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PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: EVALUATION

In-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information

Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with paragraph 5 (e) (i) of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the attached report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services entitled "In-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information". The Secretary-General concurs with the recommendations in the report.

* E/AC.51/1996/1.

ANNEX

[18 March 1996]

In-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information
Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

SUMMARY

The Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its thirty-fourth session, recommended that an in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information be prepared for its consideration in 1996.

The present report contains findings and recommendations on: (a) the approach of the Department to implementing mandates; (b) the adequacy of the Department's services to redisseminators, the general public and substantive departments; and (c) the effectiveness of programme implementation, in particular in meeting the needs of target audiences and in disseminating information.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its thirty-fourth session, recommended that an in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information be prepared for its consideration in 1996. 1/

2. The Department of Public Information, as the focal point of the information activities of the Organization, covers the entire range of issues currently before the United Nations. The in-depth evaluation reviewed all the programmes of the Department and analysed a large sample of its information products. In addition, a management letter was transmitted from the Office of Internal Oversight Services to the Department giving findings and recommendations on managerial issues and covering such topics as production and distribution of print materials, multiplier effects, increased efficiency in the use of equipment, and legal and administrative support.

3. The following categories of information were reviewed in the conduct of the in-depth evaluation: (a) information in the public domain (United Nations reports and documents, and studies by government agencies, non-governmental organizations and individual experts); (b) information from internal sources (the Department's internal evaluation reports, internal audit reports, reports of consultants, programme monitoring reports, and internal working documents); (c) the views of Governments, as contained in the statements of government representatives at the seventeenth session of the Committee on Information; (d) structured interviews and consultations with accredited press correspondents and news agencies, non-governmental organization representatives and staff of the Department of Public Information, and other departments of the Secretariat, and of the agencies of the United Nations system.

4. There have been reform efforts made in the Department over the past two years. The general intentions have been to extend the Department's reach to key audiences with a multiplier effect; forge partnerships with media organizations; harness new technologies; and promote a higher level of departmental and inter-agency cooperation. At the same time, there has been better utilization of advanced information technologies for the production and delivery of public information programmes; closer professional cooperation with both substantive departments and other members of the United Nations system, in particular in coordination of public information work relating to major conferences and communications; and a series of management initiatives that have made the Department a more streamlined and integrated operation.

II. FUNDAMENTALS

A. Mandates

5. The basic mandate of the Department of Public Information is set out in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946: "to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world. To this end the Department should primarily assist and rely upon cooperation of the established

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governmental and non-governmental agencies of information to provide the public with information about the United Nations. The Department of Public Information should not engage in 'propaganda'. It should on its own initiative engage in positive informational activities that will supplement the services of existing agencies of information to the extent that these are insufficient to realize the purpose set forth above".

6. In resolution 50/31 B of 6 December 1995, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the Secretary-General should ensure that the activities of the Department are strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the priority areas defined by the General Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information. These priority areas and recommendations are highlighted at every General Assembly session in the annual resolution on United Nations public information policies and activities. In addition to this annual resolution, a number of resolutions adopted by the Assembly imply or explicitly request the participation of the Department in implementing public information activities. While a number of mandates provide one-time tasks to the Department, others are recurrent, with, over time, a sizeable cumulative effect. For example, about one third of the mandates adopted at the forty-fourth session, while not restated since in new resolutions, are still current. The total number of conferences and observances that needed to be publicized in 1990 was 57 and in 1995, 65.

7. The staff of the Department commented that the multiplicity of specific mandates presented several difficulties. The activities of the Organization do not generate each year the same volume and type of information in every substantive area; public information strategies and techniques have to be adjusted accordingly. The proportion of resolutions containing formulations that limit this needed flexibility has declined in recent years but is still very high; approximately two thirds of the requests for public information services in resolutions adopted at the forty-fourth session were for specific information services or products, and this proportion was still more than half of the resolutions adopted at the forty-ninth session. Another difficulty is that a large number of these topics are not of the highest interest to news organizations. Effective promotion cannot be accomplished in each and every case; resources are limited and it is impossible to obtain media attention for all issues for which it is requested.

B. Themes, priorities and managerial discretion

8. In the 1994 report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/49/385, paras. 6-7), it was stated that, in order to sharpen the focus of the Department's activities mandated under paragraph 2 (a) of General Assembly resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993, the following thematically integrated priority areas were being pursued:

(a) Sustainable economic and social development in the overall context of "an agenda for development", with stress on the promotion and interrelation of issues raised in connection with major United Nations conferences;

(b) Peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-building in pursuit of the Organization's new responsibilities;

(c) Human rights and humanitarian relief activities, highlighting the emerging role of the Organization.

9. During the biennium 1994-1995, Department strategies and products linked a number of issues. For example, the public information strategy for the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo, in September 1994, the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in March 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in September 1995, emphasized their interrelatedness and encouraged journalists to view them as a continuum. Regarding the balance between the three major themes defined above, the most recent programme performance report available, for the biennium 1992-1993, shows that two thirds of the outputs and work months of units in promotional services, where activities are programmed by thematic areas, were in the area of the first theme, sustainable economic and social development. It should be noted that because of the Department's efforts to reflect linkages of issues, it is often difficult to represent output under only one priority area. This happens when a thematic issue and population group form the core of focus, such as human rights and women, the rights of the child, indigenous people and employment. Other activities of the Department, such as most radio and television programmes, were not programmed by thematic areas. An analysis of two core radio and television programmes shows that two thirds of the primary topics covered were also in the area of sustainable economic and social development. Here again, however, many of these programmes also cover human rights and humanitarian issues, or aspects of peace-keeping or peace-building.

10. In 1993, at the fifteenth session of the Committee on Information, a number of speakers stressed that the Department of Public Information needed to prioritize its information activities and to dispense with outdated mandates. In the opinion of many delegations, senior staff should have the budgetary flexibility to move resources as needed to emerging areas of importance. Several delegations indicated their belief that the Committee on Information must strive to tackle new areas of interest in its resolutions, in order to keep the Department's priorities current and focused. 2/ According to paragraph 2 (b) of General Assembly resolution 48/44 B, the Department is expected to provide the necessary level of information support for the activities of the United Nations in situations requiring immediate and special response. By that paragraph, the Assembly gives the Department greater flexibility to shift resources in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee. Since the forty-eighth session, this discretion has been used mostly for activities organized around conferences and special events or to react to misperceptions of the work of the Organization. Only a few resolutions contain formulations that enable the Department to make the necessary decisions in the face of changing circumstances. For example, in resolution 48/158 C of 20 December 1993, on the question of Palestine, the Assembly requested the Department to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme.

11. The organizational structure of the Department is less rigid than it used to be, and gives management more flexibility in utilizing the resources at its disposal. However, the definition, in 1994, of the three thematically integrated priority areas referred to in paragraph 8 above has not resulted as yet in adjustments in the work of all services.

12. The difficulty of implementing numerous mandated activities is not entirely resolved by the broad priority areas approach; there are still, for example, a large number of observances to publicize. The Joint Inspection Unit had noted that the "net effect on the public of the proliferation of United Nations observances is one of saturation. Consequently they run counter to the desired goal of mobilizing opinion" (A/44/329, annex, para. 108). The Secretariat commented that "it should be recalled that the designation of such observances is determined by various intergovernmental legislative bodies, which, in many cases, wish to attract the attention of specialized sectors of the media, of national legislative organs, non-governmental organizations and the public" (A/44/329/Add.1, para. 10). Every year, the list of observances provided to United Nations information centres is a major element in their work programme. During the biennium 1992-1993, 12 observances were the subject of wide publicity by the centres. However, publicity is limited for other observances to the issuance of a press release, or the organization of a brief ceremony, which is generally insufficient to convey to the public the real significance of the issues involved. Some observances or themes carry more relevance and command greater public interest in a given country. In 1995, at Headquarters, special events were scheduled - in collaboration with the programmes and agencies of the United Nations system - for 22 of the 65 conferences and observances to be publicized that year.

