



1981 - 6 1981

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
51st meeting
held on
Tuesday, 9 December 1980
at 3 p.m.
New York

UN/SA COLLECTION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 51st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MATHIAS (Portugal)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 59: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (continued)
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)
- (d) CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN THE APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT: REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)

COMPLETION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

*This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one month of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room A-3550, 866 United Nations Plaza (Alcoa Building), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate fascicle for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/35/SR.51
16 December 1980
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 59: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (continued)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

(c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)

(d) CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN THE APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued) (A/35/21, 362 and Add.1, 504 and Corr.1, 603; A/SPC/35/L.26, Corr.1 and Corr.2, L.30)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the members of the Committee to the corrigendum in document A/SPC/35/L.26/Corr.2 containing certain modifications to draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 and to the statement of the administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution in document A/SPC/35/L.30. If no one wished to speak on the draft resolution, he would assume that the Committee had concluded its consideration of that text and was ready to take a decision.

2. It was so decided.

3. The CHAIRMAN said that, if no delegation requested a vote on the draft resolution, he would take it, in the absence of objections, that the draft resolution was adopted.

4. Draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 was adopted without a vote.

5. Mr. AKASHI (Under-Secretary-General for Public Information) said it was gratifying that the draft resolution had been adopted by consensus, a fact which was all the more remarkable since information and communication was a field with far-reaching implications. The text would serve as a guide for the Committee on Information, the specialized agencies and, of course, the Secretariat, which was determined to do its utmost to carry out the recommendations and requests addressed to it.

6. The Department of Public Information intended to engage in a thorough review of its activities and priorities with a view to making the maximum and most effective use of its resources. It was possible that, in the process, the Department would have to abandon some of its well-established working methods and introduce some reforms. The Department would make every effort to respond to the expectations of Member States.

7. Since the Department of Public Information was being asked to expand the scope of its activities, he hoped that ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, in full awareness

of the importance of the programme established by the Special Political Committee, would view the financial implications of that decision in a favourable light.

Explanations of vote

8. Mr. KILIC (Turkey) requested the Chairman to convey the sincere condolences of his delegation to the Portuguese Mission on the occasion of the tragic death of Mr. Francisco Sá Carneiro, Prime Minister of Portugal, and to the Mission of Sri Lanka on the occasion of the death of Ambassador Amerasinghe.

9. The Special Political Committee's discussion of questions relating to information at its three most recent sessions and the establishment of the Committee on Information in 1978 were important landmarks in the evolution of the problem of communication and information and reflected the importance which the international community attached to it. That active interest, together with the realization of the need to establish a more just and more effective world information and communication order, were in themselves important achievements which transcended differences of opinion regarding modalities. It was gratifying to note that the consensus had endured and that all the regional groups were motivated by a spirit of compromise.

10. Although it was not perfect - each regional group undoubtedly had reservations on some points - the draft resolution nevertheless represented the best result which could be achieved without engaging in a sterile confrontation. While associating itself with the consensus on that text, his delegation was not thereby making any concession with regard to freedom of information, which it regarded as a fundamental principle, and, while praising the efforts of UNESCO in the field of information, it wished to emphasize that principle in connexion with the decisions taken at Belgrade.

11. The recommendations concerning the activities of the Department of Public Information represented a middle ground. In that respect, the important point was that, due to the establishment of the Committee on Information and the ongoing evaluation of the activities and policies of the Department of Public Information, a healthy dialogue had been established with the Secretariat. Mr. Akashi and his staff were to be commended for their efforts in that regard.

12. He paid tribute to the extremely positive role played by Mr. Albornoz, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Working Group, and expressed his personal appreciation, together with that of his delegation, to the Chairman, to the Ambassador of Togo, to Mr. Mubarez of the Yemen Arab Republic and to all those who had contributed to the result just achieved.

