



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-KAWARI (Qatar)

later: Mr. FREUDENSCHUSS (Austria)

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

AGENDA ITEM 78: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (continued) (A/42/21)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/42/494)

(c) NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TRANSMITTING THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued) (A/42/571)

1. Mr. MANSOURI (League of Arab States) said that the plan to restructure the Department of Public Information (DPI) proposed by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had his full support, and he wished him success. The task was all the more delicate in that the United Nations was passing through a critical phase during which it was more important than ever for it to have a clearly defined programme in the field of information and the means to implement it.

2. Co-operation must be established on a solid footing between the information services of the League of Arab States and DPI. The League's secretariat hoped that such co-operation would allow it to draw upon the vast technical expertise of the United Nations and to launch a broad programme of information throughout the Arab world to publicize the co-operation between the two organizations, particularly in the economic and social fields, and to make the Arab public aware of the goals of United Nations informational activities.

3. The League of Arab States supported all efforts to correct the distorted image that some circles sought to give of the United Nations. That would be an extremely difficult task not only because of the inadequate financial and human resources available but also because of the complexity of the political, economic and social problems facing the contemporary world.

4. The League knew how important the media were in international relations. They could, indeed, contribute greatly to understanding among States, political stability, economic development, and the safeguarding and enrichment of the cultural identity of peoples. Care must be taken to see that the media were not diverted from their true mission. Yet in recent years it had been seen how some States, more attached to their own interests than to the truth, had provided their media with an inaccurate version of the facts, the effect of which had been to exacerbate tension.

5. Prompted by powerful economic and political interests, certain information organs were taking advantage of their great technical superiority and the financial means at their disposal to mould world public opinion as they pleased. In order to counter such practices, many countries had come to demand the establishment of a new world information and communication order.

(Mr. Mansouri)

6. The elimination of the existing imbalances in the field of information would in no way jeopardize basic freedoms and rights. The League of Arab States was convinced that the establishment of a new world information and communication order was not incompatible with the preservation of freedom of information nor even with freedom of expression. Moreover, the new order would facilitate the realization of major priorities such as the strengthening of international peace and security, development, disarmament, decolonization, the struggle against discrimination in all its forms, and the right to self-determination of colonial peoples living under foreign domination.

7. Data provided by the International Telecommunication Union indicated that currently 20 countries represented by a small number of news agencies monopolized 90 per cent of the media and of telecommunications. The news agencies of the developing world, in particular the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, hoped that their co-operation with DPI would allow them to make up part of their lag. It should be pointed out that the developing countries felt that a new world information order should be established in close conjunction with the new international economic order. Accordingly, international economic relations must be restructured so as to strengthen co-operation among States that was not marked by dependency. Only thus could the multilateral system develop and ultimately enable the international community to lay the bases for a collective security system that would encompass all aspects of international relations.

8. The Department of Public Information could promote the establishment of a new information and communication order by increasing the volume of services it provided to third-world countries. In that connection, one of the most important proposals made by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had been to give a more dynamic role to the United Nations information centres. The centres must, indeed, stop being simple conveyors of information between Headquarters and the various countries and must become meeting points and places where ideas and information were exchanged.

9. The League of Arab States hoped that all countries would work together to establish a new world information and communication order based on freedom of the press and free access to the sources of information.

10. Mr. TEWARI (India) said that the revolution taking place in the technology of information would serve to increase the already considerable gap between rich and poor countries. The establishment of a new international information and communication order was being promoted in order to redress that dramatic imbalance. Mankind was moving steadily towards more democratic institutions, and information could not be an exception to that rule. Freedom and democracy were two sides of the same coin; one could not claim freedom of the press without accepting that it must be accessible to all without distinction.

11. A new information order had to be based on two essential elements: objectivity and the broadest possible participation. The developing countries felt that the existing system, dominated by the multinational news agencies, had reduced

(Mr. Tewari, India)

them to being passive recipients of inadequate and unbalanced information. A high degree of objectivity in reporting was therefore indispensable. The developing countries also intended to take a more active part in the system of world communication and the ongoing revolution in the field of computerization. Needless to say, the two conditions would not be met if those countries which currently controlled the flow and content of information stood in the way.

