



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUBAREZ (Yemen)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 67: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 67: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/37/174):

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION (A/37/21)
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/37/446)
- (c) REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (A/37/453)

1. Mr. KHAN (India) expressed appreciation for the statements made by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and the Assistant Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. As representatives of international bodies responsible for supplying information on a global scale, however, it was ironical that they had been unable to provide a text of their statements to facilitate the debate on agenda item 67. His delegation also appreciated the unremitting efforts of the Chairman of the Committee on Information, which had resulted in that Committee's adoption by consensus of 43 specific and action-oriented recommendations.
2. India's long tradition of freedom of expression dated back to ancient times and was now guaranteed by his country's Constitution. Information, as transmitted through free and fearless media, was an important pillar of democracy and also indispensable to developing countries' development efforts. The media formulated public opinion and thus played an important part in the formulation of public policy. Freedom of the press should therefore be exercised with restraint; the press had a moral obligation to make at least an effort to be objective and balanced. All too often, however, the media indulged in sensationalism and manipulation, and the press must be made accountable for its actions either through voluntary adherence to a code of conduct or through the constitution of special courts.
3. One of the paramount tasks of information was to promote development. If information was to serve the awakening and advancement of the masses, most of whom lived in rural areas, special attention must be paid to the needs of rural population groups. Radio and television could, for instance, take the lead in educating farmers about development schemes and agricultural operations. Unfortunately, since the media were usually controlled by press barons and vested interests, they tended to ignore the aspirations of the rural majority.
4. The structure of existing global communication systems was not conducive to balanced communications but instead gave rise to ignorance on the part of the developed countries about the problems of the developing countries. Indeed, the traditional monopoly of the Western news media even fostered misconceptions among developing countries about each other's problems and misinformation about the giant strides which some of them had taken in the industrial, scientific and technological fields.

(Mr. Khan, India)

5. As the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi in February 1981, had noted, media of all categories in the developed countries tended to interpret events in and disseminate information on developing and non-aligned countries in a biased and prejudicial manner which, in many respects, affected those countries' stability and development. The non-aligned countries were using the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies to rectify that situation, increasing their co-operation on the basis of self-reliance and mutual assistance in the development of communication and information systems. It was therefore gratifying to note that the Department of Public Information and UNESCO had increased their co-operation with the Pool and with the regional news agencies of developing countries. That co-operation must be expanded still further, however, and he hoped that DPI would, for instance, begin to receive daily dispatches from the Pool by the end of 1982.
6. Such developments augured well for the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order, a task in which, as recommendation 3 of the Committee on Information indicated, all must collaborate. DPI and UNESCO should redouble their efforts to achieve that objective.
7. His delegation welcomed the assurances given by the Secretary-General that a report would be prepared on the regionalization of the Radio and Visual Services Division. The role of the United Nations Centre information centres must also be enhanced to respond more fully to the information needs and interests of the countries which they served.
8. His delegation supported fully the report and recommendations of the Committee on Information, in particular recommendation 40. While it welcomed the steps taken by the Secretary-General to implement General Assembly resolution 36/149, it was disappointed to learn that traditional donors had indicated that they could not make direct contributions to the Development Forum. His delegation urged those donors to reconsider their decision.
9. With regard to the report of the Director-General of UNESCO, his delegation was particularly gratified at the progress made in implementing the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), since, without proper infrastructures, freedom of information had little meaning. He hoped that the Director-General's appeal for assistance in implementing the Programme would elicit a favourable response from the international community.
10. Mr. SHERMAN (Liberia) said that information had a vital role to play in international relations. Its potential could be used either to promote international peace and understanding or to create conflicts with unpredictable consequences for mankind. The efforts to bring about a new world information order and improve the public relations policies and activities of DPI were designed to strengthen international peace and security and promote understanding through effective communication. His delegation supported the concept of the free flow of information, with due regard for the principles of responsibility, accuracy and objectivity. That was not a limitation of freedom, but a key to effective

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(Mr. Sherman, Liberia)

communication. He supported the speedy establishment of the new information order, in order to help developing countries overcome deficiencies in their information and communication infrastructures and accelerate their development process. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the efforts by the United Nations specialized agencies, particularly UNESCO, to develop rural-oriented information and communication programmes in order to mobilize human resources in rural areas for socio-economic development.