13. Mr. NASIBORI (Japan) said that his delegation had joined in the consensus on draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26, as orally amended, because that comprehensive text, which had been worked out through constructive dialogue among delegations, would facilitate efforts to improve United Nations public information policies and activities and strengthen international co-operation in that field. However, his delegation wished to recall that, at the twenty-first General Conference of UNESCO

(Mr. Nasibori, Japan)

Japan had voted against the resolution referred to in part I, paragraph 2, of the text just adopted. There existed considerable differences of views on the new world information and communication order, a subject that was closely linked to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of speech. Information and communication activities were carried out largely by the private sector.

14. His delegation was of the view that it would be inappropriate to undertake, with undue haste, the formulation of a declaration on the establishment of a new world information and communication order. All aspects of that question should be studied carefully and above all, the universal principles of freedom of the press and freedom of speech must be assured.

15. Mr. PETREEE (United States of America) said that his delegation had joined in the consensus leading to the adoption of draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26, but with some reservations.

16. It was the interpretation of his delegation that preambular paragraph 9, which reaffirmed the primary role of the General Assembly in United Nations policies and activities in the field of information, did not encroach upon the legally defined separation of responsibilities in that field between the General Assembly and the specialized agencies, especially UNESCO and ITU.

17. Throughout the informal negotiations on the draft resolution his delegation had tried to introduce a specific reference to the private sector, especially in part I, paragraph 4, which referred to the International Programme for the Development of Communication established by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-first session, in Belgrade, in a resolution which made specific mention of the private sector. The private media sector of the United States could make a valuable financial and technical contribution to the achievement of the aims of the new UNESCO programme. It was his delegation's clear understanding that the phrase "other entities", which followed the words "non-governmental organizations" in part I, paragraph 4, covered the private sector; it was regrettable that other delegations had resisted making the reference explicit.

18. His delegation also questioned the validity of part II, paragraph 7, as that paragraph was worded. It did not oppose co-operation between the Department of Public Information and the non-aligned press pool and other third-world media bodies but felt that to single out one particular group of countries created an imbalance in the text and involved excluding some of the developing countries. Part II, paragraph 8 did not entirely redress that imbalance.

19. His delegation was seriously concerned at the financial implications of the draft resolution. However, he wished to thank the representative of the Group of 77 for the sense of responsibility he had shown throughout the informal negotiations. The world economic situation was such that fiscal restraint was mandatory. While his delegation did not oppose new programmes per se, it was convinced that it was possible and necessary to learn to do more and better work within existing budget levels. New programmes should be launched only if existing marginal programmes were cut to release the necessary resources.

(Mr. Petree, United States)

20. His delegation also had reservations about part I, paragraphs 1 and 2. Although over-all, the United States was satisfied with the outcome of Belgrade, especially with the establishment of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, those paragraphs should not be construed to mean that the United States was satisfied with all the resolutions adopted at the twenty-first General Conference of UNESCO.
21. During the informal negotiations on the resolution, the United States representative, along with several others, had strongly questioned the inclusion in part III, paragraph 1 (a), of a reference to the integration of women in the struggle for peace and development, since the Third Committee had not yet taken a decision on the draft declaration it was considering on the subject. Thus, it seemed totally out of place to request the Department of Public Information to continue to orient its work towards a subject which was not a central theme of the United Nations.
22. His delegation, which had consistently stressed the need to avoid overlapping in the United Nations system, was not pleased with the inclusion of part I, paragraph 7, which dealt with significant studies by UNESCO on the effects of the activities of transnational corporations. Such studies fell within the province of the Commission on Transnational Corporations.
23. His delegation also had reservations about part III, paragraph 2. Because of the financial implications of some of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group, it considered it premature to request the Secretary-General to implement all the recommendations. Nevertheless, it was encouraged by the willingness of the Group of 77 to agree to permit the Committee on Information to study the recommendations more thoroughly the following year. His delegation hoped that the Secretary-General would provide the Committee with the necessary documentation and cost estimates well in advance so that it could do its work responsibly.
24. Miss HACKETHAL (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the resolution which had been adopted by consensus was likely to result in a more productive international debate on information and communication and confirmed the will to co-operate that had been manifested at the twenty-first General Conference of UNESCO. The debate, which would be a very complex one, should be based on the fundamental principle of the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information. Accordingly, she saw no useful purpose in the inclusion of the words "inter alia" in preambular paragraph 13 and would have preferred to keep the wording of part I, paragraph 2 (c), of General Assembly resolution 34/182.
25. Freedom of information was meaningful only if the difficult situation of the media in developing countries could be overcome. Her Government was fully aware of that problem and had long been taking - and would continue to take - positive action in order to be a reliable partner for the countries of the third world in that area. Freedom of information and the rapid development of the media were the two pillars of the world information and communication order which her Government wished to see established.

