

32nd meeting

Wednesday, 14 July 1993, at 3.30 p.m.

President: Mr. Olexandre SLIPTCHENKO (Ukraine)
later: Mr. Martin HUSLID (Norway)

E/1993/SR.32

AGENDA ITEM 4

Coordination questions (*continued*):

- (a) Reports of the coordination bodies (*continued*)
- (c) International cooperation in the field of informatics (*continued*)
- (d) Question of a United Nations year for tolerance (*continued*)
- (e) Multisectoral collaboration on tobacco or health (*continued*)

Promotion of press freedom in the world (*continued*)

1. Mr. BALOCH (Observer for Pakistan) said his delegation hoped that more efficient coordination machinery would enable ACC to focus better on the key substantive issues facing the international community, to which the United Nations system was called upon to respond in a well-coordinated and effective manner. That was perhaps the most important question the system needed to address.

2. His delegation attached great importance to the response of ACC to the special economic problems of countries affected by the sanctions against Iraq, as well as the measures taken to implement Agenda 21 and the Cartagena Commitment¹ adopted by UNCTAD VIII. His delegation was deeply concerned at the signs, throughout the United Nations system, of declining resources, which could undermine the system's technical capacity and its support for developing countries. To survive the financial crunch, components of the system would have to learn to work together to achieve the common goals set by the international community.

3. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on international cooperation in the field of informatics (E/1993/86), his delegation's main concern was to achieve the harmonization and improvement of the United Nations information systems needed for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States Members. Some initial steps had been taken but much needed to be done. His delegation had taken careful note of the review being

undertaken by ACC and felt that not enough consultation was taking place among Governments of Member States and those responsible for the review. He urged that regular, systematic consultation should take place before the current review was completed and its outcome submitted for approval of ACC. As the report pointed out, a number of steps could be taken to improve States Members' access to information within the United Nations system in the public domain, even before a new structure for the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Information Systems and the International Computing Centre was developed. His delegation hoped that the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the executive heads of the system, would ensure that the matter received high priority in response to the Council's decisions.

4. Ms. BIRGIN (Australia), referring to the report of the Director-General of WHO (E/1993/56, annex) said that many agencies had focused attention on the health costs of tobacco consumption and that WHO had alerted member States to the dangers. The World Health Assembly, in a number of resolutions, had urged member States to adopt comprehensive strategies of tobacco control. Australia's national strategies, including bans on tobacco advertising and promotion, workplace smoking bans in the governmental and non-governmental sectors, national anti-smoking education programmes and tobacco taxation measures. The World Bank had adopted a policy of providing no new loans for the growing or manufacture of tobacco.

5. Some nations, however, earned significant foreign exchange from tobacco production, which also provided employment opportunities and government revenue. A multisectoral approach, therefore, was the best approach to the task of weighing the apparent economic benefits of tobacco production against the costs of its consumption. A successful international tobacco strategy must aim at reducing the global demand for tobacco products, with a consequent reduction in supply requirements—an approach consistent with the effective international strategies to deal with illicit drug trafficking.

6. The number of smokers had diminished significantly in Australia, from 72 per cent of adult men in 1945 to 30 per cent in 1989, and from 31 per cent of adult women in 1980 to 27 per cent in 1989. Domestic

¹ See 31st meeting, note 1.

tobacco-production profitability had declined also, but increasing demand from other nations, particularly in South-East Asia, might keep production at current levels.

7. Emphasis on economic aspects could focus on the costs to the community stemming from sickness and death, fires and other tobacco-related accidents, absenteeism and the effects of passive smoking, as well as on environmental damage such as soil degradation and the effects of pesticides.

8. Multisectoral collaboration must involve all relevant international agencies, and the developed nations must cooperate closely with developing countries in applying suitable policies and strategies. It would be useful to establish a focal point within the United Nations to consider the multisectoral implications of tobacco consumption and production, with a view to studying the range of issues and developing a negotiated strategy. There would have to be negotiation with relevant international organizations on the full range of socio-economic issues, in order to put appropriate strategies in place. Reports on the effectiveness of a multisectoral approach should be provided, through the focal point, to the Council on a regular basis.

9. Mr. KEDZIA (Poland) said that his Government thanked the Secretary-General for focusing, in his report on international cooperation in the field of informatics (E/1993/86), on the continued flow of information to States Members concerning the Organization's activities, user-friendly access to information systems, and training. The report rightly stressed the importance of a comprehensive, integrated approach. The whole area of United Nations activities should be covered. It was striking, however, that, only a few weeks after the World Conference on Human Rights, which had stressed the need for coordinated activities in that field and for further promotion of and education on human rights, the organizing of information on human rights seemed neglected. Since unlimited access to information was an obvious prerequisite, his delegation urged the competent United Nations organs to adopt a comprehensive information programme on human rights, which should include the establishment of a generally and easily accessible database at Geneva as well as the publication of human rights documentation on CD-ROM. Easy, inexpensive access by all States Members to information was essential to the equality of Members, which was a fundamental principle of a democratic world order. An efficient United Nations effort in the field of informatics was a matter of high political priority.