11. The promotion of human rights and the elimination of the exploitation of man by man should be urgent goals for the information media. Objectivity on the part of the media should be the first step toward the establishment of a new information order. United Nations bodies, such as DPI, should further the cause of the balanced and free flow of information and educate the public concerning the purposes and principles of the United Nations. DPI, however, faced a difficult task as long as Member States failed to observe their Charter obligations and continued to use the Organization as an extension of their foreign policies. No reorganization of DPI, however effective it might be, could achieve the goals of the Organization without the scrupulous observance by Member States of the principles of the Charter. Under those circumstances, DPI should be given credit for its efforts and the successes which it had achieved thus far.

12. His delegation supported the recommendations of the Committee on Information but considered that their effective implementation and the achievement of positive results would depend largely on the resolve of Member States to fulfil their obligations. It was hoped, therefore, that DPI would receive the resources which it needed in order to meet the demands made on it.

13. The ideological conflict with regard to the new world information order seriously affected developing countries, which suffered most from the imbalances and injustices in information flows. The giant news monopolies continued to disseminate information with bias, ineptitude and inaccuracy.

14. The developing countries should intensify efforts to achieve collective self-reliance in the field of information and communication. With the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies as a foundation, the developing countries establish and evolve an information and communications network responsive to their needs.

15. Mr. STARČEVIĆ (Yugoslavia) observed that, in the present context of a grave and worsening crisis in international relations, questions relating to information acquired even greater importance. Such a situation required true, complete and objective information, for politically motivated information could have a very negative impact on international relations. Unfortunately, it was precisely at times of heightened tension that information became increasingly biased. As a consequence of bloc confrontation, large news monopolies, whether State agencies or staunch defenders of the principle of "freedom of information", tended to gear their information activities to reflect government policy. Great Power confrontation thus dictated the tone of the world information process, with 80 per cent of the world's news being distributed by the five largest news agencies of the developed countries.

(Mr. Starčević, Yugoslavia)

16. Such a situation highlighted the urgent need for a new world communication and information order; yet such an order was no nearer being established than when it had first been proposed. It was still hard to find evidence of any changes in the inequality that existed between developed and developing countries in the field of information and communication. The developing countries still relied heavily on the major news agencies of the developed countries to inform them about the world and to inform the world about them, but the information which those agencies passed on did not, however, enhance understanding among peoples and Governments, for it was often prejudiced and ideologically and politically motivated. Even when information about events in the developing countries appeared to be objective, the very choice of events made the information irrelevant to those countries' needs.

17. Time and again it had been stressed that the developing countries' information and communication systems must be strengthened because of the growing interdependence within the international community. Just as the industrialized world could not develop further without an improvement in economic conditions in the developing countries, so the developed countries stood to benefit from the development of information and communication infrastructures in the third world. The information and communication gap between developed and developing countries must be narrowed. Freedom of information was certainly an indispensable part of the new international information and communication order, but for developing countries the development of information and communication infrastructures took clear priority. It was only logical that the conditions must first be created in which freedom of information could become a meaningful proposition.

18. The activities which the non-aligned countries were carrying out on the basis of self-reliance and mutual assistance played a very important part in efforts to establish a new world information and communication order. In 1982, those activities had included the Seventh Meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Pool of News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries and the Sixth Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Council for Co-ordination of Information among Non-Aligned Countries. The forthcoming Seventh Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries would devote considerable attention to information questions and was expected to decide on the convening of a general conference of Ministers of Information of non-aligned countries within six months after the first conference. Co-operation among the non-aligned countries helped to disseminate objective information about those countries' positions and interests and thus to overcome conflicts and confrontation.

19. The activities of the non-aligned countries alone could not change the present information and communication situation, however. All members of the international community must participate in appropriate global action. The most important action at present was being carried out by UNESCO, especially through IPDC and the comprehensive programme in the field of information and communication. Both the non-aligned countries and the General Assembly supported fully UNESCO's efforts to establish communication structures in the developing countries and to promote the establishment of a new world information and communication order. Resources must therefore be mobilized to make IPDC operational as soon as possible.

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(Mr. Starčević, Yugoslavia)

20. As a member of the Committee on Information, his delegation supported all of that Committee's recommendations and stressed the need for their speedy implementation. A number of those recommendations would, if implemented, make a modest contribution to the establishment of a new world information and communication order. His delegation attached particular importance to the recommendations concerning the work done by the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) in co-ordinating information and communication activities within the United Nations system and hoped that JUNIC would be able to find some means of financing the World Newspaper Supplement. Recommendation 18 was also especially useful, since it would contribute to a better understanding both of the main principles of the new world order and of the efforts of the United Nations system in that regard. Recommendations 41 to 43 would provide the Committee on Information with an insight into DPI's and regular activities.