26. Mr. BERGLIND (Sweden) said that his delegation had joined in the consensus because of its conviction that the United Nations and its specialized agencies could contribute to the strengthening of the infrastructure of developing countries in the field of communication in order to ensure the free flow of information both between those countries themselves and between them and other parts of the world.

27. His delegation noted with satisfaction that preambular paragraph 13 referred to the free circulation of information as the basis for the establishment of a new world information and communication order. It was also satisfied that international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as other entities had been invited to contribute, with concrete assistance, to the solution of the problems of the developing countries in that field. It was essential that those efforts should be co-ordinated in order to achieve maximum efficiency.

28. His delegation, however, had reservations concerning the draft resolution. With reference to preambular paragraph 3, he wished to recall that, in ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Sweden had made a reservation regarding article 20, paragraph 1.

29. With regard to preambular paragraph 19 and paragraph 3 of part III, his delegation felt that the principle of equitable geographical distribution applied to the Secretariat as a whole, not to the composition of every single department or unit.

30. He also had certain reservations with regard to paragraphs 1 and 2 of part I, which concerned the resolutions adopted at the UNESCO General Conference in Belgrade.

31. Because of lack of agreement on the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group, his delegation also had reservations with regard to paragraph 2 of part II and paragraph 2 of part III. The recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the priorities to be followed by the Department of Public Information seemed to contradict certain provisions of the resolution.

32. Mr. DIDIER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the member States of the European Economic Community, said that the Nine had joined the consensus on draft resolution A/SPC/C.5/L.26 and Corr.2, which had been drawn up in a laudable spirit of compromise and co-operation. The text was more balanced than that of General Assembly resolution 34/182; in particular, the risk of having the Committee on Information duplicate the work of the UNESCO in the field of information and communication was avoided. The Nine attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Information, particularly its evaluation of United Nations policies and activities in the field of information. Furthermore, in considering the question of the international exchange of information with regard to the effects of the activities of transnational corporations in developing countries, it was of the utmost importance to preserve the positive aspects of the current system and respect the fundamental principle of freedom of information in correcting the imbalance.

(Mr. Didier, Luxembourg)

33. The Nine expressed concern at the considerable financial implications of the text which had just been adopted; it was regrettable that the Committee on Information had not been able to draw up a list of priorities to guide the work of DPI. Such priorities should not only include new activities, but should also bring about savings in programmes currently underway.

34. Mr. RANGER (Canada) expressed satisfaction that the regional groups had agreed upon an acceptable text. Although his delegation had joined the consensus, he expressed regret that draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 and Corr.2 did not adequately reflect the concerns expressed earlier by his delegation regarding the reinforcement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which were of utmost importance. The International Programme for the Development of Communications established by UNESCO would certainly improve the conditions for the exchange of information, thus reducing the need for codifying the principles of a new world information and communication order, as was reflected in the new wording of paragraph 2 of part I. Nevertheless, Canada would continue to attach the utmost importance to freedom of expression, the freedom of mass media from censorship and freedom of access to all sources of information.

35. The study of the effects of the activities of transnational corporations in developing countries (para. 7 of part I) seemed to fall within the competence of the United Nations Commission on Transnational Corporations. Furthermore, it was inappropriate to invite DPI (para. 1 (a) of part III) to publicize the issue of the integration of women in the struggle for peace and development, since the Third Committee had already decided to defer consideration of that item until the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

36. Paragraph 3 of part III, which was designed to redress the geographical imbalance in the staff of DPI, should have included a reference to the need to recruit qualified personnel.