C. Interest and awareness of the public

13. In 1993, the General Assembly, in paragraph 2 (c) of its resolution 48/44 B, called upon the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department continued its efforts at promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations system among the peoples of the world and at strengthening the positive image of the system as a whole.

14. The surveys of public opinion commissioned by the Department in 27 countries worldwide between 1989 and 1993 show that the general public is interested in a wide array of United Nations activities. In fact, the interest in DPI publications giving basic information on the different activities of the United Nations is such that the Department cannot produce the quantities needed to fulfil requests transmitted by United Nations information centres. To meet such demand, United Nations in Brief, for example, has been redesigned to permit, within available budgets, internal printing in greater numbers in all six languages. Also, in the light of budgetary constraints, the Department is now disseminating more of its products through electronic information networks. The usefulness of DPI material is limited by the lack of material in local languages. The Department has encouraged local production of material; when resources are available, newsletters and publications are produced locally. The Department is aware of the problem and has endeavoured to allocate funds for this purpose. The problem of language is more acute when it comes to other

redisseminating efforts, such as the showing of video programmes on television and in schools.

15. Booklets produced to introduce the United Nations to the general public and material placed on electronic networks still tend to focus on administrative and organizational questions. There is not always much difference between DPI materials ostensibly targeting Governments, academics and the public, but there is intent by DPI management to shift to a greater emphasis on subjects of interest to the general public. Simple procedures to enhance product identity are not applied consistently; with the multiplication of new logos, a number of DPI products may not necessarily be associated with the United Nations. In 1995, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information stated that public interest in the United Nations was at an all-time high - but the message of the Organization must compete for the public's attention as never before. The task was to find ways to sharpen the focus on current issues and reach the widest possible audience.

Recommendation 1, Overall strategy of the Department of Public Information.

In keeping with its basic mandate, resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, the primary activity of the Department should be to assist and rely upon established agencies of information to provide the public with information about the United Nations; the Department should engage in activities that will supplement the services of existing agencies of information to the extent that these are insufficient to provide adequate information. The role of the Department should be primarily to provide services useful to agencies of information and other disseminators such as non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. Recommendations 2, 4-7, 9-13, 15 and 16 below apply this principle to specific services and functions.
[EV/96/02/1] 3/

Recommendation 2, Annual priorities.

A. The Department of Public Information should submit to the Committee on Information, within the framework of the approved medium-term plan and programme budget, a priority programme for the coming calendar year. The priority programme should focus on a limited set of specific topics and issues with linkages between some topics and issues. The priority programme should be implemented by an information strategy that draws on resources in all the sections of the Department.

B. For other topics and issues, the Department should restrict its activities to acting as a focal point and catalyst by encouraging public and private information agencies, networks of specialized non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions to carry out appropriate activities. The Department should provide the necessary guidance and overall coordination, and facilitate the transmission of existing information materials to and among those carrying out the activities.
[EV/96/02/2] 3/

D. Coverage by the media

16. In recent years, the interest of the media in the United Nations has increased significantly. Wire service stories with references to the United Nations filed in the NEXIS database were 1.7 per cent of all stories in 1984, 3 per cent in 1988 and 5.1 per cent in 1994. ^{4/} An analysis of a sample of wire service stories mentioning the United Nations filed in 1994 shows that nearly 60 per cent of these stories cover the main crises of the period - peace-keeping operations, sanctions and refugee situations; themes such as development or environment make up respectively 4.7 and 0.9 per cent of the stories. In October 1994, in his statement to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information stated that since international media coverage of the United Nations focuses almost exclusively on peace-keeping, significant portions of our audiences have come to believe that development is not a priority United Nations activity. In 1994-1995, the Department focused its resources on a cycle of international conferences placed under the broad theme of economic and social development. An analysis of a sample of all wire service stories filed in NEXIS between January 1993 and May 1995 shows that stories with at least one reference to social development doubled during the period; text analysis of a sample of stories revealed that, in those stories, the increase in substantive coverage of United Nations activities was even more significant.

17. Regarding the follow-up to the conferences, the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO) observed that media coverage of summits makes an important contribution, but is generally limited in time; non-governmental organizations reach out to an immense diversity of constituencies in ways that are often more durable and meaningful than those of the mass media. Press correspondents interviewed commented that it was easier for them to cover issues presented from a newsworthy perspective and that, although the Department of Public Information has made considerable efforts to draw attention to economic and social development, United Nations press conferences still tend to be "institutional". Informal meetings with personalities organized at the right moment and the personal accounts of officials back from the field can do more for the coverage of "soft" issues. The Department intends to organize more of such meetings.

E. Countering criticism and publicizing newsworthy developments

18. In 1993, the Committee for Programme and Coordination recommended that the Secretariat respond more effectively and expeditiously to the criticism of the United Nations in the media. ^{5/} The staff of the Guided Tours and Public Inquiries Units of the Public Services Section are required to be briefed on newsworthy developments and current news stories that might generate negative images and to respond immediately with accurate and appropriate information. However, there are no standard procedures for admitting to justified criticism or for answering inaccuracies or unfair comments and there are numerous examples where misrepresentations of the role of the United Nations did not elicit any reaction. Organized campaigns to counter negative attitudes regarding a United Nations activity have rarely been launched and sustained. In 1995, the

Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information issued a directive on the matter to heads of information offices away from Headquarters. It was stated in the directive that, in recent months, the level and frequency of criticism of the United Nations, as reflected in the press clippings sent by United Nations information centres to Headquarters, has been on the rise; much of the criticism revealed limited and possibly inaccurate understanding of the United Nations. The directive stressed that it was necessary to react promptly, within a day or two after the offending article appeared, and to have a letter published even if no guidance was received from Headquarters. United Nations information centre directors interviewed stated that this directive helped them considerably. A similar written directive at Headquarters is needed. In the last quarter of 1995, the Department established at Headquarters a core group of staff to focus on the production of fact-sheets containing up-to-date figures to help the press and the public put the activities of the United Nations and the associated costs into a realistic perspective. This effort is now being institutionalized within the Promotion and Public Services Division to provide the Organization with a rapid response capacity to correct misinformation published in the media.

19. The Office of the Spokesperson has encouraged departments, as well as United Nations information centre directors, to draw the attention of the Office to issues and events where there is potential for misperception or misrepresentation of the role of the United Nations. When the point of view of the United Nations is not presented early enough, if possible before the press has covered the story, misrepresentations can rarely be corrected.

20. The Secretary-General has expressed disappointment that United Nations success stories do not generate more coverage in the media. Senior officials have not developed the habit of alerting the Office of the Spokesperson and the Department of Public Information to newsworthy developments in their areas of responsibility as well as developments that demonstrate the capabilities and accomplishments of the United Nations. A unified approach to communicating the messages of success through different channels of information has not been implemented. Regular meetings are needed between the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information and the Office of the Spokesperson to review new developments and to decide on appropriate action by the Department; there is no mechanism for conveying systematically, and in a timely manner, relevant information from substantive departments to the Department of Public Information.

Recommendation 3, Countering criticism and publicizing newsworthy developments. A policy directive should be issued before the end of 1996 requiring the heads of all departments and offices to draw the attention of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information to:

(a) Newsworthy developments in their areas of responsibility, and newsworthy demonstrations of the capabilities and accomplishments of the United Nations;

(b) Misperceptions or misrepresentations of the role of the United Nations.

