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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit the reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, covering the activities of JUNIC during 1996, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. JUNIC held its twenty-second session at the United Nations Office at Geneva, from 3 to 5 July 1996, under the chairmanship of Mr. Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. Directors of Information and officials of 26 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The report on the session was presented to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). JUNIC considered a variety of matters relating to inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. A brief summary of the discussion and an account of some of the follow-up action on decisions taken at the session on issues that could be of interest to the members of the Committee on Information is set out below.

3. JUNIC focused its deliberations on an open-ended discussion of ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations. A number of members of the Committee expressed concern that in the current situation of dwindling financial resources throughout the United Nations system, there was a tendency in many organizations to cut the funding for public information activities, as public information work was difficult to define in quantitative terms. JUNIC agreed that at this time, as a means of broadening the support for its objectives and activities, the United Nations

system as a whole needed to strengthen public outreach to its traditional supporters, such as non-governmental organizations, while at the same time reaching out to new audiences and potential supporters, such as youth, local authorities and other levels of civil society. Among potential new audiences and partners of the United Nations, JUNIC recognized, in particular, the importance of the business community as a partner in the promotion of socially friendly sustainable development, since the policies promoted by the United Nations were geared towards strengthening the private sector and its active participation in the development process. JUNIC agreed on the need to develop a joint message of the United Nations with global appeal, to be based on a critical analysis of both the positive and negative feedback from the recent coverage and public debate about the role and achievements of the Organization, and to consider a methodology of media outreach that would successfully counter the effects of the existing information overload. To improve coordination of public information activities, JUNIC decided to establish an open-ended working group based in New York to meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis in the inter-sessional period and discuss matters of mutual concern, and also to revive the bi-monthly JUNIC Information Bulletin, prepared by the JUNIC secretariat and distributed electronically to the members of JUNIC and to directors of information of bilateral development agencies, as a means of keeping informed and better coordinating the preparation of information products and activities.

4. JUNIC also discussed several issues pertaining to the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, and recognized the vital role played by the Service in promoting and facilitating enhanced cooperation between the United Nations system and the non-governmental community. It also expressed concern over the difficulties faced by the Service as a result of the financial and budgetary crisis of the United Nations system and urged all sponsoring organizations to make every effort to maintain the funding level for the Service in the current biennium. Also, in view of the changing United Nations and global context for international cooperation and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, JUNIC endorsed a proposal for a strategic review of the role of the Service in the United Nations system.

5. JUNIC also discussed progress with regard to the participation of the United Nations system in the upcoming international expositions scheduled to take place at Lisbon in 1998 and at Hannover, Germany, in the year 2000, and agreed that any further action on both proposals would need to await action by the host Governments of the events on the terms of the United Nations participation, including financial considerations, as the United Nations could only take part in such events on a no-cost basis. On a related matter, JUNIC recommended and ACC agreed to consolidate the 1992 ACC guidelines for joint participation by the United Nations system in international expositions and the 1994 addendum thereto into a single document, for consideration and decision by JUNIC at its twenty-third session.

6. JUNIC also discussed joint information activities for the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), and considered the information strategy and programme of information activities for the 1997 special session of the General Assembly to review the progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. Following the session, the implementation of the information programme for "Earth

Summit + 5" was coordinated through the open-ended JUNIC working group, which dedicated several meetings in New York to this issue.

7. The twenty-third session of JUNIC is scheduled to take place at the International Labour Organization International Training Centre at Turin from 1 to 3 July 1997. While in the course of the session the Committee will take up a wide range of issues of mutual concern aimed at further strengthening inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information, its deliberations are expected to concentrate on the continuation of the discussion of ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations that dominated the proceedings at the twenty-second session.