37. Lastly, his delegation expressed concern at the financial implications of several provisions of the draft resolution. Any plans to expand existing programmes or create new ones should be always undertaken with due regard for the United Nations policy of financial restraint.

38. Mr. PRENDERGAST (United Kingdom) said that the negotiations on the text of draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 had been long and difficult. His delegation had been pleased to join the consensus and supported the view expressed by the representative of Luxembourg that the text which had just been adopted was better balanced than the resolution adopted at the preceding session (34/182). Nevertheless, the resolution was far from perfect and had given rise to several reservations on the part of his delegation. First, with regard to paragraph 6 of part I: although the report of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, whose circulation and study the draft resolution sought to facilitate, had certainly been useful, it was not a definitive work on which national and international policies should be based. His delegation had been very reluctant to join the consensus on the resolution concerning the report adopted in Belgrade. Furthermore, the fact that his delegation had abstained in the vote on

(Mr. Prendergast, United Kingdom)

another resolution and had voted against a third should that paragraph 1 of part I, in which the General Assembly expressed satisfaction with the relevant resolutions as adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in Belgrade, did not reflect its viewpoint.

39. His delegation also expressed reservations with regard to paragraph 2 of part I: in Belgrade it had voted against an amendment proposed by Venezuela which basically called for the elaboration of fundamental principles to govern a new world information and communication order and possibly serve as the basis for a declaration. His delegation did not favour the strict codification of such principles, because that could eventually lead to a static order officially laid down by Governments, which would hamper the pragmatic approach suited to the constantly evolving process of international communications.

40. With respect to paragraph 7 of part I, the United Nations Commission and Centre on Transnational Corporations were best suited to undertake an in-depth study of the questions involving those corporations, not UNESCO which should only engage in the type of activities mentioned in that paragraph when specifically requested to do so by the Commission on Transnational Corporations itself.

41. The financial implications of draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 and Corr.1 were considerable, particularly in the long term. It was well known that the United Nations budget was constantly growing. His country strongly supported the view of the nine member States of EEC expressed in the statement of the representative of Luxembourg and stressed the need to reduce the expenses involved in United Nations activities. In that connexion, it was to be hoped that the proposed study of the implications of United Nations short-wave broadcasts on a daily basis would take account of the limited impact of those broadcasts, particularly in Western Europe where few people owned short-wave radios.

42. Mr. LEINO (Finland) said that, although his delegation had no difficulty in joining the consensus on draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26, it had reservations on two points: with regard to preambular paragraph 3, he recalled that Finland had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with reservations concerning article 20, paragraph 1; furthermore, Finland had abstained in the vote on the resolution mentioned in paragraph 2 of part I.

43. Mr. HUTCHENS (Australia) expressed satisfaction at the spirit of co-operation which had prevailed throughout the work of drawing up draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 and Corr.2. Although his delegation had joined the consensus, it had certain reservations. With respect to paragraph 1 of part I at the twenty-first General Conference of UNESCO, Australia had abstained in the vote on two of the "relevant resolutions" mentioned there, and continued to have the reservations which had prompted it to abstain. Furthermore, the words "in the struggle for peace and" should not have been included in paragraph 1 (a) of Part III, because it was wholly inappropriate to request DPI to work in a field in which a main Committee had specifically decided to defer action. Lastly, his delegation would be reluctant to support certain provisions of part III in the Fifth Committee because of the financial implications involved.

44. Mr. SKOGMO (Norway) said that his delegation had joined the consensus on draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 and Corr.2 since it provided a good basis for future work. One of the most important aspects of the resolution was the support it gave to the International Programme for the Development of Communication established by UNESCO (part II, paras. 4 and 5) by appealing to Member States, non-governmental and other organizations and the Secretary-General, and by calling for the encouragement of interagency co-operation. Further, he stressed two aspects of his position on the draft resolution which had just been adopted. With regard to the third preambular paragraph, Norway, when ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, had reserved its position on article 20, paragraph 1. Moreover, his delegation firmly believed that the practical measures referred to in the draft resolution should in no way curtail the fundamental principles concerning freedom of opinion and information, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and recalled in the second preambular paragraph of the draft resolution which had just been adopted.