The policy should also provide guidance to senior officials on the nature of what is regarded as newsworthy, and on the immediate actions they should take to counter misperceptions or misrepresentations. [EV/96/02/3] 3/

F. Targeting audiences

21. The General Assembly, in its resolution 49/38 B of 9 December 1995, requested the management of the Department of Public Information to review its publications and proposals for publications to ensure that all publications fulfil an identifiable need, that they do not duplicate other publications inside or outside the United Nations system and that they are produced in a cost-effective manner. Although the United Nations message should ultimately reach the public as its audience, the Department must produce materials for the media and other redisseminators, including non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. Also, such audiences as schools, academic institutions and non-governmental and other organizations are reached through the organization of model United Nations programmes in cooperation with educational institutions, and the operation of a speakers' bureau (see para. 58 below). To avoid duplication in production within the United Nations system, the Department has regular as well as ad hoc contact with Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) partners regarding public information work for all major United Nations activities and events.

1. Print materials

22. In recent years, some print materials have been produced with specific target audiences in mind such as specialized segments of the press. In 1994-1995, for the promotion of major conferences, the Information and Planning Service targeted redisseminators, mostly the press, and designed print products to suit the needs of journalists. However, there is no established system to determine the needs of the target audience to be satisfied by a DPI product. There is no adequate analysis of feedback on DPI products, avenues for receiving feedback are not fostered and objective feedback is far from abundant. For the biennium 1996-1997, the Department proposes establishing feedback mechanisms to gauge the usefulness of its information materials and services to the targeted audiences. 6/

23. In 1995, in addition to the work of the Programme Evaluation and Committee Liaison Unit, responsible for the evaluation function within the Department, a few systematic analyses of user needs and related issues were undertaken by several other units. These studies were not strongly coordinated and their usefulness was uneven. The Unit was not in a position to increase its production of evaluation studies on major outputs and activities of the Department and to provide necessary guidance to assessment activities in other units.

24. The Department reviews proposals for publications, paying attention to the extent to which the information to be provided by such publications might already be available elsewhere. However, the cross-checking for product duplication is handled by ad hoc methods such as telephoning colleagues in

substantive departments and throughout the United Nations system. Sometimes, information from other parties is not received in a timely manner. At the 1995 meeting of JUNIC, it was noted that the information exchange between JUNIC members did not fulfil the purpose of the exercise, because respondents tended to report on already completed activities rather than provide information in advance of upcoming projects (ACC/1995/15, para. 8). Inter-agency task forces set up to coordinate public information work for major conferences are seen as a useful mechanism. At its 1995 meeting, JUNIC agreed that joint participation in the World Summit for Social Development should serve as an example of successful inter-agency cooperation (ibid., para. 17). No comprehensive tracking method is applied in monitoring the public information production of other international organizations. The same difficulties are experienced concerning non-print products. In relation to the review requested by the General Assembly in resolution 49/38 B, in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) found that "further analysis is needed to ascertain to what extent a number of the publications could be merged and/or produced more economically by avoiding redundant or duplicative material". 7/

Recommendation 4, Target audience needs for DPI print or electronic materials.

A. Redisseminators, who are either the target audience itself or the channel for reaching the target audience, should be the primary source of assessments of needs and demand. The production of all print or electronic materials, recurrent and non-recurrent, should be planned with the public information needs of specific target audiences in mind. These needs should be taken into account in determining the format and content of the material, and the method, scope and timing of its dissemination.

B. Materials produced by specialized agencies, Governments, non-governmental organizations and similar publishing centres that can assist the Department in fulfilling its mandates should be utilized and promoted by the Department.

C. Only print or electronic material, the effective dissemination of which can be adequately funded, should be produced. [EV/96/02/4] 3/

2. Audiovisual materials

25. Within existing resources, more comprehensive consultations and meetings are needed with broadcasters, or with their regional associations, to ascertain their needs in terms of type of programming, mode of transmission and target audience. In recent years, the production of videos has focused on shorter or low-cost programmes aimed at the general public, such as the news magazine "United Nations in Action", which is appreciated by viewers and broadcasters. Other attempts to match user needs are made by, for example, packaging film and video footage of various lengths to suit different broadcasters' needs and preparing clips to be used by broadcasters in their own news broadcasts. Selections of unedited footage illustrating a United Nations issue provided prior to the opening of a major international conference fall into that

category; "United Nations in Action" and the daily news highlights are also used in that manner.

26. Audiences reached worldwide by radio are diverse, in terms of demographics and interests. A number of United Nations radio programmes are well received by segments of the public, for example, the regular programme for women or a few special series. The Department has made efforts to improve the quality of programming, but a meaningful diversification of Headquarters programmes cannot be achieved without changing methods of production and of dissemination, by, for example, introducing live programming and partnerships with development agencies. In response to a question by the Central Evaluation Unit, the Department observed that the limitation of resources and of immediately accessible audio material at Headquarters, and of the number of products that could be aired free of charge by sponsoring broadcasting organizations, were all inhibiting factors. In general, the present radio programming is not sufficiently diversified so that it does not target specific groups; programmes of the regional units have only limited original programming. A number of United Nations information centres assist local radio broadcasters in the production of programmes and participate in local radio programmes. During a recent quarter, one centre participated in or prepared about 20 radio programmes. Another centre provided support to a local university that prepares television programmes and a weekly radio programme of 15 minutes focusing on the activities of the United Nations in the country. Briefings to newly appointed centre directors include guidance on the development of local radio programmes, using United Nations Radio material as well as local resources. However, collaboration between United Nations information centres and the Radio Section needs to be further strengthened. A number of centre directors interviewed stated that they lack the resources to be active in this way, and that they do not feel encouraged to participate in such shared activities. There is a need for clarification of policy on the promotion of local radio broadcasts on the United Nations and on the appropriateness of the involvement of United Nations information centres in local productions, taking into account the view that consistent jurisdiction over the origination and control of United Nations Radio programming and broadcasting should be maintained. There is also a need to provide a selected number of centres with portable recording and radio feed equipment that can help them relay radio news to local broadcasters as well as transmit to Headquarters material gathered in their respective regions.

Recommendation 5. Diversifying DPI audiovisual materials.

A. Systematic contact with broadcasters in the different regions by, for example, attendance at annual meetings of regional broadcasters associations, should be established to the extent that resources permit. One aim of this contact should be to ensure that the Department does not miss opportunities to place vignettes and other low-cost audiovisual materials on the United Nations in external television programming.

B. Further diversification of radio programmes to reach specific target audiences should be pursued through collaboration with other organizations in JUNIC that can provide relevant audio material.

C. A policy clarification should be issued to encourage United Nations information centres and information services to cooperate in the production of local radio and television programmes. They should be provided with support from Headquarters for these efforts. [EV/96/02/5] 3/

27. After 1985, the Department could no longer cover the cost of transmitting its radio programmes through the rented transmitters of Voice of America; the Department increased its telephone feeds to a few broadcasters and its mail distribution of taped programmes to a large number of radio stations. Taped programme distribution, however, has its limitations and uncertainties. The 1992 radio survey by the Department shows that, in most regions, 30 per cent of programmes are not received on time, and that only 45 per cent of stations answering the survey have regular time slots for United Nations programmes. The 1995 radio survey by the Department notes that some stations expressed concerns such as never receiving the World in Review tapes in time for them to be useful. These conditions make the development of a listenership difficult.