12. The developing countries had important efforts to make in that direction. In fact, it was in order to rectify the existing imbalances that the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries had been organized. Since the start of operations, it had been working incessantly to make the voice of the non-aligned world heard throughout the world. It was good to note that co-operation of DPI with the Pool and with regional news agencies of developing countries had been strengthened.

13. DPI should extend full support to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whose International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) was aimed primarily at upgrading the communication facilities of the developing countries. India also urged all countries to increase their contributions to the UNESCO Special Account.

14. His delegation, aware of the importance of DPI's mandate at a time when attempts were being made to question the validity and role of the United Nations, approved of the proposed reforms. However, such reforms should not be undertaken at the cost of DPI programmes. While it was happy that the Under-Secretary-General had given assurances in that regard, his delegation believed that the need for greater professionalism in DPI did not justify a disproportionate dependence on experts from certain areas of the world to the exclusion of others. It was perhaps easier to draw upon competent professionals from those countries which were the beneficiaries of the current inequitable international order. If that was the case, greater efforts should be made to seek out talent from other parts of the world.

15. India was aware of the financial problems facing DPI. The figures given in the report of the Secretary-General were alarming. Yet the mandates DPI must pursue could not be wished away. No choice could be made among goals such as peace, security, disarmament, development, or decolonization.

16. General Assembly resolution 41/68 A on questions relating to information had been adopted with the widest possible support, and that momentum must be maintained. The Group of 77 had always favoured dialogue. To stifle dialogue was to erode the very foundation on which the United Nations was built. His delegation hoped that the Committee would not become a party to such a trend.

17. It was inconceivable that in an interdependent world most of mankind should, because of short-term tactical imperatives, be barred from participation in modern systems of mass communication, for that prevented the establishment of more stable and harmonious international relations.

18. Mr. HAENSEL (German Democratic Republic) observed that the agreement in principle between the Soviet Union and the United States to eliminate two categories of nuclear weapons had revived optimism. Under modern-day conditions, as noted by the Warsaw Treaty States at their summit meeting of May 1987, ideological differences must not be an obstacle to mutual trust in international affairs.
19. The mass media had a great political and moral responsibility in that regard. They were responsible for propagating, by disseminating objective information, the ideas of peace, disarmament, development and a common search for a solution to political, economic, ecological, social and humanitarian problems. Hence the German Democratic Republic was committed to the establishment of a new world information and communication order as an evolving and continuous process aimed at remedying the existing imbalances in the field of information and serving the objective interests of all States.
20. For that same reason, the German Democratic Republic joined other States wishing to give practical and conceptual assistance to UNESCO in order to enable it to play its central role in information and communication, in line with its mandate.
21. The Under-Secretary-General and many other speakers had pointed out that the DPI mandate had grown to include many new issues over the years. Structural changes were now needed which were aimed at centralizing production and planning and disseminating information more effectively by making fuller use of the potential of the United Nations information centres. DPI would also have to adopt new approaches in order to carry out the tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly and enlist the support of world public opinion for the Organization's objectives. In so doing, DPI would have to recruit staff on the basis of the required equitable geographical balance, as envisaged in the Charter. Lastly, non-governmental organizations should be called upon more frequently, for their activities during the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development had shown their potential in the field of information.
22. His delegation took note with satisfaction of the documents submitted by the Secretary-General and agreed with those who wished to see the recommendations of the Committee on Information implemented more consistently. The draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly on information should take account of the necessity of adapting DPI's mandate to the requirements of the modern world and should stress the need for a more responsible approach to information and communication.
23. Knowing how important dialogue and constructive co-operation were, the German Democratic Republic reiterated its support for the Under-Secretary-General's efforts to enable DPI to carry out its mission more fully.
24. Mr. SHAH (Pakistan) said that information was indispensable to the spread of knowledge, particularly in the developing countries. Yet it was a sphere that suffered from striking inequalities. A very few countries had complete control

(Mr. Shah, Pakistan)

over the tools and techniques of communication. Their news agencies monopolized information to the point that its flow could only be uni-directional and that news was interpreted to the disadvantage of the developing countries. The concentration of resources in the hands of a few societies had only aggravated that imbalance.

