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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. NOWORYTA (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 36: POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA
(continued) (A/SPC/43/L.3 and Add.1-8)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to grant the requests for hearings contained in documents A/SPC/43/L.3 and Add.1-8.

2. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 79: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/43/21, A/43/639, A/43/670)

3. Mr. MEHAN (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), introducing the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (A/43/670), said that it was important to bear in mind the Director-General's policy of undertaking less in order to do better. UNESCO linked the future work of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) to the objectives of the World Decade for Cultural Development. He drew attention to paragraph 8 of the report concerning the recommendations which had been adopted by the Intergovernmental Council of IPDC.

4. The Council was endeavouring to make IPDC funding a more substantial part of the projects which it approved. As funds were severely limited, a more rigorous selection of projects was needed. The Director-General appealed anew to the international community for more funds for IPDC. Referring to the principle of one IPDC-financed project per country per annum, he explained that exceptions could be made in the case of the least developed countries and in some other special cases. As to the need for balance between practical action and activities to promote intellectual co-operation, he explained that the Council intended to use those studies which had been undertaken so as to improve the methodology of planning.

5. UNESCO was endeavouring to dispel the misunderstandings arising in the information and communication field by undertaking a new strategy based on the constitutional mandate of a free flow of information, emphasizing those points of common concern that were uncontested and the practical and intellectual activities that could be expected to bring about an increase in information flow, the gradual establishment of a more equitable capacity to produce, process and exchange information and the reinforcement of cultural and communication pluralism.

6. Mr. SLABY (Czechoslovakia) said that changes in the field of information had considerably helped to reduce international tensions and to promote international understanding and peace. Distorted and manipulated information had played an adverse role in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II. As a result of its bitter experience, Czechoslovakia considered the furthering of peace, security, co-operation and friendship among nations to be a major

(Mr. Slaby, Czechoslovakia)

international mission, particularly in regard to United Nations information policies. The United Nations system, and particularly UNESCO, had a special role to play in the field of information. The information activities of Member States should be an active component in international relations. Czechoslovakia was in favour of broad general access to information and willingness to exchange views with all countries on a broad spectrum of questions. It wished to establish a mechanism for the exchange of true and balanced information about the countries of the world. Information must be rid of falsifications and those views running counter to the ideals of the Organization. Czechoslovakia was willing to co-operate to that end without any pre-conditions. It made full use of the possibilities provided by the international organizations and endeavoured to encourage international co-operation at regional levels.

7. The existing information and communication order clearly failed to meet the development needs of a large group of countries and to promote the idea of the equality of all countries. That order needed to be restructured, inter alia, by eliminating the monopoly of the major news agencies.

8. Czechoslovakia had followed with interest the restructuring within the Department of Public Information (DPI). The new information programme should encompass the most important issues confronting the international community, including international peace and security, sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, social and economic development and human rights. The objective facts about the role of the United Nations should reach as many people as possible. Such a goal required a determined effort and a high degree of efficiency and professionalism. Nevertheless, professional considerations were not incongruous with an equitable geographical distribution of DPI posts.

9. Czechoslovakia was in favour of the proposal to set up an expert group comprising representatives of all the regional groups and China, which would serve as an intermediary between the Special Political Committee and DPI.

10. Mr. URBAN (Hungary) said that freedom of information and freedom of the press were fundamental human rights. Hungary strongly believed that everyone had the right to receive and disseminate information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers. It was deeply convinced that the United Nations, owing to recent favourable developments in international relations, could fulfil its task of facilitating the freer and wider dissemination of information and of encouraging co-operation in the field of information.

11. Hungary had done and would continue to do its utmost to ensure the full implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, including those provisions concerning information. The wide and open coverage given to the national and international questions of public life was a fundamental aspect of Hungary's information policy, based on the Press Law of 1986. Foreign newspapers and magazines were available in Hungary, and foreign broadcasts could be received freely. The Hungarian postal authorities had recently concluded contracts with various satellite networks with a view to receiving their programmes.

(Mr. Urban, Hungary)

12. He supported the efforts made in international forums to undertake a democratic restructuring of relations in the field of information. His delegation noted the progress made by UNESCO towards achieving a new world information and communication order.

13. Hungary welcomed the recommendations and amendments contained in the report of the Committee on Information. It had requested to become a member of the Committee on the basis of those considerations. He wished to express his appreciation to DPI for giving wide coverage to the activities of the Organization and for strengthening the image of the United Nations system as a whole.

14. As to the geographical distribution of DPI posts, his delegation welcomed the readiness of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information to improve the geographical balance within the Department and hoped that a relevant report would be submitted to the Committee on Information in the near future.

