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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. NOWORYTA (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 36: POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Requests for hearings (continued) (A/SPC/43/L.3/Add.9)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the new requests for hearings in connection with item 36 in document A/SPC/43/L.3/Add.9. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to grant the requests.
2. It was so decided.
3. The CHAIRMAN said that he assumed, in the absence of any objection, that the Committee agreed that all new requests for hearings should be submitted by delegations at the beginning of the meeting to be devoted to hearings on 9 November, in accordance with previous practice.
4. It was so decided.
5. The CHAIRMAN said that delegations submitting requests at that meeting would have to make their own arrangements to ensure that the petitioners concerned could have access to the building, as the Secretariat would no longer have time to complete the required formalities.

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

6. Mr. OUANE (Mali) said that the promotion and establishment of a new information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding was an objective to which his country subscribed whole-heartedly. What was important in the first place was to correct, through that new order, the imbalances that existed in that field between developed and developing countries. A country such as Mali, which was the heir to a great and ancient civilization and was busy building a nation, could not be satisfied by a system which acted as a vehicle for issues, ways of life, modes of thought, patterns of consumption, even ideologies, that it had had no hand in shaping and which were sometimes hostile to it. What Mali, like other developing countries, expected of the new information and communication order was that it should succeed in establishing a link between information and development.
7. It was necessary, therefore, to provide the developing countries with the infrastructure and the technical and human resources needed to establish national press agencies and define independent information policies. Those countries should then be offered the means of organizing themselves at the regional or continental level through the establishment of continental agencies such as PANA, or pools such as the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, with the aim of promoting a South-South circulation of information, and the exchange of ideas and experience among developing countries without their being obliged to resort to the North's

(Mr. Ouane, Mali)

networks. All that should be the prelude to a more balanced circulation of information between North and South, so as to enable the nations of the North to grasp the realities of the South otherwise than through worn-out clichés and stereotypes.

8. It was a question, therefore, of rescuing the South from its position as a consumer of information of which it controlled neither the production nor the distribution. His delegation believed that in order to do so adequate arrangements and machinery must be put in place as a matter of urgency. It was therefore essential that, in the information field, the purposes and principles of the Charter, in particular the principle of the sovereign equality of States, should be constantly and rigorously observed.

9. On the question of restructuring the Department of Public Information, his delegation considered that, in order to carry out its mandate from the General Assembly effectively and speedily, the Department should have the assistance of all Member States. No matter how urgent and necessary the restructuring was, it must not be accomplished by sacrificing the priorities and programmes laid down by the General Assembly. That was the case with questions relating to apartheid, Namibia or Palestine, the more so in that the United Nations had assumed a special responsibility in that regard. The new structure of the Department must also ensure respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution so that the many voices of a single world could make themselves heard.

10. Similarly, it was vital to promote and strengthen co-operation between the Department and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, through the conclusion of agreements or the training of journalists and communication technicians, and to strengthen the United Nations information centres. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the efforts of UNESCO and of the International Programme for the Development of Communication to equip the developing countries with means of communication and thus promote the establishment of a new world information and communication order.

11. Mrs. MIRANDA (Chile) said that the establishment of a new world information and communication order was a continuous and evolutionary process and that experience had shown that the best way of reaching a consensus was to display wisdom and moderation. In principle, the study of that question came within the mandate of UNESCO. However, that Organization's resolutions were no longer universal, because of the absence of certain States. Accordingly, the fact that the Committee had taken up the question meant increased pressure, but pressure that could be beneficial only if, without affecting principles which many countries regarded as fundamental, there was success in reaching a consensus, reflected in the return to UNESCO of those countries which had withdrawn from it.

12. Some 30 countries enjoyed a free and rapid flow of information, and the situation was fairly satisfactory in about 30 more; a majority, however, did not possess even the basic information media. Only the first group possessed a world-wide network of news agencies which, though undeniably useful, were prone to

(Mrs. Miranda, Chile)

distort or falsify certain facts or to keep silent on them altogether. By contrast, there were systems of absolute control which had long engaged in disinformation, but which today seemed ready to correct themselves. The question that arose was whether the Special Political Committee was in a position to modify the world information system, make international press agencies objective, and bring to an end the monopoly of certain States over information.

13. Although those objectives might seem difficult to attain, it was nevertheless vital to safeguard the underlying principles. In that connection, the Group of 77, which suffered most from that situation, was seeking to eliminate the injustices that ensued from what had been called a "colonialist" information system.