21. His delegation hoped that co-operation with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies was now regarded as a part of DPI's regular programme and noted that the volume of information on United Nations activities distributed daily through the more than 80 news agencies which were members of the Pool had grown significantly over the past year. He was particularly gratified to note that co-operation between DPI and the Pool was starting to operate in both directions. DPI would soon be receiving daily dispatches from the Pool, with the result that authentic information about the majority of United Nations Member States would finally start to reach Headquarters and would be used, in conjunction with the dispatches of the major news services of the developed countries, adding some balance to the latter's reporting. Recommendation 26 was also important in that connection: 1983 offered the possibility of co-operation between DPI and the Pool in covering the International Conference on the Question of Palestine and numerous events connected with the World Communications Year.

22. One problem of increasing concern on which the Committee on Information had adopted several recommendations was the public image of the United Nations. There could be no doubt that reporting on United Nations activities by the media of a rather limited number of developed countries ranged almost exclusively from neglect to attacks, thus undermining the Organization's effectiveness. Whether the remedy was to be found in a more effective and active response on the part of the United Nations information services was hard to say. That was certainly true in cases where negative reporting of United Nations activities stemmed from lack of knowledge about them, and the Organization's information services must produce adequate, timely and objective information material which, with prompt and comprehensive distribution, would serve the social and collective means of communication of the whole world. While the information services could contribute significantly to improving public knowledge of United Nations activities, any concerted effort on their part to correct unbalanced representation in the media would have to be made under the guidance of intergovernmental bodies such as the Committee on Information and the General Assembly. His delegation therefore welcomed assurances that DPI would have to depend largely on the co-operation of member Governments, together with the mass media and non-governmental organizations, in that regard.

23. Mr. KENDIE (Ethiopia) said that the three reports before the Committee in connection with the agenda item under discussion were lucid, comprehensive and thought-provoking and provided a basis for the elaboration of a resolution acceptable to the General Assembly. They had emphasized the urgent need for the establishment of a new world information order, an issue which was of growing concern to the international community.

24. Information meant the power to influence others, and failure to communicate had always led to unnecessary confrontation. While there was not much disagreement on the means of communication, there was a great deal with regard to the subject-matter to be communicated. The struggle between ideas had always promoted human development and been beneficial for mankind. That process should not, however, be replaced by slander, insults and psychological warfare based on fabrications and distortions.

25. According to UNESCO figures, 80 per cent of the news distributed in the world today came from the industrialized countries and only between 10 and 30 per cent of it related to the developing countries. In 1978, the developing countries, which had 70 per cent of the world's population, had only 17 per cent of the total distribution of newspapers, 9 per cent of the consumption of journals and 5 per cent of television production. The establishment, expansion and improvement of the mass media in developing countries could not be considered in isolation from their socio-economic development. The establishment of a new world information and communication order would redress the existing imbalance between the industrialized world and the developing countries and among the developing countries themselves and would promote goodwill and better understanding among Governments and peoples. The dissemination of objective and factual information on topics of vital importance would make the international community better informed, a situation which would, in turn, significantly improve the international political climate and strengthen peace and international co-operation.

26. Peace, which had become the leading item on the agenda of the United Nations, could not be manufactured. It was a product of a social system which preached and practised justice, equality, freedom and human brotherhood both internally and externally. Factual information could help to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence and an international environment in which peace could flourish. Information and communication could not be left to a handful of journalists, no matter how well-intentioned, but could only be handled by the United Nations itself, in strict observance of its own cardinal principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States and non-interference in their internal affairs. The Department of Public Information could begin by projecting a true image of the United Nations, which had unfortunately been tarnished in recent years. In spite of its shortcomings, the Organization still remained man's real hope for survival. The emergence of a well-informed, critical and objective world public was a guarantee for the maintenance of international peace and security. Nothing was gained by ignorance, and nothing could be more harmful to international relations than the poisoning of world public opinion through prejudice, cynicism, deliberate distortion of facts and irresponsible propaganda. While the developing countries needed assistance in the strengthening

(Mr. Kendie, Ethiopia)

of their information structures through the intensification of co-operation with regional news agencies, the initiation of training programmes for journalists, the opening of information offices and the accrediting of correspondents to the United Nations, care should be taken not to impose on them new patterns of dependence.