28. Recently, the Department has been exploring new ways of disseminating its radio programmes. New technologies provide a wide array of choices. For example, wherever possible, the Department is distributing the World in Review by radio, telephone and Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) circuits. In Geneva, correspondents are sending broadcast-quality signals from the Geneva Office to their radio stations through ISDN lines. The satellite-based telecommunications system of the United Nations currently under development, with its audio transmission capacity, could be an important channel in the transmission of radio signals. The signals can be relayed directly to regional audiences through leased transmitters, or to national broadcasting organizations that wish to rebroadcast United Nations radio programmes. A permanent broadcasting facility may be useful to other departments and development agencies that need to broadcast targeted information, as is the case for peace-keeping missions and other field-oriented programmes.

Recommendation 6, Study of a United Nations broadcasting capacity. A feasibility study covering the technical, financial, programming and managerial implications of the development of a United Nations radio broadcasting capacity should be undertaken and submitted for consideration to the Committee on Information at its 1997 session. [EV/96/02/6] 3/

III. SERVICES

A. Services to the media

1. Press coverage

29. The press is supplied daily with information on activities of the United Nations in the form of press releases and related materials such as daily summaries, briefing papers and notes to correspondents; most press releases and related materials are produced at Headquarters and Geneva. The General Assembly, in paragraph 18 of its resolution 50/31 B, expressed its full support for the wide and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through a continuation of United Nations press releases in both working languages of the

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Secretariat. In the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 a distinction is made between summaries of meetings for use by press correspondents, delegations and the United Nations Secretariat, and press releases prepared in a form appropriate for immediate distribution by media agencies. 8/ Most of the press releases issued belong to the former category; press correspondents interviewed by the Central Evaluation Unit stated that they use the press releases mostly to inform themselves of activities they cannot cover, and for possible follow-up at a later time; the information they contain, except for backgrounders and wrap-up, is not frequently used for dissemination in the media in the form it is presented.

30. DPI materials in general cannot compete with the capacity of news agencies to cover breaking news. For a number of correspondents, including those working for the major news agencies, the substance of meetings they considered newsworthy needed to be reported without delay. Correspondents stated that documents coming out of the Department as press releases or daily summaries tended to arrive too late to be useful in covering breaking news. The majority of correspondents interviewed by the Central Evaluation Unit commented that the most useful contribution of the Department was to provide background information, such as the fact-sheets prepared for the promotion of major conferences in 1994-1995, or brief "facts and figures" notes, which presented analyses and facts in a quotable format. These had appeal because of their brevity and because they spared correspondents the effort of research. Another issue correspondents mentioned was the need to target the various sectors of the media. In recent years, for example, a number of the press kits issued were well received by the specialized press and non-governmental organizations, while correspondents working for the general press or the electronic media did not find them as useful. Press releases and related materials transmitted electronically to the United Nations information centres and a number of other United Nations offices worldwide were also valued by information centre staff and local media for the background information they provide and their comprehensive coverage of United Nations activities.

31. Although the range and nature of United Nations activities differ substantially from those of other agencies, it is of interest to note that press releases of organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) or the World Bank do not assume the function of meeting coverage as is the case with DPI press releases. Press releases issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have special presentations whenever it is necessary to draw attention to time-sensitive information. The World Health Organization (WHO) produces several categories of press releases: those for the general press, including short releases for wire services; those for the scientific press; and special releases for specific regional or technical issues.

32. In addition to press releases, a variety of related materials are issued regularly by the News Coverage Service and on special occasions by other services of the Department. The production of these materials does not systematically target the different needs of various sectors of the media.

Recommendation 7, Information materials for the press. Resources permitting, in addition to the issuance of press releases primarily serving

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the function of meeting coverage, the News Coverage Service should regularly issue, and immediately post on electronic information networks, background information and information on newsworthy developments targeted to the interests of the general and specialized media. The News Coverage Service should provide this enhanced coverage by coordinating and pooling resources with other services, such as the Office of the Spokesperson, the Information and Planning Service and the United Nations information service at Geneva, as well as relevant services of programmes and agencies of the United Nations system. [EV/96/02/7] 3/

2. Spokespersons

33. At Headquarters, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General offers daily briefings and other information services to the news media and delegations. Other spokespersons are appointed, as needed, in, for example, Geneva or peace-keeping operations.

34. In a 1994 study on the Office of the Spokesperson, prepared by a consultant, it was noted that reporters say that it is rare that the daily briefing offers a story on the main news topic of the day; even in the midst of major news events in which the United Nations is central, no comment is offered that has not been released in, e.g., Sarajevo or Geneva hours earlier, nor is meaningful background described to put events in perspective. Correspondents interviewed by the Central Evaluation Unit at the end of 1995 were also of this view. In the first quarter of 1996, the situation appears to have significantly improved. Regarding inquiries from the press, the Spokesperson and designated contact officers in the departments are striving for a same-day answer; but too frequently, comments and reactions come too late to get into news reports. Sometimes, no answer is provided. Because of slow response and the perception that the spokespersons are often not well informed, reporters do not rely on the Office of the Spokesperson as their chief source for breaking news about United Nations activities, particularly field operations. They are more likely to get their information from delegations of Member States, non-governmental organizations or government agencies.

35. It is often difficult for the Office of the Spokesperson to get responses to urgent questions on breaking news stories in time for the daily briefings. Information components in field missions do not always transmit information to that Office; guidance is received from the Secretary-General and senior staff regularly but not each day. The departments and the senior political advisers do not have regular interaction with the Office of the Spokesperson. In 1994, department heads expressed a willingness to have staff from that Office in their own staff meetings on a routine basis, as is the practice in the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

Recommendation 8, Public information aspects of departmental actions.

A. Professional staff in the Office of the Spokesperson should be assigned departments concerned with major news stories and should attend relevant departmental staff meetings, and receive regular briefings from senior staff in their department of assignment on the public information aspects of the work of the department and important decisions made.

B. The Department of Public Information should bring to the attention of the Office of the Spokesperson relevant information originating from departments not covered directly by the Office. [EV/96/02/8] 3/

3. Access to United Nations officials and other primary sources of information

36. In 1995, at Headquarters, the Secretary-General granted formal interviews, participated in press conferences and interacted with the press in less formal circumstances. He increased his interactions with the press during his official travels. Many correspondents expressed the view that the Secretary-General's press and public relations are most effective when he handles them directly himself. Correspondents would like him to conduct more press conferences in New York, and to give more comments to the press spontaneously. Yet it is recognized that it is impossible for the Secretary-General and his Executive Office to handle the huge number of requests for information directly.

37. Many journalists emphasized the importance of direct contacts with primary sources, such as United Nations officials in the Secretariat, agencies and field missions but, apart from those whose responsibilities include press contact, senior officials have little direct interaction with the media. In 1995, the Secretary-General advised directors of United Nations information centres to contact visiting officials and ask them to do interviews, and to contact senior officials at Headquarters directly if they had requests for satellite interviews. However, there are no guidelines on media relations issued to the Secretariat as a whole, and senior officials do not feel encouraged to speak to the press. This inability of United Nations officials to brief the press routinely on an informal basis, even in cases where information is of a technical nature, or already made public, handicaps efforts to shape stories and get the Organization's views across to the public. The World Bank, in contrast, has adopted a policy on disclosure of information to improve the transparency of its activities and also to define clearly what information should remain confidential. Comparable policy has not been adopted at the United Nations. Consequently, in United Nations departments and offices there is no common understanding of what services or support should be given to the media; no communication strategy exists that could serve as the basis for granting or rejecting requests for interviews.

