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STATEMENT ON UNESCO'S ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF FREEDOM OF
INFORMATION DURING THE PERIOD JUNE 1951 - MARCH 1952

Submitted by the Secretariat of UNESCO

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO's activities in the field of freedom of information since 1947 were outlined in a report prepared as part of UNESCO's contribution to the documentation for the Sub-Commission's Fifth Session (Document E/CN.4/Sub.1/142). That report, intended for the 1951 Session of the Sub-Commission, described developments up to June of that year. The Sub-Commission may, therefore, wish to have a statement bringing up to date the earlier summary of UNESCO's efforts in this field of mutual interest and co-operative action.

It will be recalled that the report reviewed UNESCO's activities for freedom of information under four headings, corresponding to the methods employed:

- I. Sponsorship of international Agreements and recommendations;
- II. Joint action with other Agencies of the United Nations;
- III. Assessing and developing of technical facilities in press, radio and film;
- IV. Publications on matters related to freedom of information.

Developments subsequent to the June 1951 report may be considered under the same headings.

I. INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The two UNESCO-sponsored international Agreements for the reduction of tariff and trade obstacles to the circulation of educational, scientific and cultural materials gained new support in the period under review. By the end of February 1952, the Agreement for Facilitating the International Circulation of Visual and Auditory Materials of an Educational, Scientific and Cultural Character had been signed by 18⁽¹⁾ countries; it had been ratified or accepted by six⁽²⁾.

The Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials has been signed to date by 23⁽³⁾ countries and ratified or accepted by six⁽⁴⁾.

(1) Afghanistan	El Salvador	Norway
Brazil	Greece	Pakistan
Canada	Haiti	Philippines
Denmark	Iran	United States of America
Dominican Republic	Lebanon	Uruguay
Ecuador	Netherlands	Yugoslavia.

(2) Cambodia, Canada, Norway, Pakistan, Syria, Yugoslavia.

(3) Afghanistan	Egypt	Netherlands
Belgium	France	New Zealand
Bolivia	Greece	Pakistan
China	Guatemala	Philippines
Colombia	Haiti	Sweden
Dominican Republic	Iran	Switzerland
Ecuador	Israel	United Kingdom.
El Salvador	Luxembourg	

(4) Cambodia, Ceylon, Egypt, Thailand, Yugoslavia, Pakistan.

Moreover, a considerable number of governments informed UNESCO that they were taking steps to obtain parliamentary approval of the Agreements, and some acted forthwith to bring their tariff practices into line with the provisions of the Agreements. It may, in fact, be hoped that before the end of this year, each of the two Agreements will have acquired the ten adherences necessary for it to enter into force.

COPYRIGHT

The lack of universal copyright protection - a pervasive obstacle to the free flow of information - has engaged UNESCO's attention since 1947. It will be recalled that various international committees of copyright experts met under UNESCO's auspices, the most recent one in Paris in June 1951. The preliminary draft of a Universal Copyright Convention was prepared, based on the idea that every country should accord the same copyright protection to foreign authors and artists as to its own nationals. The final text of the Convention is to be submitted for adoption and signature at an intergovernmental conference in Geneva in August 1952.

COLLECTION OF CULTURAL AGREEMENTS

The texts of some 220 bilateral and multilateral cultural Agreements have been published in a loose-leaf collection, to which 80 more will shortly be added. These may be of interest to the Sub-Commission in view of the fact that the Agreements contain a considerable number of provisions for radio relays and the exchange of information personnel and press publications. A first general study of the content and geographical pattern of the existing cultural Agreements is to be submitted to the next session of the General Conference of UNESCO, together with suggestions of measures to extend the application of the Agreements.

INTERNATIONAL COUPON SCHEME

Another means devised by UNESCO to secure freer circulation of educational, scientific and cultural materials is the International Coupon Scheme. The scheme, it will be remembered, helps to overcome currency restrictions by enabling soft currency countries to purchase internationally-valid coupons from UNESCO. These coupons are obtainable against local currency and enable institutions and individuals of participating countries to buy publications, films, or scientific equipment from hard currency countries. UNESCO provides a fund of hard currency for clearing purposes.

The scheme has now been in operation for over three years. By the end of February 1952, 30 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America were participating in the scheme as purchasers or suppliers, and coupons to a total value of \$1,790,000 had been circulated.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

In response to a series of eleven recommendations adopted by the General Conference at its Fifth Session, a number of governments have taken steps to reduce certain economic, administrative and legal obstacles to the movement of ideas and persons. In addition to a marked readiness to adhere to the two previously-mentioned UNESCO conventions, Member States have responded favourably to the other recommendations as well. Details were included in the summary report which this brief statement is intended to bring up to date. To quote one striking example: eleven governments have reduced postal rates on printed matter, including press publications, and indicated that they were

prepared to apply more widely the system initiated by the Universal Postal Union which permits payment in national currency at local post offices for subscriptions to foreign newspapers and periodicals.

The first series of recommendations having been fulfilled to the extent considered possible by Member States, the Director-General plans to submit a second series of recommendations to the forthcoming session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1952. These will take account of the documentation prepared by the United Nations Secretariat for the current session of the Sub-Commission.

II. JOINT ACTION WITH OTHER AGENCIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Universal Postal Union

The apparent readiness of UNESCO's Member States to promote the free flow of information through postal channels induced UNESCO to seek the extension of existing dispensations within the framework of the Universal Postal Convention. Accordingly, twelve proposed amendments to the Convention, designed to facilitate the international postal dispatch of newspapers, magazines, books and educational films, were commended to governments for submission to the Congress of the Universal Postal Union, which will be convened in Brussels in May of this year. Initial replies from governments indicate that most, and probably all of the UNESCO-proposed amendments will be submitted to the Congress for adoption.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSIONS

Progress was also registered in the efforts undertaken by UNESCO jointly with the regional Economic Commissions of the United Nations to increase the availability of educational and scientific materials. In response to the recommendations of a working-party sponsored jointly by UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, a number of governments in that region took steps to include educational and scientific materials in new trade agreements, to increase the production of such materials, and to allocate a greater amount of foreign exchange for their purchase abroad.