25. His delegation strongly believed that the best hope for rectifying such imbalances and distortions was through the establishment of a new world information and communication order. It would guarantee access for the developing countries to communication skills and technology on a non-discriminatory basis, so that they could reinforce their own infrastructures and establish coherent policies in the field of communication, education and culture. Over a period of time, it should be possible to do away with the existing imbalance and ensure that the gains of the technological revolution were shared by all. The imposition of restrictions on the transfer of advanced technology and equipment was incompatible with the requirement of the free flow of information. Pakistan called upon Member States to take steps to improve co-operation in the field.

26. The financial crisis of the United Nations had been deeply felt in DPI. In order to deal with it, a whole series of restructuring steps had had to be considered. It was most regrettable in that connection that a quarter of a million dollars had been spent in hiring consultants selected mostly from a single country, while at the same time weekly radio broadcasts in Urdu had been curtailed which, at minimal cost, had been reaching more than 100 million people in southern Asia. The funds for the United Nations information centres were likewise being cut back at a time when they should be increased in order to make the activities of the United Nations better known.

27. It was a matter of great concern to Pakistan that the developing countries were not adequately represented in DPI. All necessary steps must be taken to remedy that situation, including action regarding the recruitment of consultants, and the relevant principles of the Charter must be adhered to strictly.

28. The Department of Public Information should adequately cover in its programmes the plight of all peoples and countries under colonial domination and foreign occupation, in conformity with the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations. It should provide appropriate coverage of all issues relating to apartheid, social discrimination, the consolidation of democratic processes throughout the world, economic and social development and the establishment of the new world information and communication order.

29. His delegation wished to place on record the great importance which it attached to the points made by the President of the United Nations Correspondents Association at the latest session of the Committee on Information. The Association carried out activities which promoted and stimulated the dissemination of information on United Nations objectives and programmes in Member States. His delegation therefore urged the Department of Public Information to extend all facilities to the Association in the pursuit of its professional activities, which should not be affected by the financial crisis.

(Mr. Shah, Pakistan)

30. His delegation had taken note with satisfaction of the report of the Secretary-General (A/42/494) and urged, inter alia, that the training programmes for journalists from developing countries and co-operation in the area of radio broadcasting should be continued. It had also noted with interest the report of the Director-General of UNESCO (A/42/571) and welcomed in particular the measures taken to implement the International Programme for the Development of Communication. It had taken note with appreciation of the statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, who had provided the Department with innovative ideas which promised to yield progress. In conclusion, his delegation endorsed the report of the Committee on Information (A/42/21) and hoped that it would be adopted without a vote after certain minor amendments.

31. Mr. GORAJEWSKI (Poland) emphasized the importance of information and communication for the strengthening of peaceful relations among States and understanding among peoples. He regretted that the Committee on Information had not been able to fulfil the task entrusted to it under General Assembly resolution 34/182, because its members had been unable to agree on the "free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information". That euphemism concealed serious divergences of opinion among the various groups of countries. It showed that some were dogmatically opposed to any change in the dependent status of the developing countries in that field and that they refused to contemplate the elimination of existing imbalances.

32. His delegation was once again concerned by the attempts made to divert the attention of the Committee on Information from some of the substantive issues falling within its ambit, on the pretext of working towards a consensus. It was fully convinced that the Committee should, as part of its mandate, promote the establishment of a new world information and communication order. It supported the just demands of the non-aligned countries with respect to that issue and shared the sentiments expressed in that regard at the Summit Conference held at Harare in 1986 and at the Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries in 1987. Respect for the principles underlying the new order - sovereignty, independence and equality - would help enormously to democratize international relations in that field and to foster freedom of information, which was incompatible with the monopoly held by a small number of developed countries.

