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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATIONSUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTEENTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Wednesday, 21 April 1948, at 3.15 p.m.

PRESIDENT: Mr. Carlos P. ROMULO (The Philippines)

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION OF REPORT OF COMMITTEE IV (Document E/CONF.6/65).

Annex A Draft Conventions (Continued)

Mr. BENTON (United States of America) moved the adoption of the First Draft Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News. He was glad to inform the Conference of a step which had already been taken in his country towards the implementation of that Convention. On the previous Wednesday, Mr. Canham, the Vice-Chairman of the United States Delegation, had flown to Washington to be inducted as President of the Association of Newspaper Editors, and on the basis of a report submitted by him, a Resolution had been passed by that Association and transmitted to the United States Government urging it to expedite the granting of visas to all bona fide correspondents from other countries. Information had been received from the United States Government that prompt consideration would be given by the Department of State and the Department of Justice to that Resolution. Here was an example of concrete action which could result from the activities of the Conference and the adoption of the Draft Conventions. Many of the provisions of the Draft Convention were already accorded in practice, but the rights and privileges they granted would

be strengthened by being embodied in an international text, for they would then no longer depend on the shifting tactics of Governments but would repose on a firm basis of law.

With regard to the amendment proposed by the delegation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, he felt that the term "conscientious and objective information" was proper to a Convention dealing with the functions and purposes of the press, but had no place in a technical Convention designed to improve the gathering and transmission of news. He also considered that it tended to restrict freedom of information rather than to increase it.

With regard to the amendment proposed by the delegation of Yugoslavia, although he was eager to have the principles of the Convention applied in all parts of the world, including non-self-governing territories, account had to be taken of the administrative difficulties confronting the metropolitan states responsible for those territories. Some of those metropolitan States had expressed willingness to adopt an article offering substantial guarantees that the principle would be applied to non-self-governing territories within the limits of what was immediately possible. That would have been an important step in the right direction. More harm than good would be done if a more sweeping clause not acceptable to those metropolitan States were included, which might prevent them from becoming parties to the Convention. For these reasons, he could not accept the amendments submitted by the Soviet Union and Yugoslav delegations.

With regard to the second Convention, concerning the institution of an international right of correction, his delegation would have preferred to have seen its provisions incorporated in the first Convention. While he reserved the right to make proposals to this end to the Economic and Social Council and General Assembly, he would vote for the second Draft Convention, with whose objectives he was in full sympathy.

He was also in full agreement with the intent of the third Draft Convention, on Freedom of Information. Unfortunately, it contained a number of provisions in Article 2 which his delegation could not accept in their present form for reasons which he had already stated. In this connection he recalled the vote taken at the previous meeting on Article 17 on the same issue. His delegation had voted with the Soviet Union Group, but for exactly opposite reasons. While the Soviet Union Group feared any suggestion of control of the press other than absolute Government control, the United States delegation feared Government control of any kind and any step, however small, towards Government control. His delegation would abstain from voting on the third Convention owing to domestic differences of interpretation and legal practice, but this in no way derogated from the fundamental unity of spirit and action which underlay the relations of his country with countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, the sister republics of Latin America, India and China, which believed in the ability of man to govern himself without being cribbed, cabined and confined by limitations which denied man's dignity and which his country regarded as fundamentally immoral.

The adoption of the Convention would help to protect those States which were threatened, from within and without, with the loss of freedom. The tide there had been flowing against freedom, but when that tide had turned, the work which had been achieved would help freedom to reach full flood.

Sir Ramaswami MUDALIAR (India) recalled the special composition of the Conference, where various factors and interests had been represented, and which had resulted in four kinds of criticism; Governments had differed with Governments, the press with the press, the Governments with the press, and the press with Governments. He looked upon this as a healthy sign. It was the first time in history that an international conference of Governments and press had tried to evaluate the position of the press with regard to the people and the composition of Governments with reference to the press. One result of the deliberations had been to set up standards of conduct for Governments and for the press. This did not mean that these standards could be agreed to by all, or that they were perfect and would stand the test of time. The concept of liberty was a growing one, and even those who had never made their own the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity had to admit that since the early days of the eighteenth Century the concept of liberty had changed. The Conference had only laid the foundations and subsequent Conferences, he hoped, would go on improving those standards.

