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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

Report of the Special Political Committee

Rapporteur: Miss Nonet M. DAPUL (Philippines)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The item entitled "Questions relating to information" was included in the provisional agenda of the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly in accordance with Assembly resolution 43/60 A of 6 December 1988.
2. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 22 September 1989, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include the item in its agenda and to allocate it to the Special Political Committee.
3. The Special Political Committee considered the item at its 15th to 19th and 25th meetings, held between 6 and 13 November and on 22 November 1989 (see A/SPC/44/SR.15-19 and 25).
4. The Committee had before it the following documents:
  - (a) Report of the Committee on Information; 1/
  - (b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/44/653);
  - (c) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (A/44/509);

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21).

(d) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of United Nations public information networks - United Nations Information Centres" (JIU/REP/89/6) (A/44/329) and the comments of the Secretary-General thereon (A/44/329/Add.1);

(e) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of United Nations public information networks - Reorganization of the Department of Public Information" (JIU/REP/89/5) (A/44/433) and the comments of the Secretary-General thereon (A/44/433/Add.1).

5. The Committee also had before it a letter dated 19 July 1989 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/44/409-S/20743 and Corr.1 and Corr.2), a letter dated 1 September 1989 from the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/44/499) and a letter dated 22 September 1989 from the Permanent Representative of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/44/551-S/20870).

6. At its 2nd meeting, on 5 October, the Committee decided to establish an open-ended working group on questions relating to information, chaired by Ambassador Charles S. Flemming (Saint Lucia), Vice-Chairman of the Committee. The Working Group based its work on two non-papers entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities" and "Information in the service of humankind", respectively, which had been prepared by the Chairman of the Committee on Information, and amended as a result of the negotiations conducted in the course of the eleventh session of that Committee.

7. At its 15th meeting, on 6 November, the Committee heard introductory statements by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, by the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Information and by the Director of the Liaison Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (see A/SPC/44/SR.15).

8. By a letter dated 17 November 1989, the Chairman of the Working Group on questions relating to information, informed the Chairman of the Special Political Committee of the outcome of the work carried out by the Working Group, stating that, owing to time constraints, the Working Group had considered only the non-paper entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities" and, although the Working Group had made substantial progress, it had failed to reach consensus. Accordingly, the Working Group recommended that the Special Political Committee should return the non-paper, entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities" as amended in the course of the negotiations in the Working Group, to the Chairman of the Committee on Information for whatever action that Committee deemed appropriate.

9. At its 23rd meeting, on 21 November, the Chairman of the Special Political Committee informed members that, pursuant to the recommendation of the Working Group, he had forwarded that paper by a letter dated 20 November 1989 to the Chairman of the Committee on Information.

## II. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS

### A. Draft resolution A/SPC/44/L.26

10. At the 25th meeting, on 22 November, the representative of Malaysia introduced a draft resolution (A/SPC/44/L.26) on behalf of States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77.

11. At the same meeting, on the basis of the information provided by the Programme Planning and Budget Division, the Chairman made an oral statement of the programme budget implications in respect of draft resolution A/SPC/44/L.26.

12. At the same meeting, the Committee then adopted draft resolution A/SPC/44/L.26 by a recorded vote of 107 to 2, with 20 abstentions (see para. 15). The voting was as follows:

In favour: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Kampuchea, Democratic Yemen, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, German Democratic Republic, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against: Israel, United States of America.

Abstaining: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Federal Republic of, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

13. Following the voting on the draft resolution, statements in explanation of vote were made by the representatives of Austria, the United States, Israel, China, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, Australia, France (on behalf of the Twelve members of the European Community), Canada and Japan.