38. At Headquarters, responsibility for servicing the media is divided between several units. There is no adequate pooling of information with agencies and programmes of the United Nations system. Press conferences could be better prepared: documentation is often not distributed to the media in advance of the event; speakers are selected who are not good communicators, or who have not been assisted with the preparation of their presentation. Schedules of press conferences, and other press encounters, by United Nations officials and delegations sometimes conflict, or are too clustered, making it difficult for the media to cover important viewpoints and information.

39. Similar problems occur in Geneva where, however, the degree of satisfaction of press correspondents is somewhat higher. Most agencies and programmes have defined communication strategies that take into account the needs of the media,

and their spokespersons participate in the press briefings chaired twice a week by the Director of the United Nations Information Service. Regarding access by the media to United Nations officials, and the release of timely information, the strong coordinating role played by the Director of the Information Service is seen as beneficial.

Recommendation 9, Secretary-General's bulletin on disclosure of information. A Secretary-General's bulletin should be issued by the end of 1996 to facilitate prompt access to United Nations officials by media organizations. The bulletin should define what information must remain confidential and aim at encouraging United Nations officials to speak informally to the media, and to accept requests for formal interviews. This guidance should emphasize the importance of the maximum feasible transparency of operations. The Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General should monitor the application of the guidance in the bulletin. [EV/96/02/9] 3/

Recommendation 10, Effectiveness of press conferences and speaking engagements.

A. To reduce scheduling conflicts among press conferences at Headquarters and at Geneva by officials of the United Nations and officials of Governments and other organizations, the Office of the Spokesperson should oversee the schedules of and preparations for such events.

B. The Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Office of the Spokesperson, should ensure that United Nations officials scheduled for press conferences or speaking engagements receive guidance on preparing statements for the press or the public and training on how to communicate effectively. [EV/96/02/10] 3/

4. Audiovisual coverage

40. The worldwide surveys of public opinion commissioned by the Department between 1989 and 1993 show that television was the general public's primary source of information on the United Nations in 21 of the 27 countries surveyed. Several units of the Department provide services and audiovisual products to the media. The Television News (UNTV) pool coverage of open United Nations meetings and official events is a continuous source of television materials on which broadcasters increasingly rely. At Headquarters, television signals are transmitted live to international television syndicators for immediate worldwide dissemination, and directly to international television organizations. A video news highlights package is produced daily by UNTV in New York to supplement any live television feeds received by the international news syndicators and other television organizations. In addition, the United Nations News Audio Information Service (UNNAIS) offers a diversified programme, available to anyone by telephone; the system receives an average of 800 to 1,000 calls per week, placed mostly by delegations, press correspondents and a few radio stations. Other services are provided by the Audio-Visual Library and the Photo Unit. Owing to increased demand for coverage of United Nations activities, it has become difficult, in a few units, to maintain the required level of services.

41. Broadcasters increasingly request audiovisual archival materials to supplement their news stories on the United Nations. The inclusion of past coverage items and outtakes from film and video productions enhances the news stories. Several Department units are competing to use the same engineering resources for the increasing mastertape recordings of events covered, as well as videotape editing and videotape dubbing. Requests from multimedia developers are also on the rise. Historical audio recordings, photos and video clips have been ordered for many educational CD-ROM projects. Modern equipment and technology have been introduced in the radio, photo and video production areas; however, they have remained stand-alone systems. Further coordination and integration of audiovisual services would enhance comprehensiveness of the material delivered to the users.

42. At Headquarters, correspondents and visiting media do not use the United Nations production facilities frequently, and the audiovisual coverage of events is almost entirely done by in-house crews under contract to the United Nations, in contrast to the situation at the Geneva Office. At Headquarters, the coverage by the Department is regarded as useful by a number of correspondents and syndicators. However, shortcomings hinder the activities of the visual media. UNTV can cover only the most important events and priority meetings, and sometimes not even these in their entirety; increased coverage by UNTV would not be cost-effective. Open events at Headquarters, usually at the committee level, that cannot be pooled by UNTV have been covered by accredited television crews following the approval of the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit. However, established procedures do not facilitate the presence of outside filming crews to fill gaps on short notice, or - on occasions of special interest to them - to produce material other than that obtained from UNTV. At Headquarters, there are several locations that could have a simple technical set-up and background that identifies the United Nations, for impromptu interviews by the visual media. Practices need to be reviewed thoroughly, considering the importance of the visual media.

Recommendation 11, Coverage of United Nations activities by the visual media. Taking into account security considerations and the concerns of delegations, the visual media should be guaranteed access to activities of the United Nations adequate to their needs. This direct coverage by the visual media should be maintained in a manner that is not disruptive to the work of the Organization under procedures, such as pooling of assignments, worked out in consultation with the media organizations involved.
[EV/96/02/11] 3/

5. Media liaison

43. A small unit, the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit, evaluates, authorizes and coordinates media coverage at Headquarters and at major United Nations conferences away from Headquarters. In 1995, the Unit processed a total of 20,039 accreditations and carried out 11,801 liaison assignments. During the same period, the Unit contacted, on a variety of issues, a total of 6,636 news wires and photo agencies, as well as still photographers of newspapers and magazines. Although these routine activities appeared to have been carried out to the satisfaction of delegations, as well as of substantive departments and

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specialized agencies of the United Nations system, the Unit lacks the time and resources to review the process and adapt it to the new, more cost-effective computerized systems.

44. In resolution 47/73 B of 14 December 1992, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide an assessment of measures to ensure that the working facilities provided for the media are fully adequate to meet present and future needs. A task force was set up, but no major improvements could be undertaken, in part for lack of funds. In that resolution, the Assembly also requested greater coordination within the Department in relation to the provision of facilities and services for the media. The Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit continues to work towards that end.

45. Since the Office of the Spokesperson and other units in the Department are involved in liaison tasks, the role of the Unit is sometimes limited to the issuance of pass forms and escorting media crews. The main responsibility for scheduling interviews with United Nations officials and for organizing press conferences lies with the Office of the Spokesperson. A number of issues fall into a grey area and are not actively pursued by either service. Apart from major conferences and meetings, the potential interest of lesser or more informal events to different sectors of the media is not assessed, and steps to facilitate coverage not taken. Requests for coverage involving technical arrangements to be made by these media are handled as normal administrative functions and do not take fully into account the newsworthiness of an event. Requests must be submitted in writing and authorizations may involve several levels of responsibility; as a result, opportunities for a wider coverage of United Nations activities can be lost. A number of events are made known to the Unit with only a few hours lead time, which means that it is difficult to finalize technical and security arrangements. More long-term arrangements need to be made to facilitate the work of media organizations that frequently cover United Nations activities.

Recommendation 12, Strengthening media liaison.

A. The Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit should be responsible for all aspects of requests by the media, in close collaboration with the Office of the Spokesperson.

B. In carrying out this function, the Unit should coordinate with all relevant technical, security and substantive services units within the Secretariat in such a way as to provide same-day response to media requests.

C. The Unit should make analogous longer-term coordination arrangements in preparation for coverage of scheduled upcoming events by eliciting from the media requests for future services. [EV/96/02/12] 3/

B. Services at the regional and local levels

1. Partnerships

46. Initiatives have been taken by the Department of Public Information at Headquarters, and in other duty stations by United Nations information services and information centres, to establish partnerships with media organizations. In 1994, in his statement to the Committee on Information, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information suggested further developing partnerships by exploring agreements with some key governmental and regional information agencies.

47. Ways to improve television reporting in developing countries on the activities of the United Nations were discussed at the 1995 meeting of the Joint United Nations Information Committee. JUNIC noted that global satellite television broadcasters, and financially better-equipped national networks, have direct and same-day access to United Nations video news feeds, while broadcasters in the developing countries, owing to a lack of funding for daily satellite transmissions, get this material with a delay, if at all, through United Nations information centres or via news film agencies. The pooling of resources between JUNIC members and several low-cost alternatives have been discussed. These alternatives include transmission of a daily 10-minute news feed through partners who already operate transponders on the Intelsat network.