They now came to the question of how to proceed with the Resolutions that had been adopted. The suggestion had been made that the fact that they were not binding upon Governments detracted from their value; he could not agree

with that view. Since they had been adopted sincerely and in good faith by representatives of responsible Governments, he was sure that every effort would be made to live up to them. They might, for instance, constitute a basis for contracts to be concluded between like-minded liberty-loving nations.

The sovereignty of nations had been invoked on several occasions, and he thought that a misconception existed in regard to Article 7 of the Charter, which stated that the United Nations should not intervene in affairs which were essentially domestic. That did not mean that arrangements could not be arrived at between Governments at international conferences which called for the voluntary surrender of a portion of their national sovereignty. If it had meant that there would be no point in holding such conferences.

He compared Article 2 of the United Kingdom Convention on Freedom of Information to restrictions placed on the right of using the nation's highways. If there were no rule of the road, and no restrictions, they could not be used for the benefit of all. There were in every country certain laws with penalties attached which restrained the abuse of the freedom of the press. In connection with the residual clause suggested by the United States delegation, fears had been felt that certain governments who wished to restrict freedom would be enabled to drive a coach and four through the Convention. But behind those restrictive clauses was a strong feeling that it was necessary to define more closely the limits within which freedom of information might be achieved.

Chapter VI still remained to be voted on. The Economic

and Social Council was free to make changes in the Draft Conventions, and he hoped that those Governments which still had objections to some of their clauses might submit amendments to the Council. He made a special appeal to those Governments which had indicated their intention of abstaining from voting for certain Draft Conventions. He stressed the tentative character of the Draft Conventions and the fact that they were still not complete and subject to modification. When important Governments abstained from voting, an element of confusion was introduced into the mind of the general public, which was not as well informed in some countries as it was, for instance, in the United States of America. It was comprehensible that the Draft Conventions could not agree a hundred per cent with the legislation of all States, but they laid down the fundamentals of basic issues.

Mr. WATT (Australia) expressed gratitude to those countries which had worked out in precise and carefully considered terms Draft Conventions which indicated that they were willing to undertake legally binding agreements. The Australian delegation felt that this was a substantial contribution which should be recognized. The representative for India had given strong arguments urging Governments to adopt the Draft Conventions even though in some respects changes would have to be made before their own countries could accede to them. Although he felt the force of those arguments, he regretted that his delegation was unable to respond to the appeal. He felt that it would lead to another kind of misunderstanding, if the Conference unanimously recommended the adoption of Draft Conventions, and they were subsequently acceded to by only a small number of Governments.

The Draft Conventions contained no statement that they were liable to revision, or that they only contained general principles. They were, in fact, intended to become binding legal texts. Some delegations were in the position of not being certain with regard to the legislation existing in their countries. Others believed that certain specific laws existing in their countries were not covered. The Australian delegation was in the latter position. While they were in full sympathy with the principles set forth in the United States Convention, one or two of its clauses were in conflict with Australian legislation. With regard to Article 4, for instance, measures prohibiting the export of films existed in Australia which were wider than those of military security. In the interval between the end of the Conference on Freedom of Information and the opening of the meeting of the Economic and Social Council, he hoped to be able to draft a minor amendment which would overcome this difficulty. He was fully in agreement with the principles embodied in the United Kingdom Convention, but Article 2 did not cover the Australian laws controlling the foreign-language press. He hoped to draft a minor amendment with regard to this matter also for submission to the Economic and Social Council.

He paid a tribute to the distinguished part played in the deliberations of the Conference by the French delegation and agreed to their Draft Convention, although he thought that some better method of correction than a direct message from Government to Government might be devised. But the French proposal constituted a step forward in a new and important field.

Some delegations had referred to the lack of unanimity with regard to Conventions and certain Resolutions, and it had also been suggested that the functions of the press should have

been defined. Very often amendments had been rejected because delegations had insisted on their own wording, which was not always acceptable. He thought it did not constitute real unanimity to agree to formulae which might be interpreted differently.