B. Candidacy for membership in the Committee on Information

14. At the 25th meeting, on 22 November, the Chairman drew attention to paragraph 16 of the report of the Committee on Information, 1/ in which the Committee, supporting the request of Nepal for membership, decided to submit the candidacy to the General Assembly for approval. At the same meeting, the Committee agreed to recommend to the General Assembly the candidacy of Nepal for membership in the Committee on Information (see para. 16 below).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE

15. The Special Political Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Questions relating to information

The General Assembly,

Recalling its previous resolutions on questions relating to information,

Reaffirming the mandate given to the Committee on Information by the General Assembly in its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, 2/

Also taking note of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit 3/ and the conclusions and recommendations therein concerning the reorganization of the Department of Public Information, as well as the comments of the Secretary-General thereon, 4/

Encouraging the Secretary-General to continue necessary action in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, with particular emphasis on securing a co-ordinated approach to priority issues before the Organization,

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2/ A/44/653.

3/ A/44/433.

4/ A/44/433/Add.1, annex.

Taking note of the comprehensive report of the Committee on Information, 5/ which served as an important basis and stimulated further deliberations,

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Information in the service of mankind

Urges the full implementation of the following recommendations:

(1) All countries, the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned should, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and adhering to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, co-operate and interact in responding to the call for the establishment of a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process, aimed at eliminating the existing imbalances between developed and developing countries in the field of information and communication, at reducing existing disparities in information flows at the international as well as the national level and at improving the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process, based on the free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information as well as on the meaningful and equal participation of all countries in the field of information and communication, ensuring the diversity of sources of and free access to information and intended to advance the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples through all means of mass communication as an important contribution towards strengthening international peace and understanding. The central role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in this regard, in line with that organization's strategies, should be reaffirmed;

(2) Fully aware of the important role that the media world-wide can freely play, the mass media should be encouraged to give wider and objective coverage to the efforts of the international community towards global development and, in particular, the efforts of the developing countries to achieve economic, social and cultural progress;

(3) All countries are urged to assure to journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks; all physical attacks against them should be resolutely condemned;

(4) Aware of the existing imbalances in the international distribution of news, particularly that affecting the developing countries, it is recommended that urgent attention should be given to the elimination of existing inequalities and the reduction of existing disparities in information flows at the international as well as the national level, to the encouragement of the free flow and the promotion of wider and better balanced dissemination of information, without any obstacle to freedom of expression, and to the advancement of mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples through the diversification of sources of information, respecting the interests, aspirations and socio-cultural values of all peoples;

(5) The United Nations system as a whole, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the developed countries should be urged to co-operate in a concerted manner with the developing countries and their media, public, private and other, with a view to strengthening the information and communication infrastructure in the latter countries and promoting their access to advanced communication technology, in accordance with their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by the developing countries, so as to enable them and their media to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and in the light of their social and cultural values, adhering to the principle of freedom of information and freedom of the press. In this regard, support should be provided for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries;

(6) Regional efforts and co-operation among developing countries, as well as co-operation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to develop further the media infrastructure in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information, should be enhanced so as to encourage the free flow and promote wider and better balanced dissemination of information;

(7) The United Nations system, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in addition to bilateral co-operation, should aim at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public and private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including in particular:

(a) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(b) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(c) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(8) Full support should be provided for the International Programme for the Development of Communication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media;

## II

### United Nations public information policies and activities

1. Calls upon the Secretary-General, in respect of United Nations public information policies and activities, to implement the following recommendations:

(1) The United Nations system as a whole should co-operate in a concerted manner, through its information services, in promoting a more comprehensive and realistic image of the activities and potential of the United Nations system in all its endeavours, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, with particular emphasis on the creation of a climate of confidence, the strengthening of multilateralism and the promotion of the development activities in the United Nations system;

(2) Reaffirming the primary role of the General Assembly in elaborating, co-ordinating and harmonizing United Nations policies and activities in the field of information, the Secretary-General should be requested to ensure that the activities of the Department of Public Information, as the focal point of the public information tasks of the United Nations, are strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter, the priority areas defined by the Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information, so as to ensure an objective and more coherent coverage of, as well as better knowledge about, the United Nations and its work. It is recommended that the Secretary-General should ensure that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Co-operate more regularly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, especially at the working level, with a view to maximizing the contribution of the Department to the efforts of that organization in:

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- (i) Encouraging the free flow of information, at the international as well as the national level;
- (ii) Promoting the wider and better balanced dissemination of information, without any obstacle to the freedom of expression;
- (iii) Developing all the appropriate means of strengthening communication capacities in the developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process;
- (iv) Advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples through all means of mass communication and, to that end, recommending such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image;

(b) Enhance its co-operation with news agencies of and in the developing countries, in particular the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, the Eco-Pool of the News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries and the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as with other news agencies and intergovernmental and regional organizations;

(c) Continue to disseminate, in co-ordination with the information services of other relevant agencies, information about United Nations activities pertaining, inter alia, to:

- (i) International peace and security;
- (ii) Disarmament;
- (iii) Peace-keeping operations;
- (iv) Decolonization and the situation in the Non-Self-Governing Territories;
- (v) The elimination of foreign occupation;
- (vi) Human rights;
- (vii) The elimination of all forms of racial discrimination;
- (viii) The advancement of the status of women and their role in society;
- (ix) The problems of economic and social development, as well as international economic co-operation aimed at resolving external debt problems;
- (x) The environment;



- (xi) The campaign against terrorism in all its forms, bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 40/61 of 9 December 1985;
- (xii) The international campaign against drug abuse and illicit trafficking, including adequate coverage of the special session of the General Assembly to consider the question of international co-operation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs, with a view to expanding the scope and increasing the effectiveness of such co-operation, to be held from 20 to 23 February 1990;
- (d) Do its utmost to disseminate widely and to publicize the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 and the tremendous efforts of the African countries towards recovery and development, as well as the positive response by the international community to alleviate the serious economic situation prevailing in Africa;
- (e) Strengthen its activities and the dissemination of information on United Nations activities against the policies and practices of apartheid, giving due attention to the unilateral measures and official censorship imposed on the local and international media with regard to all aspects of that issue, provide adequate coverage of the sixteenth special session of the General Assembly on apartheid and its destructive consequences in southern Africa, to be held from 12 to 14 December 1989, and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twelfth session, in 1990;
- (f) Continue to disseminate information about activities of the United Nations directed at a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of international conflicts by exclusively peaceful means;
- (g) Continue to cover all United Nations activities pertaining to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine in particular, and current developments therein, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twelfth session, in 1990;
- (h) Continue to disseminate information about Namibia, in particular the current independence process as provided for in Security Council resolution 435 (1978) of 29 September 1978; the Department should make adequate plans for the establishment of an information centre in Namibia, consulting thereon with the Government of the new nation immediately after independence;
- (i) Ensure the provision of coverage of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to international economic co-operation, in particular to the revitalization of economic growth and development of the developing countries, to be held from 23 to 27 April 1990;

(3) The Department of Public Information should continue its efforts in promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations system among the peoples of the world and in strengthening the image of the United Nations system as a whole and, in this connection, it is recommended that the Secretary-General should ensure that the Department:

(a) Continue to maintain consistent editorial independence and accuracy in reporting all material it produces, taking necessary measures to ensure that its output contains adequate, objective and equitable information about issues before the Organization, reflecting divergent opinions where they occur;

(b) In the context of the review of its role, performance and method of work, continue to apply appropriate modern technologies for the collection, production, storage, dissemination and distribution of information materials, including the use of satellite facilities;

(c) Consider expanding the programme of telephone news bulletins that are paid for by its users;

(d) Continue its co-operation with those countries that have expressed readiness to assist the United Nations in resuming the short-wave broadcasts through their respective national networks free of charge and to encourage expansion of such a type of co-operation with those developed and developing countries with recognized capabilities in this field;

(e) Take adequate measures to resume the taped radio programmes, which it has temporarily curtailed, if so requested by broadcasting stations;

(f) Continue its briefing, assistance and orientation programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries focused on United Nations-related issues;

(g) Identify new forms of co-operation, at the regional and subregional levels, for the training of media professionals and for the improvement of the infrastructure of developing countries in the field of information and communication;

(h) Co-operate with educational institutions of Member States, educators and education policy-makers, informing them about United Nations activities;