15. Hungary attached great importance to the activities of DPI relating to human rights. DPI should continue to disseminate information about the various fields of United Nations activities. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Department should be increased, inter alia, through a co-ordinated approach to the priority issues of the Organization. Hungary also stressed the need for DPI to co-operate more regularly with UNESCO and intergovernmental and regional organizations with a view to promoting the free flow of information.

16. Mr. YAHIA (Democratic Yemen), speaking also on behalf of Yemen, said that only a small number of the recommendations and resolutions adopted on questions relating to information had ever been implemented, while the majority had come to nothing in the midst of divergent viewpoints, contradictory assumptions, inauspicious circumstances and limited capacities.

17. There were currently many positive indications in international life that gave renewed hope for co-operation with a view to making tangible progress in the development of national capabilities in the information and communication field and in reaching agreement on the establishment of a new world information and communication order. As a pressing need and a moral obligation in the modern era, the proposed new order had the prime objective of establishing relations of equality instead of the current relations of domination and subordination. The new order would not be a magic potion capable of instantly transforming an unjust situation; that situation was the result of a long history of hegemony that had not come to an end with the elimination of colonialism and was not one that could be speedily remedied. The immediate goal should therefore be to persevere with practical efforts at the national, regional and international levels with a view to reaching the final goal in the long term.

18. The sad fact that the Committee on Information had been unable to reach consensus on the task entrusted to it at its tenth session demonstrated the obstinacy of certain parties and a lack of the necessary political will and flexibility on their part. The Committee on Information had therefore been forced to refer the matter back to the Special Political Committee. The two Yemens wished

(Mr. Yahia, Democratic Yemen)

to reaffirm their view that the draft recommendations proposed by Tunisia on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 contained the maximum possible number of concessions and that it was therefore essential for the other parties involved to abandon positions based on narrow self-interest.

19. The two delegations hoped that the steps taken for the structural reorganization of DPI would lend further impetus to its activities. The ongoing reforms should be selective and should take due account of the principle of the equitable geographical distribution of posts. The major tasks entrusted to the Department required that all available capacities should be utilized and all possible initiatives taken to help convey the achievements and virtues of the United Nations to a wider segment of the world public. The successes recently achieved by the United Nations might be expected to be of assistance in that endeavour.

20. The Department should be more actively involved in the dissemination of information on United Nations activities in the fields of decolonization, the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and settler-colonialist occupation, human rights, the World Disarmament Campaign and the maintenance of international peace and security. The Department should also strengthen its co-operation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries and other intergovernmental and regional organizations. It should increase its support for the activities of the United Nations information centres, provide them with the necessary informational materials and endeavour to increase the number of end-users of those materials.

21. The two delegations urged the United Nations, UNESCO and the industrially developed countries to co-operate more effectively with the developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, in their endeavour to strengthen their information and communication infrastructure and to obtain modern communications technology in keeping with their national needs. Such co-operation could be achieved through financial support to the International Programme for the Development of Communication, which assisted the developing countries in the development of infrastructure and in training.

22. The ambitions of the two Yemens in the field of information and communication had been realistic and reasonable, and they hoped that the current session would see the adoption of practical and well-defined measures that would help to translate those ambitions into reality.

23. Mr. YUAN Shibing (China) said that the reduction of international tensions had encouraged the international community to resolve all types of difficult issues. Consequently, China particularly regretted that the Committee on Information had been unable to reach consensus on the establishment of a new world information and communication order. Information and communication had become an indispensable factor for the promotion of social and economic development and a sine qua non for safeguarding world peace and security. The economic development of the developing and the developed countries was interdependent. It would benefit all countries if the international mass media could reflect their countries' economic, political and

(Mr. Yuan Shibing, China)

cultural features in an accurate and timely way- particularly the demands of the developing countries. The goal of a new world information and communication order was to give impetus to a two-way and balanced flow of information. Certainly, the current flow between the developing and the developed countries was extremely imbalanced. Huge gaps still existed between the two categories of countries in terms of infrastructure, communication equipment and technical personnel. Under such circumstances, it was difficult to imagine a real flow of information on an international scale.

24. The purpose of establishing a new world information and communication order was to promote a faster and freer flow of information on the basis of respect for the principle of sovereignty and equality. It was gratifying to learn that representatives of some developed countries had expressed a willingness to assist developing countries to improve their information and communication infrastructures and that a number of developing countries were also emphasizing full utilization of indigenous resources to that end. China would always participate actively in efforts to establish a new world information order and believed that a balanced, two-way flow of information would help to promote the economic development of all countries and mutual understanding. In view of the improved international situation, all Member States should strive to solve the problem in a spirit of understanding and co-operation.

