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Chairman: Mr. David SILVEIRA DA MOTA
(Brazil).

AGENDA ITEM 74

Budget estimates for the financial year 1970 (*continued*)
(A/7606, A/7608, A/7710, A/C.5/1230, A/C.5/1231 and
Corr.1 and 2, A/C.5/1233, A/C.5/1234, A/C.5/L.990,
A/C.5/L.993)

General discussion (continued)

**STATEMENT BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY-
GENERAL FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION**

1. The CHAIRMAN welcomed the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, and invited him to address the Committee.
2. Mr. HAMID (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information) thanked the representative of the Sudan who had first proposed that he be asked to address the Committee, and the Chairman who had given him the opportunity of expounding his views on the more important aspects of the mandate given to the Office of Public Information and the way in which it was trying to discharge its mandate.
3. He had assumed charge of the Office of Public Information in January 1968. At the suggestion of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions his predecessor, Mr. José Rolz-Bennett, had already begun an intensive internal re-examination of the basic policies governing the work of OPI since its establishment and of its programmes and activities in the various media. The results of that review were to have been submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-third session, but they had been held in abeyance for another year so as to enable him to go over the question again personally; he was grateful to the Fifth Committee for having agreed to that procedure.
4. The report which represented the first attempt to provide delegations with a detailed analysis of OPI activities by professional staff of OPI had been submitted to the

Advisory Committee, together with some long-term proposals, in May 1969. That Committee had suggested that the General Assembly should wait for the results of other studies, including the current manpower utilization survey, before taking any decision on future OPI activities. That, he thought, would be both logical and expedient. Although it meant postponing what the Secretary-General had described as "an opportunity for a major rethinking of the problem of United Nations information activities as a whole" (A/7601/Add.1, para. 5) that disadvantage would be amply counterbalanced by the opportunity of taking into account the results of the other studies in the recommendations submitted to the General Assembly.

5. He then turned to some of the factors that had affected the work of the Office of Public Information over the past two decades. There had been a vast increase in the size and scope of the responsibilities of OPI. The figures spoke for themselves: the number of Member States had increased from the original 50 to 126 and, between 1960 and 1969 alone, 48 new United Nations bodies had been set up. A mere listing in an OPI press release of the membership of United Nations bodies still active took up no less than 49 pages. In addition to that purely physical factor, there were other, less tangible but no less significant ones: the admission of a large number of newly independent States, which had led the Organization to re-define its priorities, placing more emphasis on economic and social development, and shifting from analysis to action. Today the United Nations family, far from being mere forums, were actively organizing numerous projects in the field. OPI had to take that new factor into account if its work was to remain vital and viable. On the political front, it had to report on the tasks entrusted by the General Assembly to a wide range of experts and committees, such as those dealing with *apartheid*, decolonization, racial discrimination and the promotion of women's rights, to name only a few.

6. Another element directly influencing the development of OPI activities was the change of attitude in world opinion towards the United Nations. The idealism and goodwill that had surrounded the Organization at its birth in 1945 had not disappeared, but the public had become more demanding and OPI could not be blind to criticism of the United Nations when formulating its programme guidelines. It had also to combat widespread apathy and indifference towards the Organization.

7. It was against that background that the Office of Public Information had tried to assess its own past performance and to formulate its work programmes for the future. Certain essential steps towards the re-orientation of information activities had already been taken. The former Economic and Social Information Unit of OPI had been expanded to become a Division, and discussions were being

held on its future role in the national and international effort to give the Second United Nations Development Decade the necessary information infrastructure. Similarly, in the political field OPI had taken new initiatives in collaboration with the substantive departments. It had begun publication of a new political periodical entitled *Objective: Justice* designed to give the reader an over-all view of United Nations activities on the elimination of *apartheid*, racial discrimination and colonialism.

8. In addition to the added responsibilities placed upon it, the Office of Public Information had to ensure that it was not by-passed by technological progress, which was particularly rapid in communications media, and that it took full advantage of new possibilities of reaching a much wider public.