14. Some countries had succeeded in equipping themselves with a national information and communication network, but the vast majority looked to the United Nations for a solution. The latter group had drawn encouragement from the Organization's recent successes. Moreover, the new climate of international understanding had had beneficial effects on the Committee's work, so that conditions seemed ripe for the conclusion of an important agreement. Such at least seemed to be the desire of the European Economic Community, China and certain other countries, it being understood that no consensus could be achieved at the expense of the principles which each side believed in. In that respect, the Group of 77 had everything to gain.

15. On the question of reorganizing the Department of Public Information, Chile hoped that the Secretary-General would submit a detailed report on the restructuring measures and the activities of the United Nations information centres to the Committee on Information at its next session.

16. Mr. ADEYEMI (Nigeria) said that the inequality and imbalances in the communication capabilities of developed and developing countries remained a fundamental issue, especially as certain developed countries were responsible for 90 per cent of the production of information goods and services in the modern world. In order to remedy that situation, efforts should be made not only to transfer communication technology to the developing countries but also to train their manpower, enabling them to have full control over their communication infrastructure. The International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO was a valuable instrument; regrettably, however, the funds available to it were lamentably small.

17. His delegation believed that the developed countries which sincerely wished to assist developing countries in the area of communication and information technology should significantly increase their contributions to that Programme. Elements of the new world information order, such as the assistance provided by some developed and developing countries - including Nigeria - with a view to building up the communication infrastructure of developing countries, had already been accepted in practice by certain developed countries.

(Mr. Adeyemi, Nigeria)

18. The Committee on Information still had not reached a consensus, although the discussions had not been futile. The tenth session of the Committee had in fact set the stage for fruitful dialogue in a spirit of flexibility.

19. The Department of Public Information had a strategic role to play, as shown by its activities in such areas as human rights, Namibia, South Africa, Palestine and Africa's economic crisis. His country endorsed the Department's plan to publish studies on global economic activities. It also encouraged the Department to intensify its training programmes for journalists of developing countries.

20. With regard to restructuring the Department, his country supported such action if it would strengthen the Department's effectiveness and if the Committee on Information was kept fully informed. His delegation was concerned at the merger of the anti-apartheid, Namibia and Palestine radio units, which could only impair their effectiveness. It was equally concerned at the dramatic reduction in the staff of the anti-apartheid radio unit, a step which could only send a wrong message to South Africa. Accordingly, his delegation called for the strengthening of the unit in order to enable it to carry out its anti-apartheid campaign.

21. Mr. BOUTSKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that his country was currently celebrating the seventy-first anniversary of the Soviet Revolution, and that the revolutionary process was still continuing. Restructuring was useful not only in Soviet society, but also in the international arena. The strengthening of positive trends in the international climate was the work of all States which respected the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. An improvement in international security must be achieved through better mutual understanding. It was necessary to renounce intolerance and fanaticism and to eliminate prejudice. Ideas about peace and disarmament should be disseminated throughout the world. Genocide, apartheid, discrimination and national or religious chauvinism must be eliminated; the responsibility of the mass media in that area should be emphasized.

22. His delegation attached great importance to the complex problems of information at the United Nations and was convinced that positive results could be achieved if the paramount interests of mankind were kept in view. To that end, it was necessary to avoid the recent conflicts between East and West in the field of information and to develop more objective means of communication and information. The mass media should respect the principles of the Charter, international law and peaceful coexistence. Distortions in communication could be eliminated only through multilateral, objective and fair information. To that end, it was necessary to strengthen the role of the United Nations, which should disseminate more balanced information, and to broaden co-operation between the Department of Public Information and the mass media of all Member States.

23. His delegation hoped that the restructuring of the Department would enable it to operate more efficiently and to carry out the tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly. His delegation supported the proposal to establish ongoing contacts between the Department and the members of the Committee on Information. It was concerned at the imbalance existing among different countries in the field

(Mr. Boutsko, Ukrainian SSR)

of information. The United Nations should direct the efforts of the international community towards assisting the developing countries to establish their own national and regional information structures. His country was convinced that constructive co-operation in the field of information was entirely possible, as shown by the satellite links established between his country and the United States, Canada and other countries within the framework of a dialogue on problems of mutual interest. Similar activities could be organized between the United Nations and UNESCO, using the national technologies provided by various countries. In such exchanges of information, countries should not be forced to adopt a particular way of life.

24. His delegation believed that more attention should be paid to relations between the United Nations and the mass media, which could enhance the prestige and image of the Organization. At the latest session of the Committee on Information, his delegation had proposed that all data concerning the dissemination by the mass media of information on the Organization's activities should be collected and analysed by means of electronic data banks. A symposium should be organized on that question. His delegation believed that the documents under consideration by the Special Political Committee could be the basis for the adoption of a decision by consensus. Such a decision would make the remaining work easier, encourage dialogue and make it possible to find a mutually acceptable solution to the remaining problems.