25. UNESCO, DPI, and the Committee on Information had all made positive efforts to improve the current situation in the field of information and eliminate imbalances. That had been done with limited resources. It was commendable that UNESCO had decided to give IPDC more autonomy in the next mid-term plan. China, which attached great importance to developing its own information and communication industry, wanted to increase its co-operation with other countries in that field. With regard to co-operation with DPI, he pointed out that China had recently signed a five-year agreement with the United Nations to ensure effective broadcasting of United Nations news. Lastly, China would work with other delegations in a spirit of understanding so that the Committee could adopt a consensus resolution on the question of information.

26. Mr. TSCHIAMALA (Zaire) expressed regret that there were still difficulties to be overcome in reaching a consensus on the item under consideration. The adoption of a text which upheld both freedom of information and the concept of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order would be particularly welcome in view of the favourable international situation. The free flow of information must apply to all countries so that information and communication could promote development and international peace and understanding. In spite of the improvement in international relations, there were still obstacles to the establishment of a new international economic order. In that context, information was essential for development because without it there could be no planning or coherent political action.

27. The developing countries could not accept the transmission of distorted information about their aspirations, cultures and efforts to improve their economic situation. The recent innovations in communication technology might increase

(Mr. Tschiamala, Zaire)

existing imbalances unless there was agreement to share knowledge and improve the ability of developing countries through research and training. In that connection, he stressed the need to provide objective information and reconcile points of view concerning professional ethics. The United Nations and DPI, in particular, should constantly keep in mind the principles forming the basis for a new information order, of which the first was to promote credibility through the content of information. All nationalistic, regional, ideological or political biases must be avoided.

28. DPI and the United Nations information centres in general should, co-operate with the national agencies of developing countries to provide to their populations accurate and trustworthy information on the political, economic and social situation in those countries. The imbalance in the geographical representation of staff in the Department should be corrected and equal treatment of the working languages should be ensured. The staff who used French were at a disadvantage compared to those who used English with regard to promotions. The North-South dialogue must be developed further to promote international understanding and the establishment of a new international economic order. Zaire fully supported efforts to promote a new world information order because it was essential to mutual understanding and international peace and co-operation.

29. Mr. GHOSH (India) said that the work of the Committee on Information had demonstrated that there was a sincere desire to find common ground on the question of information. He hoped that the Committee could adopt a consensus recommendation in order to make progress on establishing a new world information and communication order. The new information order, contrary to certain misconceptions, stood for diversity and pluralism, respecting different socio-economic systems and acknowledging that diverse social models could and should coexist. It recognized that what was relevant for one society might not necessarily be as relevant for another society with a different culture and stage of development.

30. If the people of the developing countries helplessly stood by while their positions were distorted and often misrepresented to the rest of the world, they would run the risk of losing their cultural distinctiveness and, perhaps, even some of their cultural values. Control of the communication media by a few countries inevitably led to the transmission of the values and norms of those countries, often without any sensitivity for the vital concerns of the rest of the world. Similarly, issues of real significance in developing countries were often not regarded as newsworthy in the developed world.

31. Structural changes were needed to realize the enormous potential in the world of thought and ideas and enable the vast majority of mankind to participate on an equal footing in the exchange of ideas and views. It was unfortunate that the new information and communication order had received so little sympathy in the developed countries. By attempting to perpetuate their historical advantage, those countries perhaps hoped that they would be able to influence the thinking of peoples throughout the world. That awesome power, however, would only harm the greater interests of mankind.

(Mr. Ghosh, India)

32. The countries opposed to change failed to realize that they might also be acting to the detriment of their own interest. A free flow of information would ensure greater receptivity to the ideas which the advanced countries sought to impart to the rest of the world. The increased flow of information within the developing countries themselves would bring the benefits of free expression where they did not currently exist.

33. Many of the developing countries, including India, had taken certain steps to overcome their dependence on the advanced countries in the field of information and communication. Such collective action was the corner-stone of a new world information and communication order. India's commitment to the ideals of such an order were reflected in its strong support for IPDC. His country was a major contributor to the IPDC Special Account. In that connection, he fully endorsed the view of the Director-General that the advanced countries, which were responsible for 90 per cent of the production of information goods and services in the modern world, could reasonably be expected to contribute more to the efforts of IPDC.

34. The United Nations had a special role to play in the field of information and communication. His delegation was somewhat apprehensive that a number of the changes initiated in DPI might have a negative impact on the delivery of programmes of special interest to the developing countries. The decolonization of the media, the eradication of apartheid, self-determination for the Palestinians and questions of economic and social development were among the priority issues of the Organization and should not be adversely affected by restructuring. In that connection, he stressed the need to ensure that the restructuring was carried out fairly and that there should be a balanced geographical distribution of posts both at the senior and middle levels in the Department.