9. Turning to the questions put by delegations, he said that some of them had been connected with the Advisory Committee's suggestion (A/7608, para. 89) that, in addition to the internal review prepared by OPI, an independent appraisal of programmes might be made to help the Secretary-General to establish essential priorities and ensure that the proper emphasis was given to the various media and other outlets available to the United Nations. Some speakers, principally the representative of the Philippines (1302nd meeting), had strongly supported that idea, expressing dissatisfaction at OPI's past performance and suggesting that it bore a major share of responsibility for the failure of the First United Nations Development Decade.

10. Before dealing with the question of an independent appraisal, he wished to say something about the contribution that OPI could make to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the United Nations, both in economic and social and in political matters. Clearly, public understanding and support for United Nations activities were of paramount importance to their success, and in that connexion, information activity was vital. But two additional facts must be borne in mind. In the first place—as the General Assembly had itself recognized when it first established the then Department of Public Information—the principal responsibility for informing the peoples of the world lay with the national information media, official or unofficial, public or private. The role of the United Nations was recognized as essentially one of support. National media, talking to their own people in their own language, in the context of the matters that concerned them, were best able to win public support. In the second place, the funds available to OPI would never be sufficient to enable it to make itself solely or even primarily responsible for informing the peoples of the world, even if it were technically possible to do so. For those reasons he wished to suggest to the representative of the Philippines and other members of the Committee that failure to attain the objectives of the United Nations should not be sought in any deficiencies in the Office of Public Information. It was true that information provided an essential element of support for those objectives; but it could not replace failure with success. The Office of Public Information had recognized its own responsibilities and had taken very positive steps to prepare itself to fulfil its role in the years ahead, both in economic and social development and in the political concerns of the United Nations. He assured the Committee that, within the

means available to it, OPI would do its best to give effective support to the Organization's substantive activities.

11. Turning to the subject of the independent appraisal of OPI activities, he said that several such appraisals had taken place in the past and that, in certain conditions, they could doubtless have considerable value. It would, of course, be for the General Assembly to determine whether those conditions existed again. He reiterated that the study which the OPI had undertaken represented the first professional evaluation of United Nations information needs and possibilities by the staff of OPI itself. The study had been conducted under the guidance of two Assistants to the Secretary-General, who had brought fresh and open minds to the question. However, the consideration of the report containing the conclusions arising out of that study had been deferred pending the results of the inquiries being made into the operations of OPI by the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Management Service. Under those circumstances, he did not think that any further inquiry, whatever its nature, was likely to produce results commensurate with the expenditure of time and money it would necessarily involve. In his opinion, the Secretary-General would have sufficient data to formulate recommendations without resorting to that procedure.

12. Replying to the questions raised on the subject of United Nations Information Centres, and referring in particular to the observations by the representative of Iraq (1305th meeting), he said that in staffing Information Centres everything possible was done to recruit professional staff whose nationality and command of languages properly fitted them for the duties they would have to perform. In addition, care was taken that the Information Centres symbolized the international character of the United Nations. But while recruiting Information Centre Directors knowing English or French presented no problem, that was not so where languages like Arabic, Urdu or Hindi were concerned. Consequently, the problems to be faced in that respect should not be underestimated.

13. In his opinion, a United Nations Information Centre was a microcosm of all the main functions of OPI in the field of the press, publications, radio, television, films, exhibitions and public relations. Backed by services from Headquarters, the Directors of the Centres were able to establish direct contact with representatives of the local information media and various local officials to enlist their aid in disseminating information on the United Nations and its activities. The Information Centre had a cardinal role to play in that respect and could facilitate the task of OPI. Ideally, each Member State should have a well equipped and adequately staffed Information Centre. That was unfortunately impracticable in the immediate future, and OPI had come to the conclusion that the best way of strengthening and developing information centres would be to create a limited number of regional bureaux to supplement the operations of the existing Information Centres. The bureaux, preferably established at the seats of the regional economic commissions, would have a small staff of specialists in various information media such as the press, publications and radio. Each specialist would be responsible, in his particular field, for fostering the production of programmes and information on the United Nations by the region's national information media. The specialist himself

would prepare information material of regional interest for use by national media. For that purpose, the staff of the regional bureau would have to pay regular visits to each country in the region for a specified period. Each visit would be carefully organized in close collaboration with local United Nations offices and those responsible for information media nationally. United Nations officials would thus participate actively in information programmes in the manner most suited to local and regional conditions. In addition, the maximum use would be made of the information staff of the specialized agencies serving in the region. In his opinion, the establishment of such regional production bureaux would be the most economical and effective way of strengthening information services.