(i) Ensure adequate daily coverage of United Nations open meetings in the two working languages of the Secretariat, reflecting the views of all delegations with accuracy and objectivity. It should also continue to co-operate closely with and provide assistance to members of the United Nations Correspondents' Association, taking into account their

needs and requirements, especially in the area of press releases, press conferences and briefings, which provide them with basic information for reporting;

(j) Use the official languages of the United Nations adequately in its documents and audio-visual documentation and make balanced use of the two working languages of the Secretariat;

(k) Ensure timely distribution of its material to subscribers and to United Nations information centres;

(4) The Department of Public Information should produce and distribute its publications in a timely manner. In particular, the Secretary-General should be requested to make further efforts regarding the timely appearance of the United Nations Yearbook. The improvement in format and printing of the United Nations Chronicle is welcome. The Department is encouraged to continue to consider the interests of the specific target audiences as it formulates its editorial policies;

(5) The Secretary-General is urged to continue his efforts to secure a sound and stable financial basis for the publications Development Forum and Africa Recovery;

(6) It is recognized that United Nations information centres constitute an important means of disseminating information about the United Nations among the people of the world. In this regard, United Nations information centres should intensify direct and systematic communication exchange with local media, information and educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. The Department should arrange for periodic evaluation of the centres' activities in this regard. Every effort should be made to establish close co-ordination with other field offices of the United Nations system, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme, in order to avoid duplication of work, taking into account the functional autonomy that the United Nations information centres should have. A report should be submitted to the Committee on Information after the first year of the provisional understanding between the Department and the United Nations Development Programme, reached in accordance with recommendation 37 (3) of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations. 6/ The Department should provide open and unhindered access by all people to all United Nations information centres and to all materials distributed through the centres. It is also urged to accelerate the process of linking the remaining United Nations information centres that have not been linked with electronic mail;

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6/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

(7) Stressing the need for co-ordinating the information activities of the United Nations system and recognizing the important role that the Joint United Nations Information Committee plays in that regard, the Department of Public Information is encouraged to continue its active participation in the work of that Committee;

(8) It is recognized that free distribution of materials is necessary in the public information activities of the United Nations. However, as demands increase and whenever it is desirable and possible, the Department of Public Information should actively encourage the sale of its materials;

(9) The Secretary-General is requested to ensure that the reorganization and restructuring of the Department of Public Information strengthen and improve the output of the mandated programmes and activities of the Department, taking into account, in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Charter and of General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, the need for equitable geographical distribution of posts, especially keeping in mind the levels at which developing countries are underrepresented;

(10) In view of the importance of radio programmes in developing countries, the Secretary-General is requested to enhance the efficiency of and to ensure full programme delivery by all regional radio units, namely, the African, Asian, Caribbean, European, Latin American and Middle Eastern Units and the Anti-Apartheid Programmes Section, including production of radio programmes called for in General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983;

(11) All reports by the Secretary-General, as well as by representatives of the Department of Public Information, to the Committee on Information and to the General Assembly, in particular on new programmes or on the expansion of existing programmes, should contain:

(a) Detailed information on the output of the Department on each topic included in its work programme, which forms the basis of its programme budget;

(b) The costs of the activities undertaken on each topic;

(c) Adequate information on target audiences, end-use of the Department's products and analysis of feedback data received by the Department;

(d) A statement detailing the priority level that the Secretary-General has attached to current or future activities of the Department in documents dealing with such activities;

(e) The Department's evaluation of the effectiveness of its different programmes and activities, with particular reference to the need constantly to review internal programme elements and activities;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to implement the recommendations relating to the activities of the Department of Public Information in accordance with the budgetary procedures as approved by the General Assembly in its resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 42/211 of 21 December 1987 and 43/213 of 21 December 1988, and taking into account the priorities set by the Assembly;

3. Supports the Secretary-General in his continuing efforts to restructure and revitalize the Department of Public Information, based on the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/213;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twelfth session in 1990 on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations in the present resolution;

5. Also requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session on the implementation of the present resolution;

6. Requests the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session;

7. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its forty-fifth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

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16. The Special Political Committee recommends to the General Assembly the candidacy of Nepal for membership in the Committee on Information.

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