25. Mr. AL-KAWARI (Qatar) said that, unlike written information, which had limited influence in societies in which illiteracy was rampant, audio-visual and other kinds of information knew no frontiers and were thus universal. That said, the fact was unavoidable that the countries of the North had become the centres of production and dissemination of information, while the countries of the South had been reduced to the status of consumers.

26. It was regrettable that the Western press agencies did not in general display objectivity when dealing with third world problems. They projected a stereotyped image of the third world which had more to do with sensationalism. One need only look at the image of Arabs and Islam propagated by the Western media, according to which the Arabs were terrorists and Islam was synonymous with religious fanaticism. The coverage given by the Western media to the Palestinian uprising was also in the nature of information directed by hidden forces. Although the initial reaction of those media had been spontaneous and sincere, it had not been long before the hidden forces had exerted pressure on the media, compelling them to reduce substantially their coverage of events in the occupied territories.

27. The developing countries aspired to the establishment of a new world information and communication order based on the free flow of information; however, that aspiration was not close to being realized as the current world order was merely a reflection of the prevailing economic and political forces. In any event, the establishment of the new order depended on three factors. Firstly, the third world countries must have access to the technological and human resources which would enable their media to compete with those of the Western countries. Secondly,

(Mr. Al-Kawari, Qatar)

the Western media must co-operate with the third world media so as to eliminate the bias in information and to make the countries of the South producers and consumers of information like the countries of the North. Thirdly, the Western media must display greater objectivity and sensitivity when dealing with third world problems.

28. As regards the information activities of United Nations bodies, Qatar was pleased that the Department of Public Information was playing such an important role in alerting world public opinion to the purposes and values of the United Nations, and doing so much to promote peace and economic and social development. The international and regional conferences arranged by the Department to air such important issues as apartheid in South Africa, the questions of Palestine and Namibia, and the economic crisis in Africa, were also worthy of mention. Collaboration in that area between UNESCO and the Department should continue and increase.

29. Mr. IDRIS (Sudan) said that his country had been one of the first to advocate a new world information and communications order - which it saw as an evolving and continuing process rooted in the free circulation and broader, better balanced distribution of information, thus ensuring a diversity of information sources and free access to information - in order to end the dependent status of the developing countries where information and communications were concerned and secure respect for the sovereign equality of nations in such matters. The disparities between North and South, aggravated by technological progress, must be remedied, inasmuch as they tended to encourage notions of political, cultural, economic and military supremacy.

30. His delegation welcomed the favourable turn in international relations and hoped that the easier climate would help the Committee on information to reach consensus on the subjectes of information and communications. His country was highly appreciative of the information campaign on the problems of the third world, especially the critical situation in Africa and the question of debts and debt-servicing, from which the third world was, again, the first to suffer.

31. His country hailed efforts by UNESCO within the International Programme for the Development of Communication, and hoped that UNESCO would expand its assistance for the training of Sudanese personnel and the transfer of communications technology.

32. In recent years the Sudan had suffered from drought, desertification and other natural disasters such as floods and locust swarms. Many programmes designed to help it overcome those disasters were currently being carried out by a range of international organizations such as UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNDP, and other non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. Those activities were not being covered objectively, for the post of Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Khartoum, after standing vacant for years, had been filled only in 1987 and was vacant once again. He called on the Department of Public Information to appoint a new Director quickly; all necessary facilities would be put at his disposal.

33. Mr. ERDENECHULUUN (Mongolia) said that the most important feature of the reorganization in the Department of Public Information was that it might improve the efficiency of the Department in the priority areas defined by the General Assembly. The improvement should affect both the geographical range of its activities and the substance of its work. The importance of those two aspects derived from the enhanced role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, and world public opinion must be made aware of those activities. The United Nations information centres and UNDP resident representatives could play a vital role, and his delegation welcomed the appointment of an information officer to serve in Mongolia.

34. His delegation wholeheartedly supported the work of the Department in training journalists from developing countries. It welcomed the proposal for a group of experts from all regions to consider matters relating to the work of the Department and the design of sundry information programmes. Information and communications ranked among the most acute and important of international problems, and constructive co-operation between States would be needed to do away with the inequalities that existed in that area. The current international climate of détente favoured such co-operation. In that connection, he stressed that the transparency with which the Soviet Union and the United States of America were dealing with the problems between them was creating a new atmosphere of trust which would have direct repercussions in the information field.

35. His country favoured the free and balanced flow of objective information, which should serve as the basis for the new world information and communications order. There was, it emphasized, a correlation between freedom of information and the responsible use of information. That standard should be applied by States and their information services. Freedom of information should be rooted in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and thus serve the cause of peace, trust and understanding between peoples and help to promote more democratic international relations.