14. He wished to reply to some specific questions addressed to the Office of Public Information. The Canadian representative (1311th meeting) had asked about arrangements for expanding sales of OPI publications. A sales promotion campaign was in progress, covering all OPI publications and including the English, French and Spanish editions of the *UN Monthly Chronicle*. In response to the question raised by the representatives of Uruguay and Mexico (1310th meeting), he was glad to say that the Spanish edition of *Everyman's United Nations* would be published shortly.

15. He thanked the Iraqi representative and other representatives of Arab countries for their interest in the expansion of radio and television programmes in Arabic. Since January 1969 a radio programme with special emphasis on topics of interest to the Arab world was broadcast weekly. That was in addition to the daily short-wave broadcasts and the weekly recorded programmes distributed on tape to the radio stations in the area. In addition, the staff responsible for programmes in Arabic had been increased. With respect to television, Arabic was the only language to have a special fifteen-minute weekly programme for use by the area's television authorities. All requests received from television stations in the Arabic-speaking countries had been met.

16. In reply to the questions concerning an alleged tendency towards a proliferation of United Nations information services, and in particular concerning the structure, functions and financing of the Centre for Economic and Social Information, he said that the Centre had 15 officials in the Professional category, 7 of whom were paid out of the regular OPI budget and the remaining 8 out of the Trust Fund for Development Planning and Projections, financed from the voluntary contributions of the Government of the Netherlands. The Centre also had a General Service staff of 10, 6 of them paid out of the Trust Fund. The total expenditure from the OPI budget was some \$228,000 and the amount borne by the Trust Fund \$347,000. The Centre for Economic and Social Information was part of the Office of Public Information and was responsible to himself. The activities of OPI in connexion with the economic and social matters required the closest possible co-ordination not only with the information services of the specialized agencies but also with the information personnel of United Nations bodies proper, such as UNCTAD. Steps had been taken to co-ordinate activities both at Headquarters and at Geneva.

17. On the question of centralization, he drew attention to the Secretary-General's comments in the introduction

(A/7601/Add.1, paras. 4-8) to his annual report on the work of the Organization. Any fragmentation of information effort would not only be wasteful but also counter-productive. It was essential for information concerning United Nations activities to be presented in a planned and co-ordinated manner.

18. Mr. GINDEEL (Sudan) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information for having agreed to his request to take the floor. He noted that the Advisory Committee, after studying the report of the Office of Public Information, had appreciated the extensive information it contained but had considered that before submitting the report to the General Assembly for action the Secretary-General might wish to obtain an independent appraisal of past and present information programmes. His delegation could not approve that procedure; it considered that inasmuch as the report was ready, the Advisory Committee should confine itself to appending its comments for transmission to the General Assembly. Incidentally, he would like to know what the Advisory Committee meant by "independent appraisal" (A/7608, para. 89). He hoped that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee or the Assistant Secretary-General would state what steps were envisaged for the appraisal, which he feared would entail further delay. Consideration of the activities of the Office of Public Information was of special importance and of some urgency on the eve of the Second United Nations Development Decade.

19. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for the clarification he had provided. Some doubts which had led his delegation to call for a reappraisal of the structure, policies and programmes of the Office of Public Information had been dispelled. The reason for his delegation's proposal at the 1302nd meeting that a small team of qualified consultants should be instructed to review the terms of reference, structure and effectiveness of OPI was the comment by the Centre for Economic and Social Information that the existing information methods were no longer relevant to the current task and that the more modern techniques developed for the dissemination of information should be adopted. That task was to improve the effectiveness of public information activities with respect to the economic and social activities of the United Nations.

20. He wished to explain that he had been critical of the performance of the Office of Public Information not because he no longer believed that OPI was capable of fulfilling its mandate, but because he wished to see its effectiveness increased. His delegation, as it had had occasion to state earlier, attached great importance to the success of the Second Development Decade, and it was convinced that the OPI was the proper agency to make public opinion aware of the aims and scope of the activities envisaged in that connexion. He wished to know, in addition, whether OPI had begun to take action along those lines, and, if so, whether progress had been achieved. The Office of Public Information should endeavour to provide a more complete picture of the United Nations, which was better known for its shortcomings in the political field than for its economic and social achievements. He wished to know whether there were enough broadcasting facilities in Asia for the dissemination of information on the aims and

activities of the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields, and whether all Asian Governments were satisfied with the distribution of the different United Nations Information Centres in the region. He also desired details on the steps taken by OPI to co-ordinate its activities with those of national information agencies.

