. Pazhwak, Afghanistan)

Lastly, the report did not contain any clear statement regarding the difficulties experienced by under-developed countries in creating conditions for the development of freedom of information. If those difficulties were set forth in the recommendations, they would help to point the way to practical solutions.

Mr. VELLODI (India) recalled that the UNESCO report had been requested by the Economic and Social Council for the purpose of assisting it in determining the material, financial and professional requirements and resources needed for implementation of the programme envisaged in General Assembly resolution 1313 (XIII). That resolution envisaged the preparation of an international plan of action for the development of information enterprises in under-developed countries and invited UNESCO and other specialized agencies to formulate concrete proposals to assist in meeting the needs of less developed countries in building up adequate media of information. The Commission should bear those objectives in mind when considering the report, which his delegation considered to be a most useful document.

The question of the development of information media in under-developed countries had been discussed frequently in the past by the Commission, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies. Resolutions had been adopted, recommendations had been made and much assistance had been extended to the under-developed countries by the United Nations, through its programme of technical assistance, and by the specialized agencies, particularly by UNESCO. However, the report revealed that progress had been very slow and, in some areas, non-existent. The remarks in the 1958 report of the Committee on Freedom of Information to the effect that resolutions by United Nations bodies on the subject of development of information media could have little effect unless followed by intensive implementation, were still relevant.

His delegation considered that both the Commission and the Economic and Social Council should gain an understanding of the problem, establish clear objectives and take positive measures which would contribute to the carrying out of a concerted and carefully planned programme for promoting the development of information media in the under-developed countries. Mere recommendations addressed to the Governments of those countries to encourage the development of their information media would have little value unless such a programme was drawn up.

(Mr. Vellodi, India)

The under-developed countries were well aware of their needs and had made considerable efforts to develop their information media. However, success depended ultimately on the economic growth of the country. The fixing of targets was simply not enough.

His delegation had been particularly pleased to note the reference in UNESCO's report to the use of information media as an instrument of education in the broadest sense. The use of radio and films for education in rural areas had great potentialities. The report also brought out very clearly the reciprocal relationship between the development of information media and economic development generally.

The recommendations contained in paragraphs 311 to 338 of the report were sound and constructive, but were similar to suggestions which had already been made in the past, and fell short of the objective outlined in the resolutions to which he had referred. Moreover, his delegation did not agree with the conclusion in paragraph 309 of the report that the principal value of the document resided in its possible stimulus to broad national initiative in an international setting and that national surveys might well become the logical sequel to the report. In that connexion, his delegation fully endorsed the views expressed by the Afghan representative. The Commission should make practical recommendations to the Economic and Social Council which would assist the latter in implementing General Assembly resolution 1313 (XIII). The report prepared by UNESCO provided ample material for formulation of the programme of action called for in that resolution.

His delegation saw no need to send the report to the Governments of the under-developed countries for their comments, as had been suggested by previous speakers. The regional conferences, the results of which had formed the basis of the report, had been attended by representatives of Governments and the latter had therefore already had an opportunity to make their views known.

Miss KAMAL (Iraq) commended UNESCO for having presented a very useful study to which her Government would pay particular attention. The report rightly stressed the value of information media for educational purposes in under-developed areas. In her country increasing use was being made of radio, television and the Press for instruction of the urban and rural sections of the population.

The report also brought out the close link between economic development and the growth of information media. It was only when, through economic development, people came into closer contact with the world around them that they became aware of the need to learn about that world.

(Miss Kamal, Iraq)

The UNESCO report, although very recent, did not reflect some very important changes which had taken place in her country since 1958. Since the revolution in that year, political parties had been licensed, great economic and social changes had taken place and the Press now enjoyed complete freedom. The result had been a substantial increase in the number and total circulation of newspapers and periodicals.

While the development of information media served to promote freedom of information, the reverse had also been experienced in her country. Whereas before the revolution, news reports, films and material for periodicals had come from certain parts of the world only, the more diversified material provided at present had stimulated public interest and a demand for better use of the available media.

The report rightly noted the advantage which the countries of the East enjoyed in sharing a common language, Arabic, which would facilitate regional plans for personnel training and other forms of co-operation. UNESCO's suggestion that the Governments of under-developed countries should formulate national programmes for development of the information media was a sound one. It might be wisest to let the Governments concerned determine the best methods of carrying out those programmes, in the light of their particular problems and the resources at their disposal.

The recommendation in paragraph 317 of the report concerning the provision of technical assistance for the development of mass communication programmes was an important one, because the lack of experts was one of the more acute problems faced by the Governments of the under-developed countries. Nationals of those countries had to be given training in the use and operation of the different media of information and the granting of scholarships for that purpose was, in her opinion, more important than the holding of regional seminars. The latter might prove useful at a later stage of development when a greater number of people had been trained in information techniques and could contribute more usefully to such discussions.

While it might appear desirable, as recommended in paragraph 328 of the report, that Governments of under-developed countries should consider reviewing their tariff and fiscal policies with a view to facilitating the development of the information media and the free flow of information within and between

(Miss Kamal, Iraq)

countries, it was necessary to bear in mind that, where the media of information were not State owned and operated, it was often necessary to give some degree of protection to new national enterprises such as film production, at least during their initial phases, to enable them to compete with similar enterprises in more advanced countries.

In the last analysis, the major problem in improving information media was the lack of funds. The complex systems which the advanced countries had taken hundreds of years to develop could not be instituted rapidly by the under-developed countries except at great cost. The problem of financing the development of information media had to be considered within the broader context of general economic development and no uniform solution was possible, as conditions varied from country to country. However, international assistance should be provided on a much larger scale and it was there that the United Nations, the specialized agencies and other international bodies could play a vital role. The existing programmes of assistance were already subject to heavy demands which made difficult the provision of additional aid in the field of information. The UNESCO report might usefully have devoted more attention to that problem.