35. Mr. WOLFF (Colombia) said that his delegation attached great importance to the question of information and believed that freedom of information was a basic human right. Referring to the Department of Public Information, he felt that the effectiveness of the regional information centres should be carefully reviewed in order to determine whether in Latin America their existence was justified in view of the alternatives. That evaluation should take into account the latest communication media, the recipients of information and the instruments used to disseminate it and should be carried out by external experts to ensure independence and partiality.

36. Progress had been made in the work of the Committee on Information concerning the establishment of a new world information and communication order. Everyone hoped that a consensus could be achieved. The Group of 77 had negotiated seriously and had maintained its position. Although there were still areas of disagreement, with the co-operation of all parties concerned, it would be possible to achieve a consensus which could serve as the corner-stone for future progress.

37. Colombia, one of the oldest constitutional democracies in Latin America, was a proponent of freedom of information and all that it entailed, of an autonomous, watchful and opinion-shaping press, and of responsible communications media devoid of allegiances and untouched by pressures and censorship, whether by autocratic

(Mr. Wolff, Colombia)

governments or by murderous terrorists. Unfortunately, in his country the list of journalists murdered, maimed or abducted by drug traffickers or by terrorists was a long one, and his delegation had successfully sought the inclusion of an explicit condemnation of such attacks in the recommendations of the Committee on Information. That body, it should be noted, had made serious overall progress in its work.

38. Mr. HANAFI (Egypt) observed that, owing to the changed international climate and the sincere desire for dialogue, the new world information and communication order was closer at hand than ever before. Yet before the international community reached consensus on questions relating to information, there would be a difficult road to travel. Certain States must come to understand the views and needs of other States and what they meant by the new order. They must also provide assistance to bring about radical changes in the information infrastructure. The developing countries had shown their genuine readiness to engage in constructive debate in which a common ground could be found.

39. The Committee on Information had at its latest session demonstrated a willingness to avoid at all costs the controversy that had marked its previous sessions and, in so doing, had made genuine progress. The Committee had none the less been unable to reach an understanding on the various proposals before it and in its report had referred them to the Special Political Committee for further deliberation. It was important to note that the Group of 77 had indicated its own determination to continue working for consensus. The Committee on Information must now sustain its momentum.

40. Egypt admired the bold plans of the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information to enhance the dynamism and effectiveness of DPI. The inevitable difficulties that had emerged in the course of the restructuring should not retard efforts to put the Department on a fully operational basis. In the process, an equitable geographical distribution of staff must be maintained, and some higher level posts should be earmarked for the developing countries. Egypt supported all DPI programmes, especially those having to do with Palestine, Namibia or the question of apartheid. Radio programming on apartheid should be more lively and seek a wider audience.

41. Mr. JERKIC (Yugoslavia) said that information was of exceptional importance in a world of political, economic, social, cultural and other differences, all the more so since technological advances had revolutionized the field and created an unprecedented demand. A one-way flow of information from the developed countries and its selective dissemination militated against the objective reporting of events.

42. That monopoly on information had prompted the developing countries to commit themselves to the establishment of the new world information and communication order. All countries must work together to create the new order, which, once established, would strengthen peace and international understanding. The free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information drawn from all sources and serving all interests would preserve the generally accepted principle of freedom of information, which would be the corner-stone of the new order.

/...

(Mr. Jerkic, Yugoslavia)

43. Through various activities of their own, the non-aligned and developing countries had endeavoured to do their part to overcome the gap between the developed and the developing world in the field of information. They had assisted each other in setting up information and communication systems and in exchanging and training cadres. Particularly important in that respect were the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, the Eco-pool and the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries. Even so, some non-aligned countries did not yet have their own news agencies or had insufficiently staffed and funded agencies and consequently would be able to participate in the world information system in only a limited way, unless the international community increased its assistance to them.

44. Yugoslavia believed it necessary to modernize DPI in order to make it more efficient. Given the limited resources, the priority should be to retain any programmes designed to bring about greater balance in information flows. Of particular importance were the DPI educational programmes for broadcasters and journalists from the developing countries, which should be expanded. In the course of the reforms, the issues of particular interest to developing countries should be kept on the agenda and any personnel changes in DPI should be made on the basis of equitable geographical representation. A modernized DPI would be able to present to the world an even better and more truthful picture of the United Nations, especially in view of the renewed emphasis on the role of the Organization.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (A/SPC/43/L.8)

45. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/SPC/43/L.8, containing a request from the Chairman of the Second Committee for the views of the members of the Special Political Committee on the guidelines for international decades recommended by the Economic and Social Council for adoption by the General Assembly, in so far as those guidelines fell under the mandate of the Special Political Committee. Any members of the Committee who wished to do so should submit their views to him in writing so that he could forward them to the Second Committee by mid-November. Otherwise, he would inform the Chairman of that Committee that the Special Political Committee had no comments to make.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.