21. Mr. S. K. SINGH (India) pointed out that his delegation had so far refrained from stating its views on the operation of the Office of Public Information, pending the latter's transmission to the Committee of its own recommendations in the matter.

22. The question of the operation and activities of the Office of Public Information gave rise to considerable differences of opinion which resulted from different ideas as to the part the United Nations should play in that connexion. Some maintained that public opinion should be informed of the various ways in which international co-operation benefited mankind and how the work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies made such co-operation possible. Others, including economically and militarily powerful countries, did not entirely share that opinion; still others were staunchly opposed to that concept of public information and did not wish it to be known that in some countries *apartheid* or discrimination were the very basis of national policy. The problem had intensified somewhat owing to the increased activities of OPI; since the creation of UNIDO and UNCTAD, it had become necessary to try to reconcile the views of the developed and the developing countries. The problem had become still more pressing as the Second Development Decade was about to be launched. The question still unresolved was whether or not the United Nations should act on its own initiative in the field of public information—whether or not it should, for instance, take upon itself the task of combating *apartheid* with the means available to it in the public information field. There was basic disagreement on that question, which impeded the proper functioning of OPI by pitting different countries against one another. It seemed that the time had come to give the matter some thought; instead of seeking palliatives, the Committee should perhaps decide to devote a few days during its current session to the consideration of the report on the Office of Public Information.

23. There were a number of questions to which he desired answers. First, what measures had been taken to harmonize the public information activities of the United Nations, UNIDO and UNCTAD? Secondly, when had ACC last been requested to consider the question as a whole in regard to the action taken to combat all forms of discrimination? Thirdly, precisely to what extent would the regional decentralization of the activities of OPI be carried out with the co-operation of the specialized agencies? Fourthly, had OPI considered taking advantage of modern techniques for disseminating information, and, in particular, did it propose to use satellite communications networks? Lastly, he wished to know how OPI viewed its own role.

24. Mr. MSELLE (United Republic of Tanzania) said he wondered whether it was really necessary to await the results of the manpower utilization survey before considering the report on the Office of Public Information. It did not seem particularly desirable to delay the considera-

tion of the operation of such an important office, especially at a time when measures to ensure the utmost success for the Second United Nations Development Decade were being considered and when the perpetuation of colonial conditions in Africa and elsewhere raised complex problems which had to be solved.

25. It was essential for OPI to be in a position to discharge its duties under the best possible conditions; in order to do so, it should broaden its activities as far as possible and inform public opinion even outside the countries where the United Nations had offices, while endeavouring not to spend too much on information activities aimed at a limited public in terms of the educational level of individuals.

26. He considered that OPI should increase its activities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, in other words, in the countries where the United Nations had the greatest part to play and where the most was expected of it. In that connexion, he wished to know what criteria OPI applied in deciding to open United Nations Information Centres throughout the world.

27. Mr. ESFANDIARY (Iran), noting the reactions which the comments of the Assistant Secretary-General had aroused, wondered whether it would not be preferable to await the report on the Office of Public Information before raising questions of substance, such as that of the role OPI should play. It was clearly for the General Assembly, and not for OPI, to decide whether the latter should have the task of transmitting information or whether it should be able to act on its own. He agreed with the representative of Sudan that OPI should disseminate information on the Development Decade, *apartheid*, United Nations activities in the field of human rights and generally on all the Organization's activities; however, to undertake action, for instance, with a view to inducing the developing countries to make a greater contribution to the Development Decade, was a much greater step, and the point at issue should be discussed in the light of the report which was to come before the Committee, as well as the report on the manpower survey. In that connexion, he wished to stress the benefit which would also accrue from an evaluation by independent persons; thus, the Assembly would have a more comprehensive view of the matter and would be able to deal authoritatively with such questions as those which had been raised in the course of the meeting.