10. With regard to the question of a United Nations year for tolerance, the report of the Director-General of UNESCO (E/1993/89, annex) described tolerance as a controversial concept. Indeed, in the debate in the French National Assembly on the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Mirabeau had opposed the draft, preferring a proclamation of religious freedom instead of tolerance. As he had pointed out, if there was a state of tolerance there was bound to be an authority that tolerated

but could also refuse to do so. Tolerance alone was not enough, and might even be contrary to the rule of law. If a deed was punishable, the State administering justice could refrain from punishing it only in cases clearly identified by law.

11. Tolerance, therefore, could not replace freedom in relations between the State and the individual. In Poland, before the political upheaval of 1989, it had been government policy not to interfere greatly with freedom of speech and print, but the censorship system had existed as before. Censorship might be slack in a situation of tolerance, but in a state of freedom it did not exist at all.

12. Tolerance should not be perceived as a political category only. Viewed as a human characteristic, tolerance was an indispensable element of human rights culture. Without tolerance in relations among and between peoples, there could be no genuine observance of human rights—a fact recognized in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations and in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Tolerance was especially relevant in certain areas, particularly in regard to freedom of religion, racial discrimination and press freedom. His delegation welcomed the proclamation of 1995 as the year for tolerance. It should be a year not of celebration but of concerted action by Governments, the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In that light, his delegation supported the report of the Director-General of UNESCO, and hoped that the outlined programme for the year would contribute significantly to the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/23) of the World Conference on Human Rights.

13. Mr. RAS-WORK (International Telecommunication Union) said that ITU, as the United Nations specialized agency in the field of telecommunications, was particularly pleased that the Council had included international cooperation in the field of informatics in its agenda.

14. The worldwide ITU information network for its members, the Telecommunication Information Exchange Service, provided remote consultation and electronic transfer of documents and an interactive electronic exchange of information. Geneva-based missions accredited to the United Nations had been offered the possibility of connection to the network.

15. In deciding to establish a senior-level task force on United Nations information systems, ACC had requested ITU to assume the role of lead agency. The task force was composed of senior-level information policy makers of the United Nations system, as distinct from information technology specialists. Having reviewed its mandate, it had highlighted five major components: general requirements for the dissemination and exchange of appropriate information between Member States and the United Nations and its specialized agencies; ways and means to harmonize and improve the United Nations in-

formation network system; the status of information technology in the system, and related telecommunications infrastructure; the roles and structures of the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Information Systems and the International Computing Centre; and the information needs of ACC and its standing committees. The task force would submit a report in October on the urgent aspects of its work programme, and expected to submit its final report by April 1994. With regard to the comments made by the observer for Pakistan, he felt sure that the task force would arrange in advance for all necessary coordination.

16. ITU was conscious of the importance of an up-to-date, reliable communications network to all Member States, organizations and the private sector. It would do its utmost to provide the Council, through ACC, with comprehensive practical recommendations for implementation.

17. Mr. PATNAIK (India) said that his delegation welcomed the CPC report on the first part of its thirty-third session (A/48/16, part I) but regretted that CPC had been hampered by the late appearance and inadequacy of the documentation on coordination. He hoped that ACC would pay due attention to reporting at the next session. His delegation, which had participated actively in the work of CPC, stressed the latter's role in coordinating the work of the United Nations system, and welcomed the CPC conclusions and recommendations, which it hoped the Council would adopt.

18. The CPC evaluation exercise was most useful. For instance, in the field of human rights, CPC had recommended the establishment of a database. It was important to be guided, in that regard, by the principle of indivisibility of all human rights, including civil, political, economic and social. Similarly, with regard to the recommendations relating to UNHCR, it was important that the latter's activities should be confined to its mandate and not lead to an undue strain on its resources.

19. His delegation stressed the need to strengthen the rôle of CPC in system-wide coordination, in the context not only of the programme budget but also of the medium-term plan.

20. Mr. DELACROIX (France) referred to the resolution of the UNESCO General Conference on the promotion of press freedom in the world (E/1993/58, annex). As the Windhoek Declaration affirmed, the establishment of a free press was vital for a democratic society and its economic development. His delegation fully supported the proposal that the General Assembly should be invited to have 3 May declared World Press Freedom Day, and would be prepared to co-sponsor a draft resolution to that effect.

21. Mr. STOBY (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation in the field of informatics (E/1993/86), said that he had taken

careful note of the comments by the observer for Pakistan, and of his concern that not enough consultations were taking place among those responsible for carrying out the review and Governments of Member States. He wished to point out, in that regard, that the decision to hold such a policy review had been taken by ACC only in April 1993. As mentioned in the ACC report, and in his statement to the Council the previous day (31st meeting), there had been an immediate report back to the Council, with an indication of the main policy issues which had emerged from the ACC task force's first meeting, including an indication when the task force would be meeting again and when it expected to conclude its work. Therefore he was somewhat taken aback to hear that there had not been enough consultation in the matter. In fact, the opportunity had been seized of informing the Council, at its current session, of the action ACC was taking; in particular, the opportunity for dialogue with Member States and members of the Council was welcome. The current session was itself a welcome opportunity for consultations, and he looked forward to any views which members of the Council, or the Council itself, might have on the review initiated by ACC.

