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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Summary of observations of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council on the report of the Committee on Freedom of Information of the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/762 and Corr.1)

1. By resolution 683 C (XXVI) the Economic and Social Council requested the Commission on Human Rights to complete its recommendations on freedom of information in the light of the report (E/CN.4/762 and Corr.1) of the Committee on Freedom of Information which the Commission established at its thirteenth session, and the comments of States Members of the United Nations or members of specialized agencies, of the specialized agencies and of interested non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council, for review by the Council.
2. Comments on the report by Governments and by specialized agencies are reproduced in documents E/CN.4/771 and E/CN.4/772 respectively.
3. A summary of comments on the Committee's report forwarded by non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council appears below. The full texts of these comments are available for consultation.

Fédération internationale des éditeurs de journaux et publications:

The Fédération internationale des éditeurs de journaux et publications forwarded to the Secretary-General the texts of two resolutions, adopted at its eleventh Congress (Tokyo-Isaka, June 1958) which referred specifically to aspects of the work of the United Nations in freedom of information. One resolution viewed with satisfaction the activities of the United Nations and

UNESCO in freedom of information and expressed the wish that this work should be further developed, in particular through a close co-operation with "the great international professional associations of publishers and journalists." The other resolution referred to discussion of the subject of the transmission of press messages at the International Telegraph and Telephone Conference (Geneva, 29 September 1958) and stressed the importance of this subject as an essential factor in "real freedom of information".

World Federation of United Nations Associations:

The Federation drew attention to a resolution adopted by its Sixth Plenary Session in 1951 in which the Federation stressed the importance of enacting and implementing a convention on freedom of information as a contribution to peace and international understanding and recommended that the Economic and Social Council consider the establishment of an independent committee within the United Nations to examine allegations of infringements of freedom of information. The Federation welcomed the suggestion in the report of the Committee on Freedom of Information that UNESCO be asked to continue and intensify its work on freedom of information and expressed the belief that the United Nations itself can contribute to freedom of information through an active public information policy. The Federation further expressed the belief that the United Nations family, particularly such agencies as UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union, can contribute to advancing freedom of information by assisting in the development of media of information in many countries.

International League for the Rights of Man:

The International League for the Rights of Man referred to an exposition of its views by its representative at the fourteenth session of the Commission on Human Rights (see documents E/CN.4/SR.601 and 604, and E/CN.4/NGO.80).

International Federation of Free Journalists

The International Federation of Free Journalists commented on the report of the Committee on Freedom of Information under the four main points dealt with in the Committee's report, namely:

- (1) Development of media of information in under-developed countries,
- (2) Free circulation of information,
- (3) Rights and responsibilities of media of information,
- (4) Work of the United Nations and specialized agencies in the field of freedom of information.

In commenting on the work of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies in the field of freedom of information, the Federation expressed the opinion that it is premature to attempt to finalize conventions in this field since before this can be done "the original meaning should be restored to ideals of truth, honesty of reporting, freedom of expression, free flow of information and to democracy, in relations between individuals and nations." The Federation added that the United Nations and UNESCO should always consider the fact that agreements reached in regard to such matters as postal facilities for information material, facilities for travel, etc. may be jeopardized by Governments which are prepared to curtail the substance of such agreements.

In regard to the rights and responsibilities of media of information, the Federation believed that at the present time these cannot be specified in view of the varying concepts under different forms of government. The Federation examined the position of the press in this respect in some selected countries.

With respect to the free circulation of information, the Federation stated that this is the most important single item safeguarding true freedom of information. The Federation stated that the situation called for the following steps:

- (a) denunciation of all practices of censorship of news flowing from country to country;
- (b) condemnation of, and an attempt to persuade Governments of all nations alike to cease, practices of temporary limitation of a free flow of information;

- (c) requesting free circulation of information, freedom of movement and news gathering for newspapermen;
- (d) limitation of press monopolies;
- (e) condemnation of interference with or jamming of radio broadcasts;
- (f) reduction of telegram rates to a minimum cost; and
- (g) the freest possible circulation of foreign newspapers and magazines.

Commenting on the problem of the development of media of information in under-developed countries, the Federation believed that the approach of the United Nations and UNESCO to this problem was most appropriate. In the opinion of the Federation, under-developed countries need:

- "(a) training in journalism and broadcasting techniques;
- (b) physical requirements include machinery, newsprint, etc.;
- (c) low international press cable rates; and
- (d) understanding of the function of the press in a free and democratic society."