33. The Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had indicated, in her statement, that the the Department's activities had been seriously affected by the crisis in the United Nations system as a result of the fact, noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/42/1), that deep-seated political differences had given rise to a turning away in some quarters from multilateralism and to the rejection by some Member States of adopted programmes. If the image of the Organization was to be enhanced, his delegation believed that the Department should be encouraged, inter alia, to exercise its right of reply more boldly, with a view to correcting misinformation and distortions of fact relating to United Nations activities.

34. With regard to the Department's role as the focal point in the consolidation and co-ordination of public information activities, the Committee on Information

(Mr. Gorajewski, Poland)

had, in recommendation 12, requested the Secretary-General to provide it with a feasibility study containing specific information on the financial implications of such consolidation. It was therefore nothing short of astounding that the restructuring of the Department should have been approved and implemented before the Committee on Information had been able to take a decision on that subject. The possibility could not be ruled out that the Committee would, in the light of the feasibility study, find that the financial implications were excessive.

35. His delegation wished to place on record its position with respect to the priorities and orientations of the Department's activities. Those were defined in resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other relevant bodies and related to questions of peace, international security, disarmament, development, human rights and other humanitarian questions. Any restrictive interpretation of those clear guidelines should be considered as a departure from the binding decisions of the Organization's legislative organs.

36. His delegation attached particular importance to recommendation 29, which must be addressed in conjunction with recommendation 18 and with recommendations 15 and 34.

37. His delegation believed that it was necessary to improve the quality of press releases and to ensure that they were issued promptly. It again drew the attention of the Secretariat to the need to reflect the Organization's priorities in an equitable and balanced manner.

38. In conclusion, it noted with satisfaction that the Under-Secretary-General's presentation of the Department's objectives had been more convincing than the statement she had made at the session of the Committee on Information, and offered to co-operate in the elaboration and adoption of the recommendations on which the Department's activities would be based.

39. Mr. YUAN Shibing (China) said that the international information and communication system continued to be characterized by imbalances and irrationality. The efforts of the developing countries to overcome their historical disadvantage in that area, to promote their own political, economic, social and cultural development and to establish peace and disarmament in the world had often been ignored or distorted by the international media. Certain countries, taking advantage of their superiority in the field of information and communication, sought to impose their political views, their value system and even their life-style on the developing countries. It was therefore natural that the countries of the third world should vigorously call for the establishment of a new information and communication order, which would not only promote the economic and social development of all countries but also strengthen international understanding and co-operation.

40. His country had always believed that the establishment of such a new order, based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information, was possible provided that all parties - especially the developed



(Mr. Yuan Shibing, China)

countries that enjoyed superiority in that area - demonstrated the necessary political will and understanding to reach a consensus through consultations. The developed countries should co-operate with the developing countries, on the basis of respect for national sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit, and provide them with assistance in areas such as finance, technology, equipment and training. The developing countries, for their part, should make individual or collective efforts to develop their information and communication systems.

41. As a developing socialist country, China was taking pains to develop its own system in that area and to increase its co-operation and exchanges with other countries, thanks to a policy of opening to the outside world, sustained growth in its national economy and the constant improvement of its communication facilities and technology. In a spirit of co-operation, Radio Beijing had accepted the request of the Department of Public Information and would continue to broadcast United Nations programmes free of charge to some regions, both in Chinese and in English.

42. His delegation commended the Department for the useful work it had done in many areas in implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/68 A. The information disseminated on the economic crisis in Africa had helped further focus public attention on the serious situation of the African countries. It was unfortunate that as a result of the Organization's financial difficulties some projects co-sponsored by the Department and UNESCO had had to be abandoned in 1987. His delegation hoped that the Department would make fuller use of existing human and financial resources and improve its efficiency. It had noted with satisfaction that, in her statement, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had explained that attention and efforts would remain geared to the tasks assigned by the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies on the issues of major concern to the developing countries, such as the struggle against apartheid, the question of Namibia, the situation in the Middle East, peace and development, and that restructuring of the Department would be effected with respect for the principle of equal geographical representation. China would support all reforms aimed at giving effect to the purposes and principles of the Charter and enabling the Department to fulfil the mandates assigned it by the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies.

