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SUB-COMMISSION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OF THE PRESS

TEXT OF STATEMENT MADE AT THE SIXTH MEETING OF FIRST SESSION OF SUB-COMMISSION
ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OF THE PRESS BY GENERAL FRANK E. STONER
(DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT)
ON INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THEIR
SIGNIFICANCE IN THE FIELD OF
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

General STONER: I speak as a Member of the Secretariat. My purpose in speaking to you this afternoon is to acquaint you with what is going on at the International Telecommunications Conference in Atlantic City and to give you a brief summary of the impact of electrical communications on the general field of freedom of information.

The International Telecommunications Union is a body of long standing. It operates on having a conference every five years; it regulates all phases of international communications by agreement; it has to do with the setting aside of different portions of the radio spectrum -- setting up those frequencies for broadcasting, for point-to-point message service, for aircraft, safety of life at sea, and the general mobile services. This body has under its control a bureau known as the Berne Bureau which registers all frequencies allocated to the different nations.

Communications today are changing so rapidly that it is necessary to have a permanent body constantly in session which can regulate and establish methods for the uninterrupted flow of communications between nations. For this reason, one of the important assignments which this International Telecommunications Union Conference will decide on will be the re-organization of the Union. The general consensus of opinion, as expressed thus far, is that it will consist of a permanent Secretariat, an administrative council,

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and a frequency registration board.

There are many practices in the world today on the regulation of communications between nations that vitally affect freedom of information by electrical means. Each nation has its own regulatory body and has its own laws regarding the passage of written information between its own country and other countries. Certain practices slow up communications, and when we consider the general field of information, we must always consider the written record, electrical communications, the voice communications and all of the by-products of radio.

During the war millions of dollars were spent to develop rapid means of communications. The Allied Governments had networks covering all sections of the world. Messages were passed between nations in a few seconds, rapidly. This was possible because there was no intervening national Government which set up regulatory practices, which would slow up the passage of the information either by voice or by written record. During the height of the war our American Army transmitted throughout the world fifty million words daily. This is a tremendous volume of traffic, and it was done expeditiously because of the lack of national practices in slowing up the passage between borders.

Radio knows no border. The spectrum which radio occupies is rather limited. It is being developed in the higher portion of the spectrum constantly. The high frequency portion of the spectrum, which is the proven portion now in use, is the main portion that we depend on in passing information between nations today.

Therefore, this Sub-Commission and the Conference that follows must take cognizance of that fact and do everything possible to maintain at least the present position. During the war years many assignments were made in the space allotted to broadcasting. Frequencies were taken over by nations without any consideration for the effect that the use of these frequencies would have upon other nations.

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It will be one of the main missions of the present Conference in Atlantic City to readjust and reassign these frequencies so that they will not cause interference. For that reason, we feel this Sub-Commission must go on record for the International Conference on Communications to make adequate provision for international broadcasting. We also feel the Sub-Commission should take cognizance of the fact that standardization is necessary today in order that receivers and ordinary radio equipment will have the same general principles of design in one country as exist in other countries. Through this means we will be able, in our broadcasting from all nations, to reach all the peoples of the world and thereby expect to obtain a better degree of mutual understanding.

It was very interesting to me, this afternoon, to note that the International Telecommunications Conference had the same problem which you have just disposed of.

There were some twenty international bodies that attempted to gain participation in the International Telecommunications Conference. The decision arrived at after a meeting of the chiefs of delegations was that each international body -- and the United Nations was included as an international body -- would be classified as a provisional observer for one week. At the end of the week, if no member nation of the International Telecommunications Union objected to their participation as observers, they would then continue as such and become regular observers. If there was an objection by any member nation, that objection would be submitted to the Executive Sub-Committee of the Steering Committee. At the hearing of the Executive Sub-Committee, the international body would be allowed to present its reasons for desiring participation. That appeared to be an excellent solution, and all the international bodies appeared to be satisfied with the decision.

As observers, the international bodies have the right to visit any committee and make a statement without having to present their views through

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a member nation. They are also authorized in the plenary session to make proposals. All of the international bodies, without exception, accepted that decision.

We feel that this Sub-Commission, in view of the many by-products which have come out of our wartime development in the general field of radio, may wish to ask the ITU, the International Telecommunications Union, which will remain in session until approximately 1 September, to prepare a survey and analysis of the different practices and methods now in use that effect the passage of information electrically among nations. If this is done, it is fortunate that both this Sub-Commission and the International Telecommunications Union are in session at the same time. It means, if an understanding is reached at this time, action can be initiated which will permit the International Telecommunications Union to take positive action so that it can complete its agreement before the end of its convention which, as I stated, would be approximately 1 September.

We strongly feel that, in the efficient accomplishment of our aims in international relations, there must be taken into consideration the most important means of passing information among nations -- namely, electrical communications. I have just witnessed a demonstration of the passage of written information at a speed of five thousand words per minute. We do not have to be any Buck Rogers to estimate or predict that it is not far off when we will be able to print newspapers by this process between nations, so that the American newspapers can be read in the United Kingdom at the same time they are read in America, and newspapers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Moscow can be read here at the same time they are read in Moscow.

Therefore, we urge this Sub-Commission to give consideration to the acquisition from the International Telecommunications Union of their full analysis of this problem. I am sure they are in a position to support findings which will result in the free passage of information among nations.