27. His delegation supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication and was increasingly convinced that closer co-ordination and co-operation between the United Nations and UNESCO was imperative. It welcomed the report of the Committee on Information and hoped that it would be endorsed in the General Assembly. While there had been changes in the geographical composition of DPI, his delegation urged that timely measures should be taken to rectify the imbalance in the Department.

28. Mr. HISHAM (Iraq) said that the interest of the General Assembly in questions relating to information over the past four years had been reflected in a number of resolutions reaffirming the need for the establishment of a new world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information. That interest was neither surprising nor ephemeral, but was the result of changes and developments introduced by the developing countries in the status quo so as to reflect their legitimate interests and objectives. The conferences of the non-aligned movement had given the developing countries the opportunity to study problems in the information field and they had then brought those problems before the United Nations when they believed that the time was right. The States participating in the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Havana in 1979, had accorded particular importance to that subject and the resolutions adopted had emphasized the importance of a new world information order and of the role of the United Nations in establishing such an order. The Declarations of the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi in 1981, and of the Fifth Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Council of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Georgetown in 1981, had also emphasized the need for closer co-operation in that field and for the establishment of a new, more equitable, world information order.

29. The exchange of information and the issue of truth in communication had become another arena for the struggle among the great Powers for spheres of influence and for material and moral advantage, in which they strove for the sympathy of the peoples of the world and attempted to incline them towards their own positions through the press, television and radio. The present world information order did not represent the needs and aspirations of States or give expression to their legitimate interests in an equitable manner. At previous sessions, his delegation had addressed itself to the hard facts concerning the present world information order in some detail and would now like to concentrate its attention on the role of the United Nations in the field of information and the role played by its organs at Headquarters and in the field. That role should consist in giving precise and objective expression to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principal goals of the Organization, should be carried out in a planned and

(Mr. Hisham, Iraq)

innovative manner, should include activity at Headquarters and at the information centres in the field and should ensure a balance in the use of official languages. The information organs of the United Nations continued to be dominated by the industrialized countries, in particular the Western countries, and the number of senior posts occupied by personnel from developing countries remained limited.

30. While addressing itself to the role of information in the protection of human rights and in combating racism and aggression, his delegation felt obliged to refer to the practices of a certain Member of the United Nations which were in conflict with the most elementary rights stipulated in the Charter. The Zionist entity, after coming into existence at the expense of the Palestinian people, whom it had forcibly expelled from their historic homeland, had not been content with such barbaric aggression but had continued to oppress the Palestinian people and to deprive them of their most elementary cultural and human rights. The information media of the Zionist entity encouraged racism and racial discrimination not only against Arabs but against oriental Jews. They depicted the Arabs in a manner not befitting human beings, and whenever Arabs within occupied Palestine or the other occupied Arab territories tried to express their opinions they were subjected to all kinds of oppression such as the closing down of newspapers, the suppression of articles and the detention of journalists and authors.

31. When the Zionist forces had invaded Lebanon, the security authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had prevented the Arabic press service from functioning, in order to cover up the abominable crime committed by the invading forces against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. The Zionist information media had, moreover, falsified the history of the region in general and the history of Palestine in particular, and the inhabitants of the Zionist entity received false information which increased their hostility towards Arabs and reinforced their denial of the rights of the Palestinian people. The Zionist entity was today, without doubt, one of the greatest propagandists for and practitioners of racial discrimination and expansionist policies.

32. It was necessary to intensify the struggle to change the present information order, to put an end to the domination of Western news agencies in the developing countries and to strengthen the sovereignty of those countries in the field of information. The present imbalance in the exchange of information between developing countries and industrialized countries must be remedied by developing the information infrastructure in the developing countries. International relations in the domain of information must be based upon respect for the principles of international law, national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, equality and non-discrimination. Accordingly, both States and information media had a major responsibility for the formulation of information policies with a view to the improvement of the international climate.

33. The recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Information must be translated into practical measures in the shortest possible time. That would, in the view of his delegation, require the necessary steps to be taken to lay the foundations for the establishment of the new world information order

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(Mr. Hisham, Iraq)

desired by all. Those steps were: assistance to developing countries to overcome their backwardness in the communications field; promotion of a free exchange of information characterized by balance and objectivity; continued promotion by DPI of the establishment of a new world information order; the equitable geographical distribution of posts in the information services; strengthening of the role of the United Nations information centres; increased co-ordination between the General Assembly and UNESCO in implementing the recommendations of the Committee on Information; and continued and increased co-operation with the non-aligned countries and other developing countries, with the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and the regional news agencies of the developing countries.