22. Mrs. FOURNIER (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) welcomed the Polish representative's statement on the need to reflect on the concept of tolerance. She fully agreed that the latter could not replace the concept of freedom, and that an integrated approach was essential.

23. Mr. ROCHON (World Health Organization) on behalf of the Director-General of WHO, thanked members of the Council for their support of the Director-General's report (E/1993/56, annex). In all cases, WHO would continue its intensive work to combat the use of tobacco, including support for activities at the national level. An integrated approach to the problem by the entire United Nations system was essential. Experience had shown that uncoordinated action was not enough.

24. The PRESIDENT announced that the Council had concluded its general discussion of items 4 (a), (c), (d) and (e).

Mr. Huslid, Vice-President, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 2

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following themes (continued*):

(b) Coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in the fields of preventive action

* Resumed from the 23rd meeting.

and intensification of the struggle against malaria and diarrhoeal diseases, in particular cholera (continued*)

25. The PRESIDENT drew attention to the draft agreed conclusions in document E/1993/L.26.

26. In paragraph 10, the beginning of the last sentence should read "United Nations organs and organizations".

27. The text of the draft agreed conclusions was the result of considerable work and many revisions. He noted that in the penultimate paragraph, the Secretary-General was requested to submit a report the development of which should be monitored by the Council, on the implementation of the recommendations to improve coordination in the prevention and control of malaria and diarrhoeal diseases. He also drew attention to the statement in the final paragraph that, in returning to the subject in 1994, the Council should exert more fully its coordinating role as defined in the Charter of the United Nations.

28. Mr. PATNAIK (India) said that there were still differences about the precise meaning of the agreed conclusions. In normal United Nations processes, there were two ends of the spectrum when it was a question of adopting recommendations of that nature. On the one hand, there were presidential statements of the kind the President of the Council frequently issued under his authority. At the other end of the spectrum, there were resolutions which had been carefully negotiated between delegations. In the middle, there was the innovation of the agreed conclusions, which his delegation considered to be more than a presidential summary of statements and less than a resolution. However, their exact legal status had not yet been defined. In his delegation's view, they were more similar to the presidential statements issued in the Security Council.

29. Subject to that basic interpretation, his delegation would be happy to adopt the draft conclusions. They were a clear message to the agencies involved that, when they reported to the Council the following year, it must be on the basis of those conclusions.

30. The PRESIDENT said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council decided to adopt the conclusions.

It was so decided.

31. Mr. ARELLANO (Mexico) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the efforts made by the President to arrive at the conclusions reached. However, he agreed with the point made by the Indian representative. He recognized that the decision had been taken by the Council at its current session and that new machinery had

been developed to avoid spending hours and days discussing paragraphs and becoming involved in time-consuming work. However, the Council might be falling into a new pitfall by adopting a series of paragraphs which were mostly declarative and some of which had no significance. He would like, for example, to know the meaning of paragraph 6.

32. At a future session, the Council should consider returning to the previous procedure involving resolutions and decisions which were quite clear and avoid producing lengthy documents that were mostly declarative.

33. The PRESIDENT agreed that the Council should give thought to ways in which it could improve the process. In the present case, however, it had not been easy. Many proposals had been made and in some cases delegations had not pressed their texts. However, he recognized that, in future, efforts should be made to arrive at a shorter and more action-oriented process.

34. Mr. STOBY (Department for Policy Cooperation and Sustainable Development) said, with regard to the second sentence of paragraph 19, that while it was not quite clear what the word "monitor" involved, particularly in terms of the development of the report, he thought that it would be useful to place on record the consistent position of the Secretary-General on that question. Once a request was made to the Secretary-General to prepare a report, the matter came within the ambit of the Secretariat. The report was prepared in the internal processes and submitted to Member States in accordance with the particular request. The indication given in the document about monitoring related perhaps to earlier decisions taken by the Council suggesting that the Bureau should monitor the timeliness of the preparation of the report. However, the substantive process of preparing the report was of course an entirely internal matter.

35. The PRESIDENT, referring to the point raised by the Indian representative, said that he had discussed the matter with Mr. Stoby and members of the Secretariat. On the operational side, there should be no doubt about the value and force of the conclusions. With regard to the substance, he was confident that the conclusions served their purpose.

36. With respect to the formulation of the document, the Secretariat would prepare an introductory text, stating that the Council had decided to adopt the following agreed conclusions containing specific recommendations relating to coordination in the struggle against malaria and diarrhoeal diseases, in particular cholera. The Council was adopting the conclusions with the assent of all members. There was no doubt that they were clear directives to the organs of the United Nations system.

* Resumed from the 23rd meeting.