28. Mr. QUARLES VAN UFFORD (Netherlands) asked the Assistant Secretary-General whether it was true, as unsubstantiated press reports in various countries had recently announced, that the United Nations Information Centres had received instructions not to accept for transmission to Headquarters any petition or other communication which individuals or groups might seek to deliver to them for that purpose. The Netherlands delegation was under the impression that ever since they had been set up all over the world the information centres had indeed transmitted messages of all kinds. It was true that originally not all the Member States had considered that the Information Centres could receive messages for transmission to Headquarters, nor was that function included in their terms of reference; but it was also true that so far they had never been specifically instructed not to forward communications which might be delivered to them for that purpose.

29. The press articles in question had caused great uneasiness in the Netherlands and, if the facts reported were true, he felt in duty bound to express his delegation's grave concern at the step which had been taken. He would not dwell on the question of the procedure which ought to be followed with regard to communications relating to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms since the matter was not within the Fifth Committee's competence and he would have an opportunity to raise it in the appropriate organs; for the moment, he would merely ask the Assistant Secretary-General to confirm or deny the facts reported, which were contrary to a practice established for over twenty years.

30. Mr. BENDER (United States of America) shared the concern expressed by the representative of the Netherlands; faithful to the principle of freedom of speech and right of petition, the United States believed that it was vital to recognize the right of individuals to communicate with the United Nations and to address petitions to it. If it was true that the Information Centres had received instructions not to forward to Headquarters petitions from individuals or groups and if those instructions were maintained, the question would have to be considered seriously. He presumed that the Secretary-General was giving the matter the attention it deserved and that the appropriate organs, too, would study it further.

31. Mr. ROGERS (Canada) concurred with the observations made by the representatives of the Netherlands and the United States of America.

32. He thought that the report which was to be submitted to the Committee should deal not only with the role of the Office of Public Information but also with questions of organization and should, in particular, determine whether OPI was an effective instrument and, if not, indicate what measures should be taken to ensure that it became one.

33. Mr. A. EL-ATTRASH (Syria) associated himself with the remarks by the representative of Sudan concerning an independent appraisal of programmes.

34. He thought that in view of its importance the statement made by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information should be reproduced verbatim in the summary record of the meeting.

35. The CHAIRMAN, referring to General Assembly resolution 2292 (XXII), drew the attention of the representative of Syria to the financial implications of his proposal. He asked him whether he would agree that, in accordance with normal practice, the Secretariat should be asked to include a full summary of the statement of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information in the summary record of the meeting.

36. Mr. A. EL-ATTRASH (Syria) accepted the Chairman's suggestion.

37. Mr. BANNIER (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) noted with satisfaction that the debate on which the Fifth Committee had embarked dealt precisely with questions which the Advisory Committee had long wished to see considered.

38. It was not without interest to recall that in 1964 the Advisory Committee had suggested¹ that the Secretary-General might institute a review of the public information programmes, either on a continuing basis or at regular intervals, with a view to determining the relative emphasis given to various information media, in the light of the needs of the developing countries, and ensuring the optimum use of the resources available. In 1967 the Advisory Committee had had before it an interim report and, after consultation with the Secretary-General, it had been agreed that the text of that report should be revised before it was submitted to the General Assembly. Subsequently, the Secretary-General had deferred submission of the report until the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly in order to give the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, who had only recently been appointed, time to study it and complete it.

39. The Advisory Committee had received the report on the activities of the Office of Public Information at its summer session in 1969. It had welcomed the information concerning the current role and the various programmes of the Office of Public Information, although the basic issues which had been raised in the current debate concerning the philosophy of the public information programme of the United Nations had not been dealt with. The Advisory Committee also considered that past and present information programmes had not been sufficiently evaluated and that additional information was essential in order to enable it to consider fully the future needs of the Office of Public Information. Similarly, the Advisory Committee had considered that the report should indicate the priorities determined by the Secretary-General so that any proposed expansion of its activities could be planned over several years as necessary.

40. In suggesting that an independent survey should be made, the Advisory Committee had in mind the other independent surveys currently in progress or scheduled, including those of the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Management Service, and thought that the Secretary-General would wish to await the results of those surveys before submitting a final report on the long-term public information policies and programmes.

41. Mr. STARK (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that it was no accident that OPI was the first department covered by the manpower survey. The Secretary-General should have the results of that survey at the beginning of 1970 in order to be able to take them into account and to present suitable proposals at the spring session of the Advisory Committee.