34. His delegation was particularly interested in the further development of the Arabic Radio Unit within DPI in such a manner as to enable it to carry out the functions required of it and hoped that the Secretariat would understand that concern and take practical and speedy measures in that regard.

35. Mr. CORTI (Argentina) said that his delegation was particularly interested in the report of the Secretary-General on international short-wave broadcasts by the United Nations using its own facilities and frequencies (A/AC.198/49). Most of the broadcasts would be made from the headquarters of the regional commissions. The Secretary-General had proposed that two new reports should be submitted to the Committee on Information in 1983. That was particularly interesting since Latin America was being considered as the first region to be chosen for undertaking such projects. He hoped that, as in the past, the submission of those reports would not entail additional budgetary expenditures. His delegation was looking forward to receiving the detailed study on the acquisition by the United Nations of its own communications satellite. In spite of the expense involved, such a satellite would be a necessity by the end of the century. His delegation expressed satisfaction at the work of the Committee on Information. It was particularly gratifying that the 43 recommendations had been adopted by consensus, in spite of the controversial nature of a number of them.

36. The report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the implementation of the International Programme for the Development of Communication and the Establishment of a New World Information and Communication Order was of particular interest for his delegation. The second session of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication clearly indicated the progress made by that body towards the goal of putting an end to the unjust information and communication system in the world, despite the opposition of the industrialized countries. The statement made in the Committee by the representative of Denmark, on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community, recognizing the need to bring about a more just and equitable world information and communication order was proof of the effectiveness of IPDC. Nevertheless, statements of good intent would not suffice to change the current system. True co-operation was an absolute necessity. Financing offers and other assistance should not be subject to any conditions.

37. His Government supported the Global Satellite Project for Dissemination and Exchange of Information. Nevertheless, that project should be carried out as a

(Mr. Corti, Argentina)

symbol of peace. Argentina had seen how satellites had been used for military purposes in the South Atlantic when satellites of the United States had provided the colonial Power with vital information. By the end of 1980, 75 per cent of all satellites in operation had been used for military purposes and 70 per cent of the military communications of one of the superpowers had been carried out in that fashion.

38. His delegation firmly believed that the development of communications should promote peace and disarmament. It was gratifying to note that those principles had been reflected in the second medium-term plan of UNESCO. The need to link information activities and development was of utmost importance. Developing countries were deprived of one of the most effective means of implementing their development process because they had virtually no access to information media in order to make their opinions and problems known. All obstacles preventing States from making use of sources of information and directly expressing their own points of view should be eliminated.

39. There were two distinct groups of problems in the complex world of communications and information: that relating to the mass communication media and that relating to specialized information, particularly in science and technology. The World Conference on Cultural Policies, at its last session, had conducted a detailed analysis of those questions and had adopted a number of recommendations on items relating to information and communications. Among them was a recommendation which called upon the United Kingdom to facilitate the work of Argentine scientists so that the "Corbeta Uruguay" scientific station could resume normal operations, in view of the fact that the expulsion of those scientists and the seizure of the scientific station had deprived the international community of an important service. In 1976 his Government had set up the scientific station on Morrel Island, which belonged to Argentina, in the South Sandwich Islands. That station had been used to conduct research in a number of scientific fields for purely peaceful purposes. The World Meteorological Organization had been duly notified in December 1977 concerning the establishment of the scientific station. In June 1978 that station had been included in a WMO publication and had thus been officially recognized as an Argentine station belonging to the Regional Association of South America. That had not elicited any objections from the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, in June 1982, after the crisis in the South Atlantic, British troops had disembarked on the island in question, made prisoners of the inhabitants and destroyed the scientific equipment located there. Facts such as those contradicted all promises and expressions of good intent. Developing countries could not set up their own information and communications systems if they were prevented from doing so by the countries which had such a capacity.

40. His Government was ready to continue to co-operate in efforts to establish a new world information and communication order, in accordance with its capabilities and within the scientific and technological framework of the fraternal republics of Latin America.

41. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in accordance with past practice and in order to facilitate its work, the Committee should establish an informal working group to prepare the draft resolution on the item under consideration. That group, which would be open to all interested members of the Committee, would be chaired by one of the Vice-Chairmen, Mr. Rodriguez-Medina. He said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to that suggestion.

42. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.