In Europe, negotiations were initiated with two governments to extend credit facilities to countries in Asia for the procurement of urgently needed educational items. Finally, in Latin America data were gathered on the

requirements of the countries in that region, prior to the convening of a working party under the joint auspices of UNESCO and the Economic Commission for Latin America.

This co-operative endeavour with the Economic Commissions, limited in its first phase to increasing the availability of a number of urgently needed items of scientific equipment and auditory-visual aids to education, will be extended, as the programme develops, to include press, radio and film equipment.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

As the Sub-Commission is aware, UNESCO has attempted, in co-operation with the International Telecommunications Union, to help to secure a more effective use of telecommunication facilities for the communication of information. Thus, with the support of a number of news associations, UNESCO urged the International Telephone and Telegraph Conference in Paris 1949, to accord high priorities and reduced rates for press messages.

A rare opportunity for action is presented by the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunications Union, which is holding its first session in five years in Buenos Aires in October 1952. Proposals for revision of the Telecommunications Convention are being formulated for submission to the Buenos Aires Conference. These will be designed, as in the case of the Universal Postal Convention, mentioned above, to promote the wider use of the existing facilities for the free flow of information.

III. ASSESSING AND DEVELOPING TECHNICAL FACILITIES IN PRESS, RADIO AND FILM

With regard to UNESCO's efforts to assess and develop technical facilities in press, radio and film, it need only be noted that the world survey, initiated in 1947, was completed in 1951, a total of 156 states and territories having been covered. The fifth and last volume, on the 1951 surveys, will be published this year.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

UNESCO's assistance as regards professional training of information personnel included, since June 1951, the award of five more fellowships in press, radio and film to nationals of Uruguay, Ceylon and Sweden, making a

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total of 56 fellowships awarded and administered by UNESCO since 1947. In addition, UNESCO administered three travel grants allocated to Yugoslav radio specialists for study in Western Europe; one press fellowship allocated to Korea and one for films allocated to Indonesia.

UNESCO continues to provide comprehensive information on international study opportunities. Volume 4 of "Study Abroad", to be published this month, lists about 38,000 fellowships, including about 50 as available for work in the information field. Of the total number of fellowships listed, many are available without restrictions as to study fields and are, therefore, open to students in press, radio and film.

UNESCO has also issued "Travel Abroad", a comprehensive document listing travel regulations and facilities for some 90 countries, dependencies and trust territories.

INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE

As regards the International Institute of Press and Information, the Sub-Commission will be aware that, following upon UNESCO's initial effort, an independent institute was established at Zurich, with which UNESCO maintains contact for the exchange of publications and documents.

NEWSPRINT

The newsprint crisis in 1951 led to intensified efforts on the part of UNESCO to encourage remedial measures. On the basis of extensive data on various aspects of the newsprint problem, UNESCO's General Conference, at its Sixth Session, adopted a special resolution concerning the increased production and distribution of newsprint and other printing paper. The Director-General communicated the recommendations of the General Conference to the 14 States represented on the Paper and Pulp Committee of the International Raw Materials Conference; he also appealed directly to UNESCO's Member States for concerted action to overcome the critical shortage of this vital commodity. Fifteen States indicated that they had taken, or intended to take, appropriate measures.

Simultaneously, in a special appeal, the Director-General pointed to the dangers to educational advancement and information resulting from the continued newsprint and paper crisis. This appeal was widely publicized in the press, radio and newsreels.

/At UNESCO's request,

At UNESCO's request, the newsprint problem was also placed on the agenda of the 13th session of the Economic and Social Council, which thereupon adopted a resolution calling for increased production and improved world distribution. Furthermore, the Food and Agricultural Organization, at its Sixth Session, 1951, unanimously adopted a resolution in which a programme of practical measures to overcome the newsprint shortage was outlined. In particular, Member States were invited to avail themselves of facilities offered to them by the enlarged Technical Assistance Plan and to request from the FAO expert missions and technical advice on relevant forestry problems and on the establishment of new paper mills.

UNESCO PUBLICATIONS CONCERNING FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

In conclusion, the Sub-Commission may wish to be brought up to date on recent UNESCO publications concerning freedom of information. Details of some 30 of these publications have already been brought to its attention in previous summaries of UNESCO's activities.

"World Communications", prepared by UNESCO at the request of the Sub-Commission, has appeared in a second English edition and a first French edition, both released in December 1951. The book has received wide and favourable attention in the world press. Within six weeks following publication of its second edition, more than 300 articles and stories appeared in the newspapers of 20 countries, and, at present, hundreds of articles and notices are still reaching UNESCO's attention each week.

"Newsreels Across the World", also prepared for the Sub-Commission, has likewise been widely reviewed and discussed since the appearance of the original French edition in 1951. The first English version of this study of the production, content and distribution of newsreels will appear in March or April of this year.

Among the studies in course of preparation which are relevant to the Sub-Commission's work, are these:

"One Week's News", a comparative analysis of the way in which the major newspapers in 17 countries covered the news during a one-week period.

/"Telecommunications"

"Telecommunications and the Press", a study of telecommunications systems as a vehicle for the transmission of news;

"Information Across Frontiers", a graphic study of obstacles to the free flow of ideas;

"News Agencies", a study of national and international news agencies, and

"The World Press", a study of the structure and operation of the daily and periodical press.

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