43. Mr. BOZA (Peru) said he was sorry that the disagreements on questions of substance that still divided the members of the Committee on Information were undermining the effectiveness of the guidelines that it must give the Department. As an example of the crisis of multilateralism, the North-South dialogue had lost all meaning and bred frustration in the light of the negative policy of the developed Western countries, which totally disregarded the interests and positions of the third-world countries.

44. According to a small group of powerful countries that controlled more than 90 per cent of the information disseminated, the new world information and communication order would threaten freedom of information, but for the developing countries, inundated with information from the North, the elimination of

(Mr. Boza, Peru)

inequalities and imbalances in that area was a precondition for any freedom of information worthy of the name. In fact the new world information and communication order was perfectly compatible with freedom of information and freedom of the press, as seen in the example of Peru, where those freedoms were in no way restricted. All currents of political thought could be freely expressed there by virtue of a democratic constitutional system that the Government scrupulously observed.

45. The countries of the northern hemisphere were trying to discredit the United Nations and world political multilateralism, as evidenced by the serious financial crisis affecting the Organization, the grim cuts in programmes of co-operation with developing countries and the flouting of United Nations decisions. Still, the third-world countries were vitally interested in the democratization of international relations, an essential principle of the United Nations, which, for Peru, remained the most appropriate body to deal with serious world political problems, particularly the problems of third-world development and international peace.

46. The importance of an informed public opinion for the future of the Organization could not be over-emphasized. That was why it was urgent to strengthen the activities of the Department of Public Information, whose principal task was to publicize the accomplishments of the United Nations in order to improve its image, and to create better understanding of its role, goals and principles and of its political and moral influence. In that connection the report of the Committee on Information was anything but encouraging; the Organization's publicity efforts were being seriously undermined by the financial crisis; radio programmes had had to be changed and the structure of the Department had to be modernized and developed. He hoped that the current restructuring would not entail a reduction of the already limited resources.

47. His Government was prepared to support the information activities of the Organization by all the means at its disposal, particularly by establishing closer ties with the Department and the Information Centre in Lima, by enabling it to have information about the United Nations disseminated by the Peruvian media. He commended the programmes produced by the Department, particularly in collaboration with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies; the training programme for journalists from the press, radio and television of the developing countries was especially useful. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Department was continuing the execution of many programmes of national interest and fully supported the idea proposed during the informal discussions that the Department should publish a detailed catalogue of all existing bilateral, regional and multilateral programmes.

48. Mr. F. Judenschuss (Austria) took the Chair.

49. Mr. PYADISHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), noting that the item under study was one of the most important questions on the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly, said that the mass media and communications had become one of the crucial factors that shaped the world and influenced the major

(Mr. Pyadish'nev, USSR)

trends in international politics. Powerful means of communication criss-crossed the world and increased the interdependence of States despite the great diversity of systems.

50. The Soviet Union favoured the establishment of a frank and honest dialogue that took mutual interests into account. Analysis of the problems that still had to be settled to ensure mankind's survival showed that very little progress had been made so far, but a first step had been taken. The Soviet Union and the United States had reached an agreement in principle to conclude in the near future a treaty on the question of medium- and shorter-range missiles. He hoped that that treaty would provide impetus for even more radical measures and for the conclusion of an agreement on the reduction of strategic arms, subject to adherence to the ABM Treaty.

51. The Soviet Union felt that the United Nations should participate actively in the international dialogue and should exercise fully and effectively the rights the international community had vested in it.