42. In reply to the question raised by the representative of Canada, he said that the terms of reference of the group carrying out the manpower deployment and utilization survey also authorized it to consider questions relating to departmental organizations.

43. Mr. HAMID (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information) pointed out, referring to the questions asked by the representative of Sudan, that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee had already replied to the first of

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Nineteenth Session, Supplement No. 7*, para. 86.

those questions. As for the second, namely whether an independent survey should be carried out, he had already made his views on the subject known in his earlier statement.

44. On the question raised by the representative of the Philippines of whether all the Governments of Asian countries were satisfied with the radio programmes of the Office of Public Information, he could only give an assurance that all requests for programmes or services addressed to OPI had been met. As for the scope of such programmes, it depended to a great extent on the resources available.

45. In reply to the questions raised by the representative of India, he explained that although the information activities of UNIDO and UNCTAD were directed by the staff of the United Nations Office of Public Information, the staff costs were borne by the organs concerned. Hence there was no difficulty from the point of view of co-ordination of activities. With regard to the decentralization of information activities from Headquarters to the various regions and the support which could be provided to the specialized agencies, he said that the agencies had been assured of the full co-operation of the regional offices as soon as those offices were opened. As to the utilization of communications satellites, he pointed out that more than 100 programmes had been transmitted via satellite under the terms of *ad hoc* arrangements, at the request of various Governments which bore the costs involved. Other similar arrangements would be concluded in future.

46. In reply to the question raised by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, he said that, in order to open an information centre in a given country, it was necessary and sufficient for the Government of the country concerned to request it and to undertake to provide the necessary installations and to bear the costs.

47. In reply to the question put by the representative of the Netherlands concerning the report that the Information Centres had received instructions to cease transmitting certain communications, he confirmed that the information was correct and read out the circular to that effect which had been sent to the Directors of the Information Centres.

48. Lastly, he wished to emphasize that he could not accept the statement of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee that the OPI report had not dealt with the basic philosophy of the OPI mandate or operations. In fact, the first part of the report had dealt solely with the consideration of the principles which should be used as guidelines in defining the role of OPI.

49. Mr. YUNUS (Pakistan) recalled that the representative of India had proposed that the report on the Office of Public Information should be the subject of a general debate. There had been no reaction to that proposal. The Secretariat, for its part, should comply with the directives it received from the organs responsible for preparing the programmes. It was for the members of the Committee to define the principles which should govern public information and the role of OPI; it would therefore be very useful for the Committee to be able to consider that report so that it could provide the Secretariat with the guidance without

which it could not act. He therefore supported the proposal of the representative of India that the report should be submitted to the Committee as early as possible, preferably during the current session.

50. Mr. MADDENS (Belgium) thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information for his explanatory remarks and requested that the text of the circular addressed to the Directors of Information Centres should be reproduced *in extenso* in the summary record of the meeting.

51. Mr. PAPADEMAS (Cyprus) remarked that the Committee criticized the activities and the role of certain Secretariat departments on which it was continually making greater demands, while at the same time it deplored the increase in expenditure. The important issue, in considering OPI, was not so much its volume of work as its effectiveness. It could not be denied that information activities were complex and costly. His delegation would like the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information to give his views on the effectiveness of OPI and on co-operation between OPI and the various Governments.

52. Mr. QUARLES VAN UFFORD (Netherlands) said that the detailed confirmation provided by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information would be received in his country with apprehension and concern: apprehension over the future procedure which would have to be followed in connexion with communications addressed to the United Nations, and concern over the restrictive action which had curtailed the scope of the Information Centres as means of two-way communication with Headquarters. By that action, the Secretariat was in a way withdrawing from human rights matters.

53. He had no doubt that the circular which had been read out had been sent to the Information Centres only after careful consideration. However, he wondered whether consideration had been given to the original conception of the Information Centres: they had actually been intended both to receive information from Headquarters and to transmit information to it. His delegation expressed the hope that the new policy directive would be reconsidered in the very near future.

54. Mr. TAITT (Barbados) wondered whether the new directive contained in the circular which the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had read out represented a reformulation of the policy of OPI or whether it had been precipitated by any particular incident. Although his delegation had no illusions concerning the Organization's capacity to take action, it remained convinced that one of the main functions of the United Nations was to ensure the protection of human rights, and was concerned that the policy followed by the Secretariat on that issue, by trying to be neutral, might ultimately prove to be biased. In that connexion, it was not idle to raise the question whether Secretariat policy was decided by the General Assembly or whether it was established on the basis of the interests of certain countries.