45. Mr. RANGA (India) expressed his condolences to the Chairman on the death of the Prime Minister of Portugal.

46. His delegation reaffirmed its serious concern over the "brainwashing" to which certain Powers subjected the gullible masses of third world and developing countries through the financial or other support which they gave to the mass media of those countries. The Committee on Information should, as a matter of urgency, eliminate such undesirable practices as the planting of propaganda material in the newspapers of developing countries and the subsidizing of public and private media in those countries. His delegation was convinced that third world and developing countries and their people were in particular need of unbiased and peace-oriented information -- information based on human rights, which the United Nations was best able to guarantee.

47. Mr. WEIGERT (German Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Soviet Union and his own delegation, welcomed the adoption of draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 by consensus. The delegations of the socialist countries supported the legitimate demands of the Group of 77 for international relations in the field of information and communications to be democratized and decolonized.

48. The draft resolution adopted, which had been drawn up jointly by representatives of developing, socialist and Western countries, was a compromise document. It reflected, in particular, the position of the socialist countries on the objectives of the new world information and communications order, namely the strengthening of international peace and understanding. Further, the socialist countries considered the reference in the draft resolution to the Final Declaration of the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-aligned Countries, held in Havana in 1979, to be a positive element.

(Mr. Weigert, German Democratic Republic)

49. With regard to the provisions the implementation of which would require additional resources, he stressed that those resources should be found by more efficient use and distribution of the existing resources of the Department of Public Information, which should follow a policy of economy and reduce or totally eliminate obsolete programmes.

50. The adoption by consensus of draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26 was one more measure against the poisoning of the international political climate by defamation and the propagation of racist and militarist ideologies.

51. The representatives of the Warsaw Treaty member States, meeting in Moscow on 5 December 1980, had reaffirmed their determination to contribute to improving the international climate, strengthening peace and solving all conflicts by negotiation. They advocated the development of relations with all countries on the basis of the principles of independence and sovereignty, and strict adherence to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

52. The socialist delegations expressed their solidarity with the representative of Poland who, in his statement to the Committee on the day before, had referred to the present increase in the slanderous campaign launched against socialist Poland.

53. Mr. ALBORNOZ (Ecuador) said that his delegation had joined the consensus which had emerged on draft resolution A/SPC/35/L.26, but had hoped that it would have referred more explicitly to human rights, particularly those of freedom of information and expression. The reference in the thirteenth preambular paragraph to the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information was inadequate. It would, in a genuinely democratic spirit, have been preferable to also mention the freedom of movement of journalists in countries where they operated, their right to enter and leave such countries and their right of free access to information sources. Organs of the United Nations system should have been pressed to better inform public opinion of the values and objectives of the United Nations and its work in the economic and social spheres. In that respect his delegation welcomed the specific references in two paragraphs of the draft resolution, to the work and efforts of UNESCO. It noted with satisfaction the adoption of the 43 recommendations made by the Working Group of the Committee on Information and the renewal by consensus of the mandate of that Committee.

54. It was obvious that if further duties were entrusted to the Department of Public Information, it would need not only working guidelines but also additional resources. He recalled the recommendations which had been made on a more balanced distribution of staff.

55. He would have also preferred the resolution to have mentioned contacts in the field between United Nations information centres and UNDP. The 110 United Nations information centres in developing countries should have better facilities to support the development efforts of those countries. For that reason, in

(Mr. Albornoz, Ecuador)

accordance with its mandate, the Committee on Information should continue to promote the new world information order which was closely linked to the new international economic order.

COMPLETION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

56. After an exchange of courtesies, the CHAIRMAN declared that the Committee had completed its work for the thirty-fifth session.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.