Each delegation had the responsibility, when it returned to its own country, of translating into action the principles and purposes agreed upon by the Conference. He congratulated the United States delegation on being the first to be able to announce a practical step as the outcome of the work of the Conference.

Mr. ROSSI (Uruguay) declared that freedom of information was becoming more and more important by reason of the increased use of radio broadcasting, which reached a more numerous public than the written word. His delegation considered that the greatest freedom for the dissemination and exchange of news by radio should be striven for. He therefore proposed the addition of the words "and listen to" after the word "transmit" in line 3 of Article 1, paragraph (c), of Draft Convention III on Freedom of Information.

On a vote being taken, the amendment (document E/CONF.6/70) proposed by the delegation of the Soviet Union to the Draft Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News, was rejected by 21 votes to 7, with 7 abstentions.

On a vote being taken, the amendment (document E/CONF.6/67) proposed by the Yugoslav delegation to the Draft Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News was rejected by 19 votes to 11, with 7 abstentions.

The Draft Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News was adopted by 28 votes to 6, with 2 abstentions.

Mr. MIKAOUI (Lebanon) had voted both for the Yugoslav amendment and for the text of the Convention as presented by the United States delegation, in order to show the same spirit of conciliation as that bestowed on the amendments proposed by the Lebanese delegation to Article 11 of the United Kingdom Draft Convention, the substance of which was now incorporated in Article 14 of the Convention presented by the United States delegation.

Mr. IRWIN (Canada) had voted for the Convention since its primary purpose was to widen the freedom accorded to news correspondents; he reserved his government's position in regard to Article 4, which he construed as accepting the principle of prior censorship in peace-time.

Mr. NORIEGA (Mexico) had voted for the Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News and would vote for the other two Conventions contained in Annex A. He reserved his government's future action in regard to the Conventions but believed that they could be implemented by all.

Mr. CIPOLLETTI (Argentina) had voted for the Convention on the Gathering and International Transmission of News and would vote for the other two Conventions in the Annex, as an expression of his approval of the substance rather than the form of those documents. He did not agree that international legislation in regard to information could be initiated by conventions.

Mr. IKRAM (Pakistan), while sympathising with the purpose of the Convention and understanding that its present text was to be regarded as a draft only, had voted for the Yugoslav amendment, since in his belief Article 14 did not fully cover the case of non self-governing territories.

Whilst appreciating the constitutional difficulties mentioned by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom, he felt that the latter might have given an assurance that their government would use their best endeavours to secure the application of the Conventions in those territories. It was to be hoped that Article 14 would be amplified in this sense when considered by the Economic and Social Council.

The PRESIDENT intervened to ask that any further explanations of votes be put in writing for incorporation in the record. The two written explanations recorded are appended to the Summary record.

Draft Convention concerning the Institution of an International Right of Correction.

On a vote being taken, the Convention was adopted by 33 votes to 7.

Draft Convention on Freedom of Information.

On a vote being taken, the first amendment proposed by the Soviet Union delegation (document E/CONF.6/68) was rejected by 19 votes to 6, with 9 abstentions;

the second amendment proposed by the Soviet Union delegation (document E/CONF.6/68 (paragraph 2)) was rejected by 19 votes to 6, with 10 abstentions.

The proposal of the Uruguayan representative to insert the words "and listen to" in Article 1 (c), line 3, was adopted by 30 votes to none, with 6 abstentions.

The amendment proposed by the Polish delegation (document E/CONF.6/66) to Article 13 was rejected by 16 votes to 15, with 8 abstentions.

The Draft Convention on Freedom of Information was adopted by 31 votes to 6, with 2 abstentions.

Mr. BOLLA (Switzerland) stated that his delegation had been instructed to observe the principles of freedom applying to the press in Switzerland and to support any measures suggested for the full and fair exercise of freedom, within the limits imposed by common law to protect the rights of others.

The Swiss press in its multiplicity and variety of outlook was unanimously concerned to inform the public objectively. The Swiss people would therefore not tolerate any hatred of race, religion or nation. The texts which had just been adopted by the Conference would consequently call for little reform of the procedure already applying in Switzerland and would be regarded by that country as a useful development of principles it had already established.