52. The accelerating tempo of international life implied that the United Nations should assume greater responsibility than before in the field of information. To that end, the Soviet Union proposed the establishment of a world-wide information programme to be introduced gradually with the direct participation and co-ordination of the United Nations. It called upon Member States to express their views about the organization of such a programme within the framework of a comprehensive system of international security. That proposal was motivated by the need to overcome ideological differences and to gear all efforts to the most important goal - the survival of civilization. Over the years a natural selection had taken place and had made it possible to find a common denominator in the field of information. It was therefore important to retain only the realistic positions suited to the current situation and exclude those that offered nothing but confrontation and stalemate. The most important objective of such a programme was to promote the dissemination of the ideals of peace, strengthen mutual trust and co-operation and eliminate misconceptions on both sides. The discussions in the Committee on Information and in the Special Political Committee had been very useful, but more detailed exchanges of views on questions relating to information, particularly on the programmes proposed, could take place within an international conference convened under United Nations auspices, with the participation of representatives of national information services, editors of leading newspapers, media specialists, etc.

53. His delegation was prepared to co-operate constructively in the consideration of all questions relating to the establishment of a new information order and freedom of information for peace, mutual understanding and all-round co-operation among nations. Proper place should be assigned in the Committee's decisions to questions pertaining to the activities of UNESCO.

54. His delegation welcomed the efforts made during the restructuring of the Department of Public Information to make the Department more rational and

(Mr. Pyadishev, USSR)

economical. It wondered, nevertheless, whether there was not a risk that the restructuring would upset the coherence of the system of political priorities, and whether the new structure might not be just as cumbersome and complex as before since at least two new units were being established. There seemed to be a conflict with the resolutions calling for a stronger United Nations which was less expensive to operate. His delegation counted on the common sense, experience and sense of responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information to ensure that the restructuring was carried out rationally. It also hoped that the interests of all groups of States would be taken into account in recruitment, in particular the group of socialist States, which were currently underrepresented in the Department.

55. Mr. CHOUBRI (Lebanon) said it was important to increase the ability of the United Nations to project its ideals and achievements throughout the world. The Charter, which his country had been one of the first to sign, was an expression of the will of the world's peoples; it was thus imperative to try and reach all those peoples by the best available means.

56. His delegation welcomed the practical and innovative plan put forward by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, Mrs. Sévigny. The Department of Public Information must be revitalized, and the task was all the more urgent because there had not been a comprehensive review of the public information apparatus in 40 years. The activities of the Department needed co-ordinating, stressing the specific themes mandated by the General Assembly. The most important proposal was, without doubt, the administrative streamlining of the information centres. Instead of serving only as distribution outlets for publications, the centres should foster dialogue between Member States and the Organization. His delegation therefore welcomed the appointment of Mr. Sanbar as the Director of the United Nations Information Centres Division; his great experience, gained in often difficult circumstances, made him particularly qualified for the tasks ahead.

57. Despite the strife which had troubled his country, a founder Member of the United Nations, for 13 years, the Information Centre in Beirut was still active. Notwithstanding problems of every kind, financial and other, the Lebanon continued to meet its obligations to the United Nations, including providing full support to the Centre in Beirut. Communications facilities were still operational and the freedom of the press was guarded particularly jealously, even in the most catastrophic circumstances. It was at such trying times that energetic, effective and responsible United Nations information was most appreciated.

58. Mrs. RUIZ-ZAPATA (Mexico) said she hoped that the turn for the better in international relations would enable the United Nations to discharge its responsibilities in full, and that the new Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Federico Mayor, whose appointment her country had supported, would not change the basic structure or orientation of that organization.

59. Referring to recommendation 12 by the Committee on Information, under which the Secretary-General should be requested to provide that Committee with a feasibility study on the consolidation and co-ordination of all the Department's

(Mrs. Ruiz-Zapata, Mexico)

information activities (see document A/42/21, para. 61). Her delegation had taken note of the current restructuring exercise and was generally in favour of it, believing that public information should be used to further the objectives of the United Nations. It had always striven to ensure that the Department had sufficient resources, believing that it was in the interests of the developing countries and, indeed, all other countries, to publicize what the United Nations was accomplishing in the fields of development, decolonization, disarmament, human rights and international peace and security.