48. The Department organizes many types of encounters with the press, including, in 1994-1995, a few at the regional level for the promotion of the major conferences. A number of United Nations information centres organize, frequently in collaboration with national authorities, briefings or seminars with the press, focusing on current issues or special events. Centre directors interviewed stated that these low-cost encounters are effective, particularly when their news content is enhanced by the presence of a visiting United Nations official. At Headquarters, round tables with senior editors have been discontinued, for lack of resources. Once a year, the Department conducts a programme for young journalists from developing countries, in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Centre directors stated that the programme is useful and, if more journalists participated in it, could create a corps of journalists well equipped to report on the activities of the Organization. It should be noted that some United Nations agencies and programmes, sometimes in collaboration with bilateral aid agencies, organize training seminars for journalists. Although approaches and purposes are not identical, a degree of coordination is possible, in particular to strengthen partnerships and networks with the press.

Recommendation 13, Support to the media at the regional and local levels.

The Department should continue to develop low-cost initiatives, such as those mentioned in paragraphs 47 and 48, that would increase coverage of United Nations activities by providing more targeted services to the media at the regional and local levels. These initiatives should be implemented by the pooling of resources between those JUNIC members with relevant television and training programmes and in partnership with regional and local media organizations. [EV/96/02/13] 3/

2. United Nations information centres

49. More than half of the operating costs of United Nations information centres are for renting and maintaining premises. In its resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to enlist the cooperation of the Member States concerned in providing all possible facilities for the establishment of new information centres and in assisting actively in efforts to promote wider public understanding of the aims and activities of the United Nations. In 1994, the average operating costs incurred by United Nations information centres established before the adoption of resolution 1405 (XIV) were 2.7 times higher than for information centres established after its adoption; expenditures for rental of premises were eight times higher for the former.

50. The average information centre budget for translation into local languages and production of information materials is approximately \$3,000 per year. Centre directors commented that budget limitations frequently make it difficult to distribute documents sent to them, and there are cases when centres cannot meet requests by media organizations for transmission of time-sensitive materials. The collaboration of centres in joint projects is sometimes impossible, for budgetary reasons. Small amounts of seed money received in 1994-1995 for promotion of the major conferences - a total of approximately \$130,000 for all 63 United Nations information centres - enabled the centres to organize a relatively large number of activities. A number of them receive cash contributions from host Governments; unfortunately, contributions by Member States have fallen since the biennium 1990-1991: there was a 40 per cent decrease between 1991 and 1994.

51. In 1995, ACABQ recommended that the administrative support for the centres be reviewed with a view to releasing more resources for operational activities. 2/ Over the past 10 years, savings have been realized through the reduction of staff - 30 per cent of the Professional posts - and a strategy of integration within the offices of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) resident representatives, where possible. From the point of view of programme delivery, the integration has not been successful everywhere. The Department and UNDP have agreed to increase staff training. In countries where there is no UNDP office, the United Nations information centre acts as the focal point for the United Nations system as a whole and is asked to provide a variety of services. A number of centre directors spend a substantial amount of their time on liaison and representation functions and are not able to focus on their primary function.

Recommendation 14, Support to United Nations information centres.

A. For United Nations information centres established before 1960 that do not have host country agreements, increased efforts should be made by the Department to negotiate such agreements, reflecting the principles of General Assembly resolution 1405 (XIV).

B. All countries hosting United Nations information centres should be encouraged by Headquarters to contribute funds to the operational activities of the centres. [EV/96/02/14] 3/

C. Services to non-governmental organizations
and the general public

1. Non-governmental organizations

52. Nearly 1,500 non-governmental organizations are associated with the Department; one of the criteria for association is that the non-governmental organization must have the commitment and means to conduct effective information programmes about United Nations activities through enlisting cooperation of print and broadcast media. In addition, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council are granted association with the Department upon written request. The Non-Governmental Organization Executive Committee acts in a liaison capacity and represents the interests of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department; at Headquarters, the Non-Governmental Organization Section supports their work. The annual non-governmental organization conference and orientation seminars draw generally positive comments. The main criticism of the Department's efforts concerns lack of access to United Nations documents and information. The NGO resource centre receives documents long after they have been issued. A proposal to relocate the NGO resource centre to the Periodical Room of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was made to the interdepartmental working group on non-governmental organizations in 1995. The working group considered that, if feasible, the move could probably facilitate the work of non-governmental organizations. Also, the editors of a number of non-governmental organizations with influential public information programmes have not been authorized by the Department to attend press briefings and related activities at Headquarters.

53. The Non-Governmental Organization Section, the United Nations information centres and other services of the Department are all engaged in joint projects with non-governmental organizations, through joint information programmes for the commemoration of international days and weeks - often at the suggestion of non-governmental organizations - or through the translation of information materials into national languages. Almost half of the non-governmental organization participants surveyed at the 1993 annual conference expressed considerable interest in such joint projects with the Department, and, with appropriate safeguards, there is the potential to significantly increase the number of joint projects. The Non-Governmental Organization Section is in contact with associated non-governmental organizations that actively disseminate information on United Nations activities. Owing to the large increase in the number of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department, the Non-Governmental Organization Section is not in a position to monitor the dissemination capacity of all associated non-governmental organizations. The growth in the number of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department is due to the much larger number of non-governmental organizations interested in the global issues addressed by United Nations conferences.

54. At the subregional and country levels, United Nations information centres maintain important relations with non-governmental organizations not associated with the Department. Conversely, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council have limited contacts with United Nations information centres. Considering the multiplicity of non-governmental organizations at the country level, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness

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of the outreach of information centres. The UNIC Manual urges centre directors to set up committees or coalitions linking local non-governmental organizations that have common interests, focusing particularly on those organizations with interest in economic and social questions. There are examples of non-governmental organization committees or coalitions set up by information centres but there is no indication of the extent of the practice in the Headquarters United Nations information centre database.

55. The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) has national United Nations associations in 83 countries in all regions. The aim of the organization is to devote itself entirely to the support of the Charter of the United Nations and to the promotion of public awareness and understanding of the activities of the United Nations and its agencies. These organizations are very active in a number of countries. However, the United Nations associations are organizations whose outlook and impact differ greatly from one country to another, even if they are governed by identical statutes. Considering their statutes, United Nations associations are, among non-governmental organizations, the most logical partners of United Nations information centres; a number of centres have established close collaboration with them, but other centres should be encouraged to pursue a policy that would be mutually beneficial.

56. The 1968 review by the Secretariat of United Nations/non-governmental organization cooperation recommended that specialized assistance be provided to understaffed United Nations information centres and that regional non-governmental organization activities be developed; the Office of Public Information planned to attach non-governmental organization liaison officers to the major regional offices of the United Nations (E/4476, paras. 31 and 36). The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1297 (XLIV) of 27 May 1968, endorsed the proposal of organizing regional conferences of non-governmental organizations. For lack of resources, no regional conferences have been held since the 1960s. On this question, non-governmental organizations interviewed stated that organizations not in proximity to a main United Nations centre are at a disadvantage and that more exchange of information is needed at the regional level. Staff of the Department stated that, in the present context, with the cooperation of the commissions and each United Nations information centre, conferences on the model of the annual non-governmental organization conference at Headquarters can be organized at little cost. Currently, the Department is working with the Non-Governmental Organization Executive Committee on a project entitled "NGO-NET", which proposes to hold non-governmental organization gatherings at the national level, in various regions, focusing on a United Nations theme.