36. His delegation considered it important to compile world-wide information programmes under the auspices of the United Nations on the way each nation lived. States, developing countries in particular, would thus be able to play a more active part in exchanges of information, and that would promote greater awareness of other traditions and a better climate in inter-State relations. Such programmes would also make the activities of the United Nations better known and they might thus enjoy broader support in international public opinion. Concerning the work of the Committee on Information, he observed that the Committee's draft recommendations (A/43/21, annex VII) could serve as the basis for a consensus.

37. Mr. HILMI (Iraq) pointed out that the diversification of sources of information and technical progress had indeed allowed information to spread more widely and circulate more freely, but the developed and developing countries were still separated by a broad gulf which must be closed. Unfortunately, the information activities of the United Nations, on which third-world countries pinned enormous hopes, still left much to be desired. The message of the United Nations failed to reach vast sectors of public opinion. Moreover, events which rocked the

(Mr. Hilmi, Iraq)

world were clearly not accorded corresponding prominence by the Organization's information services.

38. It was not his delegation's intention to discredit the deserving efforts of the Department of Public Information, especially since the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had taken up her duties; it would simply like United Nations information efforts to be more comprehensive and provide hard-hitting coverage of the suffering which peoples under the colonial yoke continued to endure.

39. By proving itself incapable of rallying public opinion, the United Nations had left the field clear for information media hostile to the great causes of the developing countries, so that the heroic uprising of the Palestinian people, the question of Namibia and the struggle against apartheid were paid scant attention at the international level. The picture given by the Western media was rarely true to life, and the result was that the lack of understanding and the distrust between peoples were accentuated.

40. In particular, attention should be drawn to the campaigns of disinformation and denigration against the Arab States. There could be no doubt that their purpose was to obscure the scientific and cultural legacy of the Arab nation which had long been Europe's, indeed the world's, only source of enlightenment.

41. Unfortunately, the Western information media had fallen under the spell of the international Zionist lobby, to the extent that peoples could no longer view the reality of the Arab nations except through the distorting prism of the media which that lobby manipulated. The result was that public opinion in the developed countries regarded the legitimate aspirations of the Arab peoples for dignity and well-being as a threat and had in the end become convinced that it was dealing with barbaric societies without faith or law.

42. The United Nations therefore had a crucial role to play. It must re-establish the facts and secure justice for the peoples victims of those campaigns of slander, in particular the Palestinians, who were still being struck down by the bullets of the Zionist occupiers and driven from their native lands, without stirring any interest from the Western information media. Unfortunately, that state of affairs did not seem to arouse any great interest on the part of the United Nations information services either.

43. In the circumstances, the countries of the third world had tried to develop a common response. For example, the Non-Aligned Movement had established a Co-ordination Committee to harmonize the policies of its Member States in that area, with the aim of promoting co-operation, understanding, peace and security in the world. The Ministers of Information of the States members of the Islamic Conference had also held their first meeting to discuss means of solving the problems encountered by their countries' information media.

44. Although 10 years had passed since the establishment of the Committee on Information, most of its objectives had not yet been attained. However, after

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(Mr. Hilmi, Iraq)

listening to the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Information, his delegation was filled with optimism. It nevertheless noted with concern the regrouping of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia into a single department. It would welcome in that connection an assurance from the Director of the Department of Public Information that that measure, dictated by the financial crisis, would improve the Division's performance and would not have the effect of restricting its activities.

45. Mr. RAMBISOON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that contemporary information systems had an enormous capacity and power to mobilize public sentiment throughout the world, and that peoples and Governments could respond positively to such sentiment. Unfortunately, not all the problems of mankind received the same attention from the media. The mandate of the United Nations Department of Public Information had evolved since its establishment, in an effort to meet the changing needs of the Organization; more recently, the Committee on Information had been established to undertake that difficult task. Since publicity was the most effective instrument used by the United Nations to secure implementation of its resolutions and decisions, the functions of the Department of Public Information were vital to the effective operation of the Organization as a whole, and it was therefore very important to formulate definite guidelines for the Department's work. In view of the improvement in the international political climate and the strengthening of the Organization's peace-keeping role, it was regrettable that the Committee on Information had been unable to reach agreement during its meetings in 1988. His delegation hoped therefore that it would be possible to formulate draft principles at the present session. There was a tendency to regard the United Nations as an entity separate from its membership. However, while the Organization did have its own characteristics, the membership could impose changes on it.

