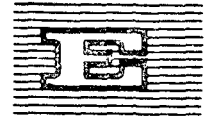


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Review of United Nations priorities
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UNITED NATIONS AUDIO-VISUAL INFORMATION CENTRE ON
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Note by the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The General Assembly, in resolution 32/162 of 19 December 1977, section II, paragraph 4 (g), requested the Commission to review and provide guidance on the programme of the United Nations Audio-Visual Information Centre on Human Settlements established by virtue of General Assembly resolution 31/115 of 16 December 1976. In implementation of the above resolution, the following is a progress report by the Director of the United Nations Audio-Visual Information Centre on Human Settlements.

INTRODUCTION

1. For Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver from 31 May to 11 June 1976, 120 Governments contributed 216 audio-visual presentations and 12 United Nations agencies produced 16 presentations for a total of 232. Immediately after the Conference, work began on classifying and storing, under proper conditions, some 10,000 separate films, tapes and slide-set items, together with substantive documentation which accompanied the presentations. The work was undertaken on the campus of the University of British Columbia at Vancouver pursuant to an interim agreement between the United Nations and the University.

2. On 16 December 1976, the General Assembly decided, in resolution 31/115, to establish a United Nations Audio-Visual Information Centre and authorized the Secretary-General to conclude an agreement with the appropriate Canadian authorities for the latter to provide the facilities and financial support to the Centre.

3. On 27 September 1977, the United Nations signed an agreement with the Government of Canada concerning the headquarters and operations of the United Nations Audio-Visual Information Centre on Human Settlements and on 1 October a director was appointed by the Government of Canada and designated by the Secretary-General as United Nations Special Representative for the Centre.

4. The headquarters of the Centre is located at Vancouver. The Government of Canada has contributed a sum of approximately 3.5 million Canadian dollars to fund operations until 31 March 1980 and the Province of British Columbia, in collaboration with the University of British Columbia, is providing office space, furniture and a certain amount of professional equipment on the campus of the University.

I. ORGANIZATION

5. In addition to its headquarters at Vancouver, the Centre is establishing six regional offices. Headquarters will administer the programme and also serve North America. An office at Geneva will serve Europe and co-ordinate regional offices in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East, East Africa and West Africa. At the time this report was prepared, headquarters had been established at Vancouver, and the European office in the Palais des Nations, the Latin American regional office at Mexico City and the East African regional office at Nairobi were in the process of being set up. The regional offices in Asia and the Pacific, West Africa and the Middle East will be established in the coming months. The headquarters staff at present consists of 8 posts and 13 staff members are scheduled to be deployed in the field. In addition, an information officer posted at United Nations Headquarters has been assigned to serve as liaison officer for the Centre.

II. CURRENT DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIAL

6. The major activity to date has been largely organizational and custodial; establishing offices and procedures, classifying the material on human settlements both audio-visual and written, and carrying out the vast technical preparations referred to below. During this period, the only film prints available for distribution have been the original prints provided for Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements; there has consequently been a minimal public awareness of the existence of the material. Nevertheless, headquarters has been able to service a total of 117 requests with 380 film loans. Approximately 60 per cent of the requests came from North America but the remaining 40 per cent were almost equally divided among all the other regions. Generally, the requests for films came from educational institutions, national Governments and professional organizations, frequently for use in seminars and conferences; for those fortunate enough to be able to come to the University of British Columbia an excellent close-circuit television viewing area has been installed, where an average 15 videocassette screenings have been booked each month.

III. TECHNICAL PRODUCTION

7. A massive undertaking to classify, evaluate and reproduce the Habitat presentations is entering its final stages. The initial objective is to make available to all countries in their own regions all the programmes produced by them for Habitat so that they can study in sight and sound human settlement problems and the solutions most relevant to their regions. In addition, an advisory group of 34 human settlements and media experts has established criteria, which were followed in selecting a significant number of films for universal distribution. The programme provides ultimately for a distribution in English, French, Spanish and Arabic of some 2,500 prints from the seven regional offices. This massive technical process is being carried out in close collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada.

8. In connexion with distribution, there is one matter to which the Commission's attention must be drawn. In implementing the programme outlined above, two prerequisites must be met. First, countries which produce films must transfer in writing the distribution rights to enable the United Nations to make the necessary film distribution. Secondly, the producers must give the Centre the printing elements required to produce quality film prints. In certain cases where these procedures are lagging behind, it is hoped that the Commission's support can prove influential in providing the Centre with the tools necessary to carry out its mandate.

IV. MANDATE

9. The central mandate of the Centre derives from General Assembly resolution 31/115, namely (a) to treat audio-visual and related material as a resource to be used in implementing recommendations for national action, programmes of international co-operation and the realization of goals in the field of human settlements established by Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements;

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(b) to be responsible for the custody, reproduction and international distribution of the material; and (c) to ensure its widest possible use by Governments and other interested bodies.

10. To this end, the Centre has emphasized the decentralization of its staff and resources. Indeed, about 75 per cent of its budget is allocated to the field and 25 per cent to headquarters. Designated as "animators", in the French sense of the word, their task will be to animate, encourage and inspire national disseminators, professional groups, educational institutions and government departments to use the materials in connexion with workshops and training courses.

The animators will also make contact with the mass media to promote public information on human settlement problems. In carrying out their task the animators will be instructed to work closely with the regional commissions and intergovernmental committees on human settlements, as well as with the representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of Public Information and other relevant United Nations bodies in their regions.

11. With each regional office responsible for serving an average of 20 countries, an active film-lending programme is anticipated within the regions. For it to succeed it is vital that the dispatch of films to and from the regional offices should proceed expeditiously. Certain customs difficulties have come to light in some instances, which could severely limit the effectiveness of the offices, and the Centre may turn to the Commission for further assistance in solving such problems.

12. The Centre conceives of the films not as ends in themselves but as vehicles to encourage positive activities in the field of human settlements. It envisages the production of compilation films on a thematic basis to facilitate discussions and television programming. The Centre also plans within budget constraints to produce from available material visual presentations that can be used effectively in the context of United Nations conferences and seminars. In this connexion it has co-operated with the Canadian International Development Agency and the National Film Board of Canada in producing programmes that may be seen at the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries. Finally, it is hoped to embark soon on a programme to stimulate new filming on Habitat themes, which could augment and update existing material.