57. There are services in various sectors of the Organization supporting the United Nations/non-governmental organization relation, such as the Non-Governmental Organization Sections of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and of the Department of Public Information. In addition, the objective of the inter-agency Non-Governmental Liaison Service is to foster an improved relationship between the United Nations system and the non-governmental organization community on development and related issues. Each has a rather small staff. In addition, a range of United Nations programmes and agencies have appointed officers to work with non-governmental organizations; non-governmental organizations interviewed commented positively on the support

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provided by these personnel, but said that they were sometimes overwhelmed by the scope of tasks; they commented also on the duplication of activities. In 1995, the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status of the Economic and Social Council suggested that there be a thorough examination at the Secretariat level of the total resources available to support the United Nations/non-governmental organization relation, and of legislative mandates, constituencies and users of services. In September 1995, the interdepartmental working group on non-governmental organizations was re-established. Its work is coordinated by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The focal point stressed that her role would be to facilitate the emergence of common guidelines for collaborative relations between departments and non-governmental organizations.

Recommendation 15, Strategy for collaboration with non-governmental organizations. In consultation with the Non-Governmental Organization Executive Committee, CONGO and WFUNA, the Department should, by the end of 1996, define priority areas for collaboration with non-governmental organizations, with special attention to those organizations that have as their mission the promotion of the goals and purposes of the United Nations. The overall aim should be to develop the capacity of non-governmental organizations to disseminate public information on United Nations activities. [EV/96/02/15] 3/

Recommendation 16, Coordination of United Nations services working with non-governmental organizations. The interdepartmental working group on non-governmental organizations should, by the end of 1996, make proposals to JUNIC for joint implementation of support to non-governmental organizations. Taking into account legislative mandates, these proposals should include, for example, the merging of newsletters and publications and jointly organized meetings and seminars. [EV/96/02/16] 3/

2. The general public

58. In New York, Geneva and Vienna, several units of the Department of Public Information organize visits and seminars, answer inquiries and make arrangements for speaking engagements aimed at the general public. Non-governmental organizations and educational institutions also receive these services, which provide them with an additional source of information. At the local level, United Nations information centres have a comparable range of activities. They also maintain reference libraries used in large part by the informed public.

59. In 1995, there were more than 400,000 visitors at Headquarters and more than 150,000 at the Geneva Office. In recent years, proposals have been made aimed at increasing the number of visitors and the appeal of guided tours. It was noted that tours are not tailored to obvious audience segments. In 1995, an internal DPI proposal, concerning the updating of exhibits on the tour route, noted that exhibits should convey a clear and consistent message and have some built-in element that can be easily updated; it would be desirable for all exhibits to have some components specifically designed to cater to younger visitors. A similar situation exists at Geneva.

Recommendation 17, Updating public exhibits. The public exhibits used for guided tours or group briefings at Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna should be regularly brought up to date in terms of style and content. Extrabudgetary contributions should be solicited for this purpose.
[EV/96/02/17] 3/

D. Services to substantive departments

60. In 1986, the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency and the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations proposed, in recommendation 37 (2), that information activities then conducted by several departments and offices in the Secretariat should, to the extent possible, be consolidated in the Department of Public Information. 10/ The Management Advisory Service reviewed the situation between 1988 and 1992 and concluded that collaboration between the Department and substantive offices needed improvement, although consolidation of all information activities within the Department might not be effective or even feasible. In a number of cases, the separation of substantive information and public information activities is difficult. Furthermore, legislative bodies have sometimes assigned mandates to a substantive office that include public information activities. A number of offices have funding for promotional activities. In 1995, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, in addressing the Committee on Information, stated that the concept of partnership is fundamental to the Department's new approach within the Secretariat, which entails the sharing of responsibility, the strengthening of coordination in planning public information policies and programmes with substantive departments, offices and agencies, the pooling of resources for the implementation of information tasks and the recognition of public information as a decisive factor in United Nations initiatives both at Headquarters and in the field.

1. Promotional activities

61. Within the Department, the promotion of thematic issues is primarily the responsibility of the Information and Planning Service. Its clients can be considered the relevant United Nations departments and offices concerned with those issues. Services provided include developing communications strategies to generate media interest in the work of substantive departments and promoting their publications. During the biennium 1994-1995, the Department adopted a focal point approach to preparing for major conferences. In each case, it designated a senior officer as focal point to oversee the implementation of the communications strategy, additional funding was provided, and the Service increased its coordination efforts with substantive departments and agencies and programmes of the United Nations system. In addition, the Department has worked with the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Political Affairs in establishing a consultative mechanism on media strategies for peace-keeping and other field operations that has proved to be effective.

62. Owing to the demand for promotional activities, resources are spread thin. The Department tries to overcome this by using a task force approach in

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promoting themes and issues. Focal points in substantive departments stated that, in general, information officers in the Department are not in close and regular contact with staff in their departments, and that more involvement with the substantive work of departments by DPI staff is needed. On the other hand, substantive departments rarely define their broad priorities for public information to assist the Department in the formulation of its programme budget proposals. There are examples of substantive departments producing materials and carrying out activities of immediate interest for public information which are not always brought to the attention of DPI staff.

2. United Nations publications

63. In 1993, the responsibility for the implementation of the publications programme of the United Nations was transferred from the Office of Conference Services to the Department of Public Information. In the context of this transfer, the Department set up a working group to review United Nations publications policies, practices and operations. The review indicated that there were problems with quality control and distribution. It was noted that quality control of the contents and presentation of publications through peer reviews and other procedures was not systematic; no coherent mechanisms existed to stop the publication of a manuscript whose contents were so mediocre as to reflect negatively on the image of the United Nations. Regarding distribution, the review noted that print-runs and distribution patterns seemed to be mainly based on precedents, some so old that it was difficult to trace their origins. A number of recommendations were made on the need to reinforce the Publications Board, to modify and expand the role of its working group and to delegate a wide authority to its Executive Secretary. Through further restructuring, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information was appointed Chairman of the Publications Board in 1994; in 1995, the Sales Section was transferred to the Department.

64. Regarding print-runs and distribution, there are indications of progress, owing in part to the action of the working group of the Publications Board and of the various units of the Department concerned with publications. Quality control, however, is difficult to exercise; departments must be responsible for the quality of the publications they produce. The Publications Board can influence practices through policy decisions and recommendations, but, until 1993, it had not met regularly, and severe pressure of time can prevent proper review. Evidence that publications are filling a need is not reviewed systematically; feedback on the needs of the readership is rarely obtained, either for a new title or for a new language version; several publications may be issued on related topics, when one consolidated report would have been more cost-effective. The 1993 report of the Secretary-General on the Publications Policy of the United Nations stated that "the Publications Board is considering ways to introduce new mechanisms (such as a Reading or Selection Committee) and/or procedures to improve the process of reviewing manuscripts to ensure that publications fulfil identifiable mandates and meet the criteria for publication. Whenever appropriate, encouragement would be given to the publication of interdisciplinary works, prepared through cooperation among several departments or offices, including cooperation among several organizations in the United Nations system" (A/C.5/48/10, para. 19). Pending consideration of the report by

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the General Assembly, the Publications Board decided to refrain from proposing any specific changes to its mandate, including added emphasis on its policy-making role. Within the Department, apart from units concerned mostly with production and distribution, there is at present no other formal procedure by which the Department of Public Information gives advice to departments on their publication programmes. It frequently offers assistance on an informal basis; further exchange and coordination is being considered for the future.

Recommendation 18, Policy for approving new United Nations publications.