46. His delegation believed that freedom of information was a fundamental human right. The domination of the media by the interests of the developed countries bore many resemblances to the international financial picture. The sustained domination of the weaker by the stronger produced a negative return. His delegation supported therefore a new world information and communication order which would enable all peoples to participate effectively in political, economic, social and cultural life and promote human and friendly relations among countries. In that connection, the Department of Public Information would have a crucial role to play in ensuring the free flow of information while maintaining depth, balance and objectivity. His delegation noted with satisfaction the efforts to secure reform undertaken by the Department in order to provide an innovative response to the information needs of the United Nations. However, at the latest session of the Committee on Information it had stated its concern about the introduction of a commercial element into the operations of the United Nations, for the promotion of comity among States might be affected by such considerations. With regard to the structural reorganization of the Department's radio programmes, his delegation thought it imperative to maintain the integrity of the regional units, in order to meet the special needs of each region, in particular the Caribbean, where the audience was higher than the average. Accordingly, the personnel, which included persons with good knowledge and experience of the region, should be maintained at the existing level.

(Mr. Rambissoon, Trinidad and Tobago)

47. The delegation of Trinidad and Tobago supported the draft recommendations submitted by Tunisia on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 (A/43/21, annex III), particularly the measures proposed in paragraph 8. The Committee on Information had itself been unable to agree on all the principles, and his delegation hoped that the task could be accomplished by the Special Political Committee.

48. Mr. OKEYO (Kenya) said that his country was concerned about the negative effects of the reform of the Department of Information, in particular the merging of the anti-apartheid, Namibia and Palestine radio units, for that move would certainly not make the programmes more effective. The Department should give more attention to the question of apartheid in order to reflect the importance which Member States attached to its total elimination. His delegation believed therefore that the Department should reconsider the issue and that the anti-apartheid programme should be kept separate from the other programmes and furnished with the necessary resources.

49. The Kenyan delegation urged the Department to step up the production and distribution of radio programmes. It was particularly concerned by the Department's proposal to cut back the number of professionals in the African Unit and about the fate of the radio programmes broadcast in Kiswahili. The radio programmes were particularly important for the developing countries, for they were a cheap means of disseminating the Organization's messages accessible to millions of people throughout the world. The impact of some of the reform measures carried out in the Department were beginning to be felt in the various services. For instance, the new procedure of covering meetings in either French or English and then translating the texts into the other language did not seem to be producing the envisaged results and had led to frequent delays in the issue of press releases at the present session. His delegation therefore requested the Secretary-General to re-evaluate that procedure, because it was clearly impeding the attainment of the objectives of the Department and the Organization.

50. Although the General Assembly had been considering the question of a new world information and communication order for 10 years, hardly any progress seemed to have been made towards the attainment of that vital goal in the field of information. In view of the increasing scale of interdependence and multilateral co-operation, information was a key component in the enhancement of understanding among States, and it was inevitable that the United Nations system would have to address the existing serious imbalance in the flows of information between the developed and the developing countries. Although some people held that the concept of a new world information and communication order involved the imposition of a uniform communication policy on all countries and that it was synonymous with press censorship, his delegation believed that the concept was in no way inconsistent with the maintenance of free flows of information. The non-aligned countries and other developing countries were pursuing their joint efforts to overcome the obstacles in the field of information and communication. In that respect, the existence of the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries and other similar organizations showed that the developing countries were committed to the goal of establishing a balanced world information order.

(Mr. Okeyo, Kenya)

51. His delegation supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication established by UNESCO, for the co-operation between developing countries and UNESCO would foster self-reliance among developing countries in information matters. Kenya believed in the freedom of the press because it recognized the cardinal role which information played in society, but it also thought that in exercising that freedom the media, like any other sector of society, must demonstrate a sense of responsibility.

52. Mr. TSIMBA (Zimbabwe) said that the arms reduction agreement between the super-Powers, the end of the Persian Gulf War and the promising signs for the resolution of other conflicts had created unprecedentedly propitious conditions for accelerating the pace of economic development in Member States. Information and communication had become crucial factors for development and for the maintenance of world peace and security. The establishment of a new world information and communication order remained a priority goal for the developing countries since it would redress the chronic imbalances in flows of information and would help to enhance the status of young nations and close the huge infrastructure and competence gap between the developing and developed countries.