The Swiss Government would reserve its action in regard to future alterations to the texts of the Conventions. The Swiss delegation appreciated the sympathy shown by the Conference to its efforts to obtain consideration for Switzerland's situation as a small Central European country, and welcomed the achievements of the Conference as a first step towards the international regulation of freedom of information.

Resolutions 42 and 43 Annex C, Chapter VI.

Mr. CHANG (China) stated that the words of the resolutions and conventions adopted by the Conference might be regarded as an embodiment of the spirit which had prompted them, and the Chinese delegation supported the provisions of Resolution No. 42.

However, the intangible safeguard of freedom of information, that was to say, world-wide acknowledgement of its significance, was as important as the formulae just elaborated. The duty

of sustaining public sympathy would have to be performed by the press, the radio and other information agencies.

The resolutions and conventions had clarified the idea of freedom of information in three ways. They had fostered greater movement, in according wider personal liberty to news correspondents; greater range, in encouraging the increase of information agencies; and better quality of the information disseminated. He favoured the procedure prescribed in Resolution No. 43.

Mr. BOGOMOLOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stated that the Soviet Union delegation, believing that discussion of freedom of information should go hand in hand with that of the tasks of information agencies, had hoped that the Conference would reach a common agreement on the latter. Measures to combat incitement to war and the publication of false or distorted news should have been included in the conventions. The Second Session of the General Assembly had considered these matters as of sufficient importance to require resolutions in their regard, but many delegations, which at Lake Success had recorded an affirmative vote for those resolutions, had rejected amendments on the same lines at the present Conference. Consequently disagreement on the main principles of information procedure had become clear and the drafting of conventions was, in the opinion of the Soviet Union delegation, premature. Resolution No. 42 should therefore be omitted.

Resolution No. 43 should likewise be omitted, and the following text, which should also be incorporated in the Final Act, inserted in its place:

"That all documents approved by the Conference be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council for study."

The amendment was rejected by 27 votes to 5, with one abstention.

On a vote being taken, Resolution No. 42 was adopted by 28 votes to 6.

Resolution No. 43 was adopted by 28 votes to 6.

Credentials of the Paraguayan Representative

The PRESIDENT stated that the credentials of the Paraguayan representative had not arrived, and, in reply to a question by the representative of Poland, explained that the Conference had taken note of the presence of the Paraguayan representative, who had attended the discussions but had not voted.

Draft Final Act

Mr. BOGOMOLOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stated that the Soviet delegation was submitting an amendment to delete from Article 7 the sentence: "That all documents approved by the Conference (resolutions or draft conventions) be referred to the Economic and Social Council for study at its next session", or to substitute for it the following: "that all documents approved by the Conference be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council for study", and secondly to substitute for the words in Article 12: "IN WITNESS WHEREOF the respective Representatives have signed this Final Act" the words: "IN WITNESS WHEREOF the President and Executive Secretary of the Conference have signed this Final Act".

Mr. Van Heuven GOEDHART (Netherlands) could not see the point of the Soviet Union amendment. As the Conference by 27 votes to 6 had rejected an identical amendment referring to Resolution No. 43, on which Article 7 was based, they would be contradicting themselves if they adopted the Soviet Union amendment.

Mr. BOGOMOLOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) thought it would be desirable for the Conference to adopt unanimously the articles of the Draft Final Act, and if they voted to delete Article 7 or to replace it by the Soviet Union text, that would not prevent them retaining Resolution No. 43 in Annex C.

Mr. Van Heuven GOEDHART (Netherlands) repeated that this seemed to him contradictory, as the Final Act constituted a sort of record of the decisions which had been taken by the Conference, and as the Conference had voted in favour of Resolution No. 43, it would be contradicting itself by deleting Article 7 or in substituting for it the Soviet Union article. For this reason the amendment could not be accepted.

The PRESIDENT thought the remarks made by the Netherlands representative very much to the point, and ruled that the Soviet Union amendment was inadmissible.

Mr. J. PEYNADO SOLER (Dominican Republic) said he would be glad to see the original text of the Final Act drawn up not only in French and English, but also in Spanish, as had been done for the Final Act of the Maritime Conference.

Mr. BOGOMOLOV proposed that the Final Act be drawn up in the five official languages.