A. The Publications Board should adopt a policy by the end of 1996 requiring departments to establish departmental reading committees, or a procedure for peer review of technical publications, which should follow standard external procedures for such reviews adapted to the requirements of the United Nations.

B. Subsequent to the inclusion of a publication in the publications programme, submissions by departments to the working group of the Publications Board should be accompanied by an assessment of the reading committee or peer review mechanism evaluating the manuscript and identifying target audiences and the dissemination strategy to be followed in promoting the publication.

C. Where the reading committee or peer review assessment suggests a rewriting of the manuscript, this should be done before the departmental submission is made to the Publications Board. [EV/96/02/18] 3/

3. Library services

65. The Library's primary function is to enable the delegations, Secretariat and other official groups of the Organization to obtain, with the greatest possible speed, convenience and economy, the library materials and information needed in the execution of their duties (A/C.5/298, p. 1). The Dag Hammarskjöld Library was transferred to the Department after the 1993 restructuring. The Library at the United Nations Office at Geneva remained under Conference Services. A number of specialized tools for reference needs and to assist outside libraries in their use of United Nations documentation are produced; recurrent reference tools to assist libraries are produced from the common database, the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), such as UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM and the CD-ROM on human rights. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is mandated to be the archival library for all United Nations documents and publications as well as responsible for providing complete bibliographical access to them.

(a) User support

66. In the early 1990s, reviews of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library observed that the reference services that the Library is expected to provide were not adequate and that duplication of some functions within the Library caused delays and sometimes loss of documents. There were significant gaps in document databases and document collections, in particular overseas documents and publications,

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unsymbolled material and series distributed by issuing departments outside the regular Headquarters distribution mechanism. Steps have been taken to streamline operations, to improve indexing and reduce gaps, and to develop further computer applications. The situation is not yet entirely satisfactory. An Integrated Library Management System (ILMS) is in the process of being installed. It is expected that ILMS will force a streamlining of operations, especially in the area of documentation control and indexing.

67. For United Nations documents, UNBIS is the main tool to serve information retrieval needs. Bibliographic tools help the user make more efficient use of textual databases; however, users are increasingly requesting access to full-text databases in addition to bibliographical information. The Library plans to create and maintain UNBIS files on ILMS when it is fully operational and to devise modalities for a more seamless interface between UNBIS and the Optical Disk System (ODS), which contains the full-text of United Nations documents. While complex search strategies that are available in UNBIS may not be available in ILMS, the new system will provide for more user-friendly retrieval access.

68. At Headquarters, assistance to researchers on questions regarding documents and publications of the specialized agencies is sometimes problematic. There is a need to develop further access to and exchange of information; some agencies do not publish printed indexes, and not every agency publishes a bibliographical CD-ROM or provides on-line access to their information resources. Away from Headquarters, with the exception of the Geneva Library, other United Nations libraries are not able to provide full access to United Nations documentation. In 1992, on the question of an integrated library network of the United Nations system, the Joint Inspection Unit stressed that increased attention should be given by organizations of the United Nations system to establishing effective linkages between all components of existing or potential networks (A/47/669, annex, para. 146). Avenues of inter-library cooperation can be pursued, such as creating interfaces to access different bibliographical files, and searching other organizations' databases via telecommunications links like Internet. UNBIS is an example of a joint cooperative bibliographic network, of the Dag Hammarskjöld and Geneva Libraries, and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is reviewing the possibility of including more partners in this network, beginning with the regional commissions. Each partner would share the processing and indexing of the documents originating in its office by feeding one or more centralized databases, in conjunction with the Optical Disk System network.

69. Acquiring the information resources needed has traditionally meant owning printed collections; technological innovations have transformed this process, and increasing amounts of information can now be delivered through other non-print media such as microforms and on-line databases. In recent years, acquisitions of external printed publications and subscriptions have been reduced, where possible and advisable, and the volume of inter-library loan services, in particular through electronic document delivery, has increased. Acquisitions are still needed for reference material and serials available only in hard copy and for electronic resources such as CD-ROMs. This gradual shift from ownership to access has both increased the importance and expanded the role of reference librarians. Now, as "electronic acquisition librarians", with faster and wider access to information, external reference librarians have

experienced a sharp increase in the number of on-line searches requested. Users require more assistance for searches in on-line databases, and need to be kept informed of the availability of current and specialized information. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has made concentrated efforts in both on- and off-site training in the use of commercial, full-text databases. However, its reference librarians have limited time to learn how to access the latest information available efficiently. Selective dissemination of information (SDI) - tailored information provided at regular intervals to a user - has not been pursued aggressively. Departments are interested in accessing directly on-line services and information contained in CD-ROMs. The Library can play a clearing-house function, with savings to the Organization, particularly in the case of on-line services.

Recommendation 19, Plan for improving access to information. By the end of the first quarter of 1997, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library should develop, on the basis of its reference desks' survey of users' needs, a plan for improving access to United Nations documentation and on-line services by delegations, Secretariat officials and other official groups.
[EV/96/02/19] 3/

(b) Depository libraries

70. Through its system of depository libraries, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library disseminates information about the Organization and its activities. The Library oversees the United Nations depository library system, while the specialized agencies' depository library systems are administered by the services of the respective agencies. In 1995, there were 351 United Nations depository libraries in 140 countries or territories; a number of these were also specialized agencies depositories. In general, these libraries do not have public information functions; a few have been able, although rarely, to organize special events around a specific theme of interest to their users. In 1994, external auditors recommended that control of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library over the performance of depository libraries should be strengthened through more frequent visits, assessments and training workshops. The fundamental problem is the complexity of managing collections of United Nations documents; in all regions, a number of libraries, even those well staffed, have difficulties maintaining the collections in a manner useful to users. There are no resources to increase the number of visits and workshops to depository libraries by Dag Hammarskjöld Library staff; activities have been organized on an ad hoc basis or when additional funds are provided by Governments. Efforts are being made to strengthen control over the performance of depository libraries through more effective coordination with UNDP and the specialized agencies. Monitoring of the system of depository libraries needs to include information on whether the material is received or not, and whether the recipient library wants to continue to receive United Nations documentation, as well as the number of copies and language versions needed.

Recommendation 20, Depository libraries. In order for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to exercise effective oversight of the depository library system, a revolving fund for visits and training should be established as recommended by the Publications Board. An amount from the contribution of each depository library should be set aside to fund a better monitoring

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programme of visits and training, including workshops in the management and use of United Nations document collection for the staff of depository libraries, particularly in developing regions. [EV/96/02/20] 3/

IV. ACTION BY THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION

71. Under its terms of reference, the Committee on Information reviews United Nations public information policies and activities. The present report, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Programme and Coordination on it, should be brought to the attention of the Committee on Information.

Recommendation 21. The present report, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Programme and Coordination on it, should be submitted to the Committee on Information for review and action. [EV/96/02/21] 3/

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/49/16), para. 34.

2/ Ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/48/21), paras. 34 and 69.

3/ Office of Internal Oversight Services tracking number.

4/ Survey of NEXIS (Dag Hammarskjöld Library) WIRES file, a computer file containing as of 31 December 1994, more than 50 wire services, including AFF, AP, ASAHI, Inter-Press Service, JIJI, KYODO, Reuters, ITTAR-TASS, UPI, Xinhua; more than 2 million wire stories were filed in 1994.

5/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/48/16), para. 220.

6/ Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/50/6/Rev.1), vol. II, para. 25.3.

7/ Ibid., Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/50/7 and Corr.1), para. VII.8.

8/ Ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 6 and corrigendum (A/47/6/Rev.1 and Corr.1), vol. II, para. 38.17.

9/ Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/50/7 and Corr.1), para. VII.20.

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