53. As a member of the Group of 77, Zimbabwe found it regrettable that the Committee on Information had been unable to reach a consensus on a set of recommendations and was committed to facilitating an agreement on the remaining unresolved issues. In her report to the Committee, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had hardly mentioned her Department's activities relating to the anti-apartheid campaign. The staff of the anti-apartheid radio programmes unit had apparently been cut by more than 50 per cent and its programmes combined with those for Namibia and Palestine. He recalled that the Section had been set up in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 32/105 and 33/103 with a view to responding effectively to the insidious propaganda activities of the apartheid régime of South Africa. In that connection, he quoted from the reports of the Fifth Committee to the General Assembly at its thirty-second and thirty-third sessions (document A/C.5/32/79, paras. 21 and 22, and document A/C.5/33/23, paras. 17 and 18). It was distressing that, with the intensification of repression, the increase in acts of aggression and destabilization against the front-line States and neighbouring countries, the campaign of disinformation and the media blackout inside South Africa, the Department had, over the years, continuously reduced the number of anti-apartheid radio programmes. In 1978-1979, the unit had produced some 1,228 programmes a year, a figure which had subsequently risen to 1,825, and had had a staff of 15. It was inconceivable, therefore, that with a staff reduced by more than 50 per cent, it could effectively carry out the tasks assigned to the Department of Information in that area. The lumping together of priority issues was inconsistent with the legislative mandates laid down by the General Assembly, masked the uniqueness of those issues, undermined the effectiveness of programmes and suggested that the Department was relegating those questions to secondary status. Giving figures to support his position, he also expressed concern with the effects of a number of restructuring measures, particularly those regarding the African Regional Radio Unit and the future of radio broadcasts in Swahili and Portuguese.

(Mr. Tsimba, Zimbabwe)

54. He welcomed the Department's co-operation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, Eco-Pool, the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries and other regional news agencies such as the Pan African News Agency and the Organization of Asian News Agencies. The importance of that co-operation had been underlined at the eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Harare in 1986. He also welcomed the efforts made by UNESCO, particularly with regard to training programmes to assist developing countries in setting up information infrastructures. He referred to a recent article in UN Report, a publication of the United Nations Staff Union, describing the difficulties of the Department of Public Information in carrying out the restructuring process and containing some surprising revelations.

55. Mr. BELEYI (Togo) emphasized the keen interest accorded by his Government to information and communication given the many problems caused in international relations by structural imbalances and profound differences in approach. The draft recommendations considered by the representatives of the regional groups and China were the most important result of the work of the tenth session of the Committee on Information. They proved that it was possible to reach a consensus when States were motivated by a genuine political will and kept national interests in check.

56. As a result of rapid and impressive scientific and technological advances, means of information and communication had invested virtually all sectors of national and international life and had wrought profound changes. Currently, as a result of the growing interdependence of States, information, as an energizing factor in national and international life, was an essential component of international co-operation. However, it reflected the ideological and political confrontations and inequalities which typified international society. The Committee on Information, which, under General Assembly resolution 34/182, had been entrusted with promoting mutually advantageous international co-operation in the field of information and encouraging the progressive elimination of structural imbalances between information and communication media throughout the world, had unfortunately made little progress in carrying out its mandate. Given the considerable impact of information and communication on economic, commercial and cultural exchanges and the adverse effects of information disseminated on developing countries, most often with basic commercial motives which sacrificed objectivity to sensationalism, his delegation continued to believe that the only way of ensuring the freer circulation and more objective and balanced dissemination of information was to establish a new world information and communication order. In that regard, the essential role of the United Nations in promoting international co-operation and correcting information imbalances between North and South could not be over-emphasized.

57. The initiatives taken by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information under the Department's restructuring plan would undoubtedly enhance the Organization and improve its international image. In pursuing that process, it was important to adhere scrupulously to the principle of equitable geographical distribution of posts at all levels, particularly those with responsibility, and the balanced use of the Secretariat's two working languages.

(Mr. Beleyi, Togo)

58. Finally, the draft recommendations (see annex VII of document A/43/21) which provided for a dual approach to the establishment of a new world information and communication order, could provide a basis for consensus. His delegation, like others, felt that the time for unproductive and paralysing confrontations was past and that attention should be focused on devising a new system of universal co-operation safeguarding the right of each country to preserve its political and cultural identity and to benefit from the scientific and technological advances in information and communications. The establishment of that new order would, by enabling nations to get to know one another better through the exchange of information, help to strengthen solidarity and understanding and thus consolidate international peace and security.

59. Mr. MOUSHAITI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that although his country was not a member of the Committee on Information, it attached the greatest importance to the item under consideration: it was, indeed, in a good position to know that when information ran counter to the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations it could have a destructive effect on relations between peoples. That was why his country was playing an active part in the work being done by numerous international bodies and especially by the United Nations, with a view to the establishment of a new world information order which would be more balanced, more equitable and capable of promoting understanding and agreement among peoples, and which would take into account the differences between civilizations, traditions, languages and values.

60. In that regard, his delegation considered that the recommendations of the Group of 77 could form the basis for a consensus within the context of the climate of "prudent" optimism which currently prevailed in international relations.

61. His country was one of those which had suffered the most from the pernicious effects of prejudiced and biased information and calumnious campaigns conducted by certain Western circles which monopolized 90 per cent of the world's information media. It would be recalled that all the accusations made against his country in the course of those campaigns had finally proved to be false.