The PRESIDENT agreed to these requests, and then put to the vote Articles 1 - 11 inclusive of the Final Act.

Articles 1 - 11 inclusive of the Final Act were adopted by 28 votes to 6.

Mr. BOGOMOLOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) explained that he had voted against these articles because Article 7 had been maintained in the text of the Final Act.

Mr. MAVROCORDATO (Greece), on behalf of the Greek delegation, said that Greece had co-operated loyally and unreservedly in the Conference on Freedom of Information, and had refrained from airing any political grievances. But before they passed to the vote on these resolutions or conventions, he would like to point out that these resolutions and conventions pre-supposed a state of peace between all the contracting parties. But, de facto and de jure, the position of Greece was a special one. For this reason, when voting on the Final Act, the Greek delegation would reserve full liberty of action before the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations which would have to pronounce in the first instance on the resolutions and conventions of the present Conference. He asked that his statement be put on record.

The PRESIDENT put to the vote the Soviet amendment relative to Article 12.

Mr. DAVIES (United Kingdom) said that he would support the Soviet amendment, as, for practical reasons, it was

preferable that the Final Act should be signed by the President and the Executive Secretary of the Conference.

The Soviet amendment to Article 12 was put to the vote and adopted unanimously.

A remark made by the Chinese representative, regarding the order in which the five official languages should be enumerated in the article, gave rise to an exchange of views, in the course of which reference was made to the technical difficulties which would be raised, if the Final Act had to be translated immediately into the five official languages. To cut this discussion short, the Netherlands representative proposed that Article 12 should be drafted as follows:

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF (text) OTICHOPOCTE, ...

The President and Executive Secretary of the Conference have signed in the City of Geneva this 22nd day of April 1948, this Final Act in French and English, each text being equally authentic. The texts, in the five official languages of the United Nations will be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who will send certified copies to each of the Governments invited to send representatives to the Conference.

The Netherlands amendment was put to the vote and adopted by 29 votes to none, with one abstention.

Article 12, thus modified, was put to the vote and adopted unanimously.

The PRESIDENT then put to the vote the Final Act.

The Final Act was adopted by 30 votes to 1, with 5 abstentions.

Mr. BENTON (United States) said that before leaving the Palais des Nations and the City of Geneva, he would like to pay a tribute to Mr. Romulo who had presided over the work of the Conference with such cordiality and skill. He pointed out that it had been a resolution, submitted by his delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations and now celebrated, which had given rise to this Conference. He asked members to pass by standing a vote of congratulation to the President, to whom was due in large measure the success of their work. He also paid a tribute to the Chairmen of the four Committees and to the work of the Secretariat. No better place for the Conference could have been chosen, for the Swiss press and people provided an example of a freedom without constraint and without abuse. He asked members to pass by standing a vote of thanks to Switzerland for the hospitality she had shown towards the Conference.

Mr. NORIEGA (Mexico) also paid tribute to the President and members of the Conference. In his eyes, they were no longer merely the representatives of the various countries of the world, but friends, whose skill in defending different ideals he had admired. In following the progress of the Conference, he had realised how important it was for the future of international relations that both governments and peoples should try to get together and promote a wider diffusion of ideas. He had studied all the documents adopted by the Conference, not only from the point of view of a government representative, such as he was at the moment, but from the point of view of a journalist of 18 years standing. If governments were slow in putting into effect the decisions there taken, the world would be surprised and gratified to find journalists themselves pressing for the

application of those decisions.

Mr. BOLLA (Switzerland) thanked the United States representative and the Conference in general for the tribute paid to his country, which could always be relied on to provide the right atmosphere for exchanges of ideas.

The PRESIDENT said that, before adjourning the Conference, he would like to make a brief summing-up of their work during the four weeks of their meetings in Geneva. To do so, it would be necessary to consider the results in relation to the goals which had been set before them and with reference to the social, political and economic conditions in which their work had been done.

Few international gatherings had had the benefit of the careful planning which had preceded this conference. The purposes, the methods of work, and the agenda of the conference had been discussed at the political level in the General Assembly and in the Economic and Social Council, and at the technical level, in the Sub-Commission on Freedom of Information. At each stage in the discussion, the Secretariat had made available a mass of pertinent data which had given both historical perspective and contemporary content to the work of the conference.