55. Mr. RODIONOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) recalled that his delegation had drawn attention to the shortcomings of the Office of Public Information and to

the fact that too much political information was disseminated to the detriment of economic and social information. In that connexion it should be stressed that many of those shortcomings were due to the fact that the principle of equitable geographical distribution was not fully applied with respect to OPI.

56. Certain delegations had raised the issue of the role of the Information Centres and the transmission of communications from individuals or groups. The Office of Public Information should not assume functions which had not been assigned to it. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had quite rightly pointed out, the essential role of the Information Centres, as defined in the relevant General Assembly resolutions and in the Charter, was to disseminate information on the activities of the Organization. His delegation considered that the Secretary-General's position was entirely correct and that the circular sent to the Directors of Information Centres was quite justified. If individuals wished to address communications to the Organization, they should do so through the usual channels. Moreover, as the Assistant Secretary-General had pointed out, if the Information Centres transmitted such communications, they ran the risk of contravening the provisions of the laws in force in the country concerned.

57. Mr. STOBY (Guyana), Mr. GINDEEL (Sudan) and Mr. KAKAMBA (Uganda) supported the proposal of the Indian representative that the report on the Office of Public Information should be transmitted to the Committee and should be the subject of a general debate at the current session.

58. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the financial implications of the proposal made by the Belgian representative that the text of the circular addressed to the Directors of the Information Centres should be reproduced *in extenso* would amount to about \$200.

59. Mr. TARDOS (Hungary) said that he was against the publication of the full text of the circular, and recalled that when the representative of Syria had made a similar proposal concerning the statement of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, the Chairman had urged him to withdraw his request.

60. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the full text of the circular had been published by the Office of Public Information in the form of a note to correspondents, and that delegations could easily obtain it.

61. Mr. MADDENS (Belgium) withdrew his proposal.

62. Mr. SANU (Nigeria), referring to the proposal made by the representative of India and supported by other delegations, pointed out that the Joint Inspection Unit was currently studying the activities of the Office of Public Information; it might be advisable to await the results of that study before proceeding with the discussion of the question. Moreover, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit could constitute the independent study that had been requested.

63. Mr. STARK (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that the Secretary-General would be duly informed of the comments and proposals made in the course of the discussion. However, he wished to reaffirm that the Secretary-General intended to transmit the report in question to Governments as soon as he was in possession of the additional details which he had requested.

64. Mr. GUPTA (India) pointed out that for the last three years no intergovernmental body had been able to examine that report because the Advisory Committee had requested that the problem should be the subject of an independent study. The Joint Inspection Unit had only recently started to examine the question. The time seemed to have come for the intergovernmental organs, which were the only ones authorized to issue the necessary directives, to study the problem. He recalled that the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management had also mentioned the manpower utilization survey, and he asked how many studies were to be carried out and which one was the independent study in question.

65. Mr. STARK (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said he believed that the independent study in question was the one being carried out by the Joint Inspection Unit. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General would also like to be informed of the results of the manpower survey in respect of OPI.

66. In reply to a question from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. GUPTA (India) indicated that he would not press for the adoption of his proposal but reserved the right of his delegation to submit a formal proposal to the same effect to the Committee at a later stage.

67. Mr. STOBY (Guyana) also reserved the right of his delegation to submit to the Committee a formal proposal that the report concerning the Office of Public Information should be discussed during the current session.

68. Mr. HAMID (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information), in reply to the question put by the representative of Cyprus, said that the effectiveness of the Office of Public Information could only be measured in terms of the requests received from users. All the requests relating to radio and television programmes had been met. The demand for publication was now greater than the available resources.

69. Replying to a question from the representative of Barbados, he said that the instructions sent to the Directors of the Information Centres involved no change of policy and that the purpose of the circular was to reply to points raised by some of those Directors.

70. Mr. STARK (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that he wished to emphasize that the Secretary-General could not take a decision on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit because that Unit was not responsible to him. Nevertheless, the Secretary would make every effort to find out when the report would be ready.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.