62. His country hoped for a new order that would guarantee responsible and honest information, free of racism and chauvinism. Paradoxically, it was those very circles which claimed to be the champions of the free flow of information and freedom of the press which had advised the leaders of a racist entity which had usurped Palestine to prevent the international information media from reporting on the popular uprising in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. On the other hand, those same circles were conducting a flamboyant campaign in favour of human rights and freedom of the press in certain parts of the world with a view to compelling certain States to send some of their citizens to another country which they knew only by name.

63. Despite all its rhetoric, the tiny minority which monopolized most of the world's information services was preventing developing countries, such as his own, from developing their information media and was depriving the peoples of the world

(Mr. Moushaiti, Libyan Arab
Jamahiriya)

of their legitimate right to knowledge through coercive measures in many fields, including education.

64. His delegation had listened attentively to the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and wished her the greatest success in her work. However, he could not help feeling ill at ease when he heard certain delegations refer constantly to restructuring, reform and rationalization, which had been on the agenda since 1985, especially since that was the favorite theme of the aforementioned minority, which was seeking to discredit the United Nations and impose its political will by coercion. In particular, his delegation feared that the idea of "reform" had a certain political connotation and might be used as a tactical means of weakening the services dealing with questions of concern to the developing countries. His delegation therefore insisted that the Department of Public Information, in accordance with its mandate, should continue to give priority to questions of concern to the third world countries, in particular decolonization, the questions of Namibia and Palestine, the elimination of the apartheid system, the promotion of human rights, disarmament, economic and social development, the resolution of the East-West conflict, the transfer of science and technology, the third world debt and the critical economic situation in Africa. It should also make absolutely sure that there was an equitable geographical distribution of responsible posts in the Department, so that a vast sector of world public opinion could be better informed about the achievements of the United Nations. That would also help to promote co-operation with the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the press agencies of those countries and with international and regional governmental organizations, and to enhance the activities of the United Nations information centres.

65. His delegation welcomed the report by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); in particular, it had noted with satisfaction the part concerning the International Programme for the Development of Communication, given the leading role which the Programme played in helping to preserve the cultural identity of the third world countries. That role was all the more praiseworthy in that the relevant budget represented only a tiny fraction of the income received by the major United States television networks.

66. In that connection, his delegation urged the developed countries to support UNESCO's efforts to help the developing countries to acquire the necessary infrastructure and to train journalists and information technicians. The aim of that assistance was to enable the countries concerned to formulate their information and communication policies in complete independence, taking their socio-cultural values into account.

67. Mr. THIAM (Senegal) said that while supporting most of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General (A/43/639), the Director-General of UNESCO (A/43/670) and the Committee on Information (A/43/21), his delegation wished to make a modest contribution to the analysis of the problems raised.

(Mr. Thiam, Senegal)

68. Senegal attached the greatest importance to training and information, for it regarded the individual as both the origin and the goal of all economic, cultural and social progress. Information was one of the basic elements of Senegal's democratic experience. In Senegal, freedom of expression and opinion was an inalienable right and there were no restrictions on freedom of the press, as was demonstrated by the existence of numerous publications expressing various points of view.

69. It should be remembered, however, that if information was distorted or badly presented, it could be highly detrimental to the interests of a nation and even to the equilibrium of the international community. That was why Senegal hoped to see the speedy establishment of a new world information order based on justice and freedom of access to new communication techniques. In that regard, his delegation could not overemphasize the urgent and imperative need to orient the flow of information appropriately in both directions, so as to establish more dynamic and productive international co-operation; such co-operation was all the more desirable because owing to the impetus of technological progress, information had become essential to every development process. It would be an illusion to believe that one part of the world could develop in peace and security without enabling the other part to benefit from its scientific and technological discoveries.

70. Africa, aware of all the issues at stake, had taken the felicitous initiative of setting up the Pan African News Agency, but the latter might very soon be unable to pursue its course unless it received more international assistance. In that connection, mention should be made of the valuable contribution made by the International Programme for the Development of Communication, despite its modest resources. Mention should likewise be made of the appreciable results achieved by URTNA, whose programmes should receive more support from the international community.

71. His delegation greatly appreciated UNESCO's ongoing work to promote a new world information order, and wished to endorse the appeals to the international community to increase its support for UNESCO's activities. In that connection, the strengthening of the means available to the International Programme for the Development of Communication would be a very positive measure.