Mr. BRILLANTES (Philippines) said that his delegation was in general agreement with the observations made by the representatives of Venezuela, Afghanistan, India and Iraq, countries with which his own shared a common interest in the development of media of information.

The UNESCO report merited commendation. For the first time, as pointed out by the representatives of France and the United Kingdom, a report on the subject had been prepared with a new approach, i.e. with emphasis on the dual role of freedom of information. Moreover, the report indicated for the first time the importance of the development of media of information in the economic and social development of the under-developed areas.

He drew attention to paragraph 87 of the report, which suggested that countries should endeavour to provide for every 100 inhabitants at least ten copies of daily newspapers, five radio receivers, two cinema seats and two television receivers. It was not clear to his delegation whether the suggestion was that that minimum should be achieved by every under-developed country irrespective of other conditions or considerations and whether all those minimum requirements were regarded as equally indispensable or whether some priority among them could be established. He asked whether, if a country could not aspire to

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(Mr. Brillantes, Philippines)

achieve them all at once, it should concentrate on two or three of them and, if so, what effect that would have on the general scheme of development.

He agreed with previous speakers that in general the recommendations in the report were rather a statement of needs in the under-developed countries than an indication of how those needs were to be met. Those countries were well aware of their needs; what they required was assistance in dealing with them. The recommendations in the report appeared to be directed exclusively to the Governments of the under-developed countries, but his delegation could not subscribe to the view that that had been UNESCO's intention. For example, paragraph 368 spoke of financing a development programme, whereas it was well known that the under-developed countries did not possess the resources to carry out such a programme.

When listening to previous speakers it had appeared to him that two methods of dealing with the item were being envisaged. The first was that proposed by the representatives of France and China and consisted of transmitting the report to member Governments for their observations and recommendations. The second method had been suggested by the delegation of the United States and was warmly endorsed by the Philippine delegation. In his view, there was no need to refer the report to Governments. The report of the Committee on Freedom of Information, which did not differ greatly from the UNESCO report, had already been submitted to member Governments and comments had been received from them. Secondly, the States Members of the United Nations were also members of UNESCO, and the report was based on regional meetings conducted under UNESCO auspices. Thirdly, in its resolution 6 (XIV) the Commission had requested the Economic and Social Council and, through it, UNESCO and the other specialized agencies concerned to initiate action to consider and implement the suggestions of the Committee on Freedom of Information concerning under-developed countries with the object of assisting them to build up adequate information media and their use for the free flow of adequate and undistorted news and information. Now that the UNESCO report, which had taken due account of the report of the Committee on Freedom of Information, was ready for the Council, he could see no reason why the Commission should again transmit it to Governments. He considered that any resolution in connexion with the item should request Governments to consider the various recommendations contained in the UNESCO report and should be addressed to the Governments of all Member States and not only to those of under-developed countries. Moreover, it should be accompanied by an appeal to the Governments of the more advanced countries to continue to assist the under-developed areas in the latter's efforts to develop their media of information.

Mr. HAKIM (Pakistan) said that his Government attached the utmost importance to freedom of information. The right to freedom of opinion and expression established by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was meaningless unless it was based on an adequate flow of information, which necessitated the creation, utilization and development of communications facilities. The importance attached by the General Assembly to the development of media of information was shown in its resolution 1315 (XIII). Subsequently the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 718 (XXVII) had stressed that priority should be given to the problem of providing under-developed countries with technical assistance in that field.

His delegation was entirely satisfied with the extensive data provided in the UNESCO report, which would undoubtedly serve a useful purpose in connexion with the formulation of programmes of action for the development of information enterprises in under-developed countries. Certain aspects of the report deserved special mention; for example the minimum requirements suggested as an immediate target in paragraph 87 clearly showed the existing discrepancy between the theoretical right to full freedom of information and the practical possibilities of enjoying it.

As the members of the Commission were well aware, Pakistan had had to start almost from the beginning in nearly every field of development. On the eve of independence there had been some half a dozen newspapers in the country and an insignificant number of radio receivers and cinema seats. The UNESCO report showed a more than ten-fold increase in information media in Pakistan. The information given in the report, however, was not and could not be expected to be completely up to date. The Government of Pakistan, which attached great importance to the dissemination of information and to freedom of the Press, had appointed a Press Commission to inquire and report on the difficulties faced by newspapers and to suggest ways and means of removing them. The Commission, after collecting extensive data, had submitted a report towards the end of 1960 and the Government was taking steps to implement its recommendations. The present Government had also made it possible for the poorer section of the people to acquire cheap radio sets. Moreover, during the past two years a considerable number of feature films and newsreels had been produced. Pakistan had been self-sufficient in newsprint since 1960.

(Mr. Hakim, Pakistan)

Nevertheless, his country was not complacent. Its achievements still fell far short of the minimum requirements mentioned in paragraph 87 of the UNESCO report. The pace of achievement must be accelerated and new advances made. Poverty, illiteracy and shortage of foreign exchange were impeding the growth of information media. What had been achieved was due to the strong desire of the Government to raise the level of living and to the aid of friendly nations and the technical assistance programme. Today the country was in greater need than ever of further assistance, primarily in the shape of technical equipment and scientific knowledge.

He endorsed the view expressed by the representative of Venezuela that the UNESCO report should have mentioned the responsibility of the highly developed countries. Passing mention was made of inter-governmental assistance, but positive steps should have been suggested. A desire for the development of information media and enterprises existed in Pakistan, as in most under-developed countries which had recently attained independence. Inter-governmental action, which was called for in operative paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 1313 (XIII), was urgently needed to secure the effective implementation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.