But planning, no matter how adequate, could not forestall all the difficulties of execution. The Conference was not going to be held in a political vacuum. The delegates were not going to meet in an ivory tower to set up an ideal system of freedom in relation to information. On the contrary, the Conference had been called primarily to consider what practices should be included in the concept of freedom of

information. From the very nature of its principal task, therefore, it had been inevitable that the proceedings and achievements of the conference would be conditioned by the realities of the world as they knew it. In practical terms, this had meant that the Conference would have to proceed with the utmost realism, recognizing that there existed throughout the world a variety of political traditions, economic systems, legal practices, and administrative procedures which, in some way or another, affected the actual practice of freedom in the field of information. It had meant also that the conference would be called upon to establish a proper balance between freedom and responsibility, between the freedom to gather, transmit and disseminate news and the right to receive truthful information, between the general obligation to tell the truth and the special duty to observe public decency and to help maintain national security and peace among nations, and between the traditional concepts of national sovereignty and the requirements of the new international order.

All those issues had been debated at great length in the course of their meetings, and it was to the credit of the various delegations that there had been an admirable readiness to make concessions and come to terms without sacrifice of basic principles. When it was considered that their discussions had taken place at a time of great international tension, in an atmosphere of the gloomiest pessimism, there was reason to believe that the Conference had more than measured up to the generous hope that had called it into being.

They had approved three draft conventions and numerous resolutions providing definite guarantees to freedom of information and at the same time defining its proper limits within the scheme of their evolving world community. The draft convention on the gathering and international transmission of news sought to secure unhampered access to all legitimate sources of information and to expedite its transmission by giving foreign correspondents all the facilities and freedom of movement they required. The draft convention on freedom of information imposed on states the obligation to assure to every man the right to receive and impart news or opinion by every means of mass communication, restricted only by the ordinary requirements of law, decency and national security. The responsibilities of the press were emphasised in the resolution denouncing incitements to war and the draft convention recognizing the right of governments to reply to false, malicious or distorted information tending to impair good relations among nations. Equally important was the endorsement by the Conference of the articles pertaining to freedom of information for inclusion in the Draft Declaration and Draft Covenant on Human Rights. The setting up of continuing machinery ensured the effective implementation of the conventions and resolutions approved by the Conference.

Anyone who examined the resolutions that had been adopted must feel satisfied that this Conference had explored the entire field of freedom of information and emerged with concrete and practical recommendations. Indeed, it was heartening to consider in retrospect how the numerous proposals on a bewildering variety of subjects had been

beaten into shape, fitted into one another, and placed in logical sequence in order to constitute an organic whole.

Yet no mere enumeration of the resolutions and draft conventions could give an adequate idea of the work accomplished by the Conference. They must search elsewhere for the intangible factors which gave durable substance to the achievement.

For the first time in history, an authoritative body had discussed in detail the principles of freedom in relation to information. There had begun to crystallize there, in Geneva, a philosophy of freedom of information on an international plane, under circumstances dramatic enough to fix it firmly in the minds of men. No-one who had followed the discussions would make an unwarranted claim that the Conference had enunciated a universal philosophy acceptable to all peoples and governments and applicable in all countries. Since the Conference had had to break new ground, the approach had been appropriately tentative and exploratory. Perhaps subsequent conferences at three or five yearly intervals would need to be convoked to pursue certain ideas much further than they had dared to do. Yet it could not be denied that there had taken place there something more useful than a mere contest of ideologies, and that through the exposition of varying concepts the Conference had in fact indicated the areas within which agreement was not only desirable but possible.