60. Her delegation was, however, troubled by some aspects of the planned restructuring. For instance, the proposals emphasized the modernization of facilities in the Department and the dissemination of information. In view of the shortage of funds, the modernization represented a possible risk to the continuation of some current training projects and programmes and to the publications programme. It should not be forgotten that the impact of information dissemination programmes, which could in any case reach a larger audience, was relative by comparison with the potential benefits of training groups of journalists from developing countries, improving infrastructure in those countries and making programmes or sundry information available to universities and similar institutions. The current restructuring exercise was presumably only a first step, but it must be ensured that everything the Department did was in keeping with its mandate and the recommendations of the Committee on Information. She pointed out, in connection with the paper on the work of the United Nations in the 1990s, that the main function of the United Nations in that area was to serve as a catalyst for the accomplishment of the goals and principles of the Organization and the application of decisions taken by the international community in terms of General Assembly resolutions. Her delegation wished to stress that Mexico attached the same importance to all General Assembly resolutions, whether adopted by large majorities or without a vote at all. At the most recent session of the Committee on Information, her delegation had stressed the need to reach a consensus which actually made sense. It had been clear from the discussions that the purpose behind the insistence on seeking consensus was specifically to compel the Group of 77 to set aside the question of a new world information and communication order. That question, however, was the crux of the Committee's work. Some delegations had defined the new order as an evolving and continuous process; the efforts made, in both United Nations and UNESCO, to introduce the new order should likewise be evolving and continuous.

61. The improvement in international relations might help to modify attitudes; the Group of 77 would be receptive to any encouraging sign, and ready to negotiate. In the current instance, the negotiating process should follow the opposite of the normal course: the countries concerned should try to reconcile their position with that of the Group of 77. Efforts to extract more concessions from the Group or impose minority viewpoints on it would only diminish the chances of agreement. It was now up to those groups to prove that they were ready to facilitate agreement, perhaps on the basis of the recommendations by the Committee of Information, which drew upon General Assembly resolution 41/68 A, adopted on the affirmative votes of 148 Member States.

62. Mr. MONTANE-LOPEZ (Cuba) assured the Chairman and the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information of his delegation's co-operation in accomplishing the goals of the United Nations in questions relating to information, which were of critical political, social and economic importance. Great technical advances in information had marked the opening of a new era. The instantaneous transmission of information around the world thanks to the new satellite telecommunication systems had social and economic implications, and there was a risk that countries without appropriate policies or the necessary infrastructure would find themselves subject to a new form of dependence. In view of the imbalances in the international distribution of information, especially where developing countries were concerned, the question of a new international information order had been central to the discussions in the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee for some years, as had been the question of improving the services of the Department of Public Information. The main intention of the new order was to promote development and strengthen peace.

63. Apart from being of a normative nature, the new order would facilitate decisive progress with regard to the exercise of such fundamental rights as the right to communicate, to be informed objectively and to have full access to information. The process in question called for the strengthening of multilateralism through co-operation and mutual understanding, which formed the foundation of the United Nations system. The fact that there was no consensus on the issue had a negative impact on international relations and on the developing countries' aspirations and was holding work on the matter up.

64. The problem had been considered in depth at the Second Conference of Ministers of Information of the Non-Aligned Countries, which had taken place at Harare, Zimbabwe, in June 1987. Ministers from over 60 countries had considered issues related to those before the Special Political Committee, namely, the decolonization of information, the development of infrastructures, technical training and development of the exchange of information, which called for the strengthening of the news agencies pool and broadcasting bodies of non-aligned countries. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of non-aligned countries, who had met at United Nations Headquarters a few days earlier, had noted that the situation in southern Africa had worsened. Cuba therefore wished to request the Department of Public Information to disseminate more information on the situation in Namibia and on apartheid practices. Similarly, the serious conflict in Central America was linked to the struggle waged by the peoples of the region for peace and independence. The General Assembly, and more particularly the Department of Public Information, thus had a unique responsibility with respect to the establishment of the new world information and communication order. The ongoing restructuring process must not have an adverse affect on activities approved by the General Assembly or upset the existing balance where, for example, programmes broadcasted in certain languages and the various services were concerned.