72. Senegal welcomed the tremendous effort made by the Organization, under the guidance of the Secretary-General, to support the activities of the Department of Public Information. Despite the competence and dedication of its staff, the Department had so far had difficulty in effectively co-ordinating all the activities within its purview. The establishment of the Communications and Project Management Service was thus welcome. It was, however, important to pursue that innovatory initiative so as to produce programmes that more closely accorded with the wishes of Member States, several of which had asked the Department to give priority to broader dissemination of comprehensive and objective information on the racist and segregationist policy of the contemptible Pretoria régime, the struggle of the Palestinian people and various flagrant human rights violations. In

(Mr. Thiam, Senegal)

particular, with regard to South Africa, increased pressure should be applied on the Pretoria Government to end its censorship of its national and the international press.

73. His delegation endorsed the proposal by Zaire to invite the Department of Public Information to place increased emphasis on the use of French in its activities. Further, greater effort should be made to promote more equitable geographical distribution in respect of senior posts within the Department, to strengthen the training programme for information specialists from developing countries and to promote more effective and fruitful co-operation between the United Nations and the news agencies of the non-aligned countries.

74. Implementation of all those activities would certainly require the mobilization of additional resources, but the results anticipated fully justified such an effort. The development of information technologies and their rational utilization favoured world economic growth and development, and would make an effective contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security.

75. Pursuant to various General Assembly resolutions relating to the items before the Committee, in particular resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, his delegation wished to invite the United Nations and UNESCO to strengthen their co-operation with a view to promoting, by specific measures, the free flow and broader and more balanced dissemination of information. Furthermore, the United Nations must encourage the specialized agencies to improve and promote the dissemination of the statistics and information available to them in developing countries. The Organization should also increase its support for the wide dissemination of information relating to human rights, decolonization and the struggle against all forms of racial discrimination and foreign occupation. Lastly, he urged the Department to give more vigorous support to the dissemination of information on the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development. In particular, greater dissemination should be given to the conclusions and recommendations of the thirteenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the critical economic situation in Africa, and to making donor countries more aware of the serious consequences of the indebtedness of African countries.

76. Lastly, his delegation wished to pay tribute to the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, whose brilliant exposition had provided eloquent evidence of the Organization's determination to strengthen and improve its information activities.

77. Mr. KORSHENI (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the critical importance of the collection, processing and dissemination of information, not only to the day-to-day functioning of the United Nations system but also to the maintenance of world peace and development, justified the interest of delegations, in particular his own, in the items under consideration.

(Mr. Korsheni, United Republic
of Tanzania)

78. It was regrettable that the Committee on Information had been unable to reach a consensus on a set of recommendations to provide the Department with general guidelines. The questions outstanding were not insoluble. The issue was basically one of policy and of determining ways of rectifying the imbalances that currently existed in information flows between the developed and developing countries, imbalances that were further aggravated by developments in communications technology.

79. In its desire to see the establishment of a new information and communication order, his delegation appealed to the members of the Committee to be objective, fair and flexible. Despite the fears harboured in some countries, the concept of the new order was in no way incompatible with the maintenance of the free flow of information.

80. His delegation fully supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication established by UNESCO and called for increased support for that undertaking. Nevertheless, such a programme would make no sense unless the new order went hand in hand with the establishment of the requisite infrastructure in the countries concerned.

81. His delegation had followed with great interest the restructuring of the Department of Public Information, which was important in that it would improve the effectiveness of its work. As radio remained the principal information medium in the majority of developing countries, the impact of various reform measures was disquieting. For example, the drastic reduction in manpower in the Anti-Apartheid Programmes Section of the Radio Service could hardly increase the effectiveness of the Department's activities in that sphere at a time when the racist régime was intensifying its propaganda and disinformation campaign and its censorship of the media in South Africa and Namibia. At a time, too, when there was a glimmer of hope that a settlement of the question of Namibia might be reached, the Department must step up its information activities so that the international community could be duly informed of the situation in Namibia and South Africa. Further, the question of the adaptation of programmes into various languages should be approached with the utmost caution, as his delegation had stressed in the Committee in 1987.

82. Once the restructuring was completed, all decisions affecting mandated programmes should be submitted to the General Assembly before being implemented. With regard to staff, the principle of equitable geographical distribution at the policy-making level must be scrupulously observed.

83. His delegation supported the maintenance of such publications as Development Forum, the United Nations Yearbook and the UN Chronicle, and stressed the importance of seminars, workshops and training programmes, as well as of co-operation between the Department and the pool of non-aligned news agencies and UNESCO. His delegation was satisfied with the work carried out by the Department of Public Information despite fiscal constraints and hoped that it would do even better to disseminate knowledge of the Organization's activities.

AGENDA ITEM 115: PROGRAMME PLANNING (A/SPC/43/L.10)

84. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the letter he had addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/SPC/43/L.10) in which he requested him to forward his letter dated 4 November 1988 addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee as well as a letter dated 3 November 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Group of 77, stating the views of the Group of 77 on item 115.

The meeting rose at 1:10 p.m.