No-one present, to his knowledge, had declared against freedom of information. Nor had anyone claimed a monopoly on truthful information. Some had advocated freedom with a

minimum of restrictions, others freedom coupled with responsibility. Everyone had agreed that no right was absolute, since the exercise of any right was necessarily limited by respect for the rights of others. Freedom of information was, in a very real sense, a function not only of political liberty but of social progress and economic prosperity. Accordingly, there were certain areas in the world where the lack of liberal political traditions resulting in the establishment of authoritarian political and economic systems had created the most formidable dictatorships of the human mind. Those were the areas where the life-giving principles of freedom of information were most needed but where also they would meet with the most bitter and stubborn opposition. And yet it was equally true to say that there was no single curtain which conveniently divided the world into areas of black and white; there were many patches of black or gray everywhere, and the curtains cut across all continents and ran in all directions wherever men were held in bondage by prejudice and oppression, poverty and ignorance. If the conference has made one thing clear, it was that the cause of freedom of information needed to be advanced not only in one direction but in many directions, and not only across national frontiers but within the borders of every nation.

This was the first inter-governmental conference on freedom of information ever to be held. Previous conferences on this subject undertaken without the participation of governments had necessarily been limited by that fact in scope and influence. Here, for the first time, press,

government and people had been joined in common counsel and united endeavour. That was a fortunate circumstance because what had been said of governments was true also of the press: the people got only the press which they deserved. The press was a reflection of the people, and the people must, in the final analysis, assume the major responsibility for the character of the press. Government was, by its very nature, antagonistic to liberty, and its commitments in favour of freedom of information could never be as effective as the guardianship exercised by an alert public opinion and the self-criticism exercised by journalists and correspondents themselves. This conference had emphasized the desirability of developing higher professional standards in the press and it was reasonable to believe that many journalists and correspondents who had accepted their function as a matter of course would, in the future, attempt to conform to the criteria enunciated here in Geneva.

The conference had thus demonstrated that they were ready to move from the plane of philosophical enquiry and political affirmation to the plane of practical application.

In his opening address, he had made reference to the tremendous emotional power which a conference of that nature was bound to generate. No-one who had followed their deliberations with an open mind could have failed to be uplifted and edified by what he had seen and heard there. The Conference had been a triumph of reason. Not far away war clouds might be gathering fast. And yet, undismayed by the menace of immeasurable catastrophe, they had come together there, representing sixty nations, to proclaim their faith in the healing power of truth, their loyalty to the cause of freedom, and their profound abhorrence of war.

They had worked earnestly and hard on a vital segment of the United Nations programme for the definition and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in doing so, they had launched what was perhaps the most significant experiment in the history of international relations. Dark as the hour might seem, what they had done there proved that the United Nations continued to be a useful instrument of international discussion and negotiation and justified a generous measure of optimism for the future.

They did not point to the Conference and say that it had accomplished the impossible. They said of it only that it had achieved the unexpected. They did not declare that they had found a short-cut to peace. But they did affirm that, however long and tortuous it might be, that was the only road to enduring peace.

The final assessment of the results of their labours was yet to be. That was only the beginning. They had but broken the ground, and it would take years before many of the proposals and recommendations they had advanced would bear fruit in wider freedom for all men everywhere.

Freedom through truth, or truth through freedom - that was the golden avenue through which mankind was destined to move in a limitless sphere where no barred gates should be or stone walls or iron curtains of the mind.

From the battle of ideas which had engaged their whole energies there, let them all go forth knowing that their respective personal and national triumphs and defeats were of little moment and that, in the end, the real victim of their failure or beneficiary of their success would be the human race.

The PRESIDENT declared the Conference closed.

The meeting rose at 7.40 p.m.

Appendix

Explanation of Votes

(1) Canadian Delegation

"In view of the appeal of the President to the delegates to place in writing any explanations on their vote on the Convention on Freedom of Information, we are formally placing on record the position of the Canadian Delegation.

We voted for the convention because it enunciates the principles in which we believe. However, we make a reservation on Article II and particularly on the restrictive Clause (j) which reads as follows:

"The systematic diffusion of deliberately false or distorted reports which undermine friendly relations between peoples and States."

We feel that this clause could lead to abuses of censorship on the part of governments."

(2) Mexican Delegation

"The Delegation of Mexico wishes it put on record that it voted in the affirmative for the first Draft Convention, and will likewise vote in favour of the two remaining Drafts, since it regards the three texts as providing an ample basis for future work. It wishes, however, to make it absolutely clear that the said votes do not imply any initial undertaking on the part of the Government of Mexico with regard to the said documents which, from the point of view of substance and form of application, are capable of improvement."