65. The final document and the resolutions adopted at Harare, one of which denounced the subversive programmes broadcasted from the United States, by the radio station that went by the unfortunate name of Radio Marti, demonstrated that the problems in question were not of a solely technical nature, but that they were

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also of a political nature and were exacerbating the current crisis in international relations. The final document in question also referred to subversive broadcasts in Africa, Asia and Latin America, particularly by the Thuth radio station - whose latest programme beamed at Nicaragua had been transmitted on 15 September 1987. That was an indication of how to interpret the free exchange of information advocated by the United States, which, through its weekly broadcasts directed at Cuba, was engaging in despicable psychological warfare against a small non-aligned country that was striving to develop itself. That example showed that it was a matter of great urgency that a new information order should be established and that the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee should take account of violations committed and political pressures brought to bear by the United States under the pretext of guaranteeing freedom of information. That approach to freedom of information was in keeping with the free-trade doctrine and the pragmatism that the current United States Government was endeavouring to impose on others, which had enabled United States transnational corporations to establish themselves throughout the world. The true goal of the United States was to acquire a monopoly over communications and the media in order to expand the export of services and to promote a consumer society. In other words, freedom of information was to strengthen free trade at the transnational level. It must be borne in mind that the third-world countries had access to only 10 per cent of the media and communication networks and that there was hardly any freedom of information in more than 100 countries.

66. The practical aspects of the issues under consideration were inseparable from the serious political, social and economic problems affecting most of mankind, namely, problems relating to development, the excessive burden of servicing foreign debt, safeguarding national sovereignty and cultural identity, the settlement of regional conflicts, the right to self-determination, and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. To disregard those linkages would be tantamount to ignoring historic reality.

67. If realistic agreements were to be concluded and major goals were to be attained, the members of the Committee must take a comprehensive approach to the issues under consideration taking account of all their political, economic and social aspects.

68. Mr. KUNDSTADTER (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it was regrettable that the representative of Cuba should have raised the issue of Radio Marti broadcasts, which he had described as subversive, thus disrupting the debate in the Committee, in which a wide range of views had so far been expressed in a moderate manner. The objections raised by the Cuban representative merely proved that freedom of information did not exist in Cuba. The United States delegation wished to remind him that, in violation of the relevant ITU agreements, Cuba was trying to jam medium-wave broadcasts beamed at the United States.

69. Mr. MONTANE-LOPEZ (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, if the United States had really known the Cuban people, it would not have set

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up a radio station that was in fact a State radio station similar to the Voice of America. Freedom of expression was most certainly not interpreted in the same way in the two countries. The actual facts, which were referred to each year by the representative of Cuba as proof of that difference, were never denied. What was actually bothering the United States was that Cuba had reached a level of development that many countries would be unable to attain in the coming years. Cuba now had over 50,000 doctors, as compared with 3,000 at the time of the departure of the United States. What was also bothering the United States was the development of a Cuban micro-electronics industry. Cuban radio and television broadcasts received in Florida showed that there certainly was freedom of expression in Cuba, but not freedom of expression as the United States saw it. The United States, which had 80 per cent of the media in its possession, refused to vote in favour of a document advocating freedom of expression.

70. Mr. KUNSTADTER (United States of America) said that the United States knew the Cubans very well, since 10 per cent of the Cuban population lived in the United States. The United States could not be perturbed by countries wishing to develop themselves or by such countries' exploits in any field whatsoever. As for the freedom of expression, he wished to remind the representative of Cuba that one of the unique aspects of the New York Public Library was, as one of its former directors had said, that everybody who wished to use it was free to do so. The representative of Cuba should avail himself of the resources that the Library offered to each and every user.

71. Mr. MONTANE-LOPEZ (Cuba) said that libraries were indeed established in order that they should be used. American journalists were able to go to Cuba, whereas Cuban journalists were not permitted to visit the United States. A programme shown recently by an American television network had dealt with the problem of freedoms in the United States. There was not enough information on restrictions in that area in the United States.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.