

United Nations GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THIRTEENTH SESSION
Official Records



FIFTH COMMITTEE 684th
MEETING

Friday, 14 November 1958,
at 11.50 a.m.

NEW YORK

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Chairman: Sir Claude COREA (Ceylon).

AGENDA ITEM 55

**Public information activities of the United Nations:
report of the Committee of Experts on United Nations
Public Information, and comments and recommendations
thereon by the Secretary-General (A/3928, A/3945, A/C.5/757, A/C.5/764, A/C.5/L.527,
A/C.5/L.529, A/C.5/L.530) (continued)**

1. Mr. HSIA (China) complimented the Committee of Experts on United Nations Public Information on an objective and highly readable report (A/3928). The importance which the General Assembly and the Fifth Committee had always attached to the public information activities of the United Nations was clearly proved by the attention consistently given to that question and, more particularly, by the elaboration of the basic principles in 1946, their revision in 1952, the appointment of a Survey Group in 1955,^{1/} and the lengthy discussions at the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the General Assembly.

2. The basic principles laid down in 1946 (by General Assembly resolution 13 (I)) stated that the "United Nations cannot achieve the purposes for which it has been created unless the peoples of the world are fully informed of its aims and activities". In 1952 the revised principles^{2/} had added the ideas that that objective must be achieved within the Organization's budgetary limitations and that particular attention should be paid to the special problems and needs of those areas where information media were less fully developed. The second point had been further expanded by the 1955 Survey Group, which had concluded that the role and operation of overseas information offices should be given added emphasis and that programme patterns and relationships with Headquarters should be reviewed and revised. The Committee of Experts,

^{1/} The Survey Group's report was entitled "Organization of the Secretariat, Report of the Secretary-General's Survey Group on Overseas Offices and the Technical Assistance Administration, 15 November 1955".

^{2/} Approved by the General Assembly in resolution 595 (VI); for text, see Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes, agenda item 41, document A/C.5/L.172, annex.

in turn, had carried the two ideas still further. Firstly, it had argued that "Member States must, inevitably, share responsibility for disseminating information about the United Nations and about their own contribution to the Organization's development and growth", adding that "the United Nations information programme can only supplement this effort but cannot be in substitution for it". Secondly, the Expert Committee had recommended a definite ceiling of \$4.5 million instead of the more general restriction imposed by "budgetary limitations". His delegation was in favour of the Committee's recommendation that the Office of Public Information should take immediate steps to reduce expenditure with a view to bringing the level down to \$4.5 million in three years.

3. However, in stating that the best way for reaching the peoples of the world was "through the Governments of Member States and through a select group of individuals and organizations", the Committee of Experts raised a basic issue. He assumed that the same point was being made in paragraph 226 (b) where the Committee spoke of "a shift of emphasis in the method of dissemination of information from 'mass approach through media of mass communication' to the selective approach of public relations". Some speakers had questioned whether it had been appropriate for the Committee to make that suggestion. While his delegation might not entirely agree with the suggestion, it would defend the Committee's right freely to express its views on every aspect of the public information activities of the United Nations, if its objective was to improve the effectiveness and quality of the information programme. In paragraph 7 of his comments and recommendations (A/3945) the Secretary-General expressed grave doubts about the soundness of the suggestion. His delegation would hesitate to support the new approach advocated for somewhat different reasons. In many cases, the selective approach would probably be better and more effective than the present approach, but there were certainly areas where the public relations technique would have limited or no success. As the Secretary-General rightly stated in paragraph 6 of his comments and recommendations, circumstances varied considerably in different areas. The Committee of Experts itself agreed that the target could not be uniform for all areas and countries. In those circumstances, his delegation thought it would be advisable to provide the information centres with the means to adopt another approach, if the public relations approach proved ineffective.

4. The Committee of Experts had failed to give due weight to the basic principle that particular attention should be paid to the special problems and needs of those areas where information media were less fully developed. The Office and the overseas Information Centres should make greater efforts to spread knowledge about the United Nations in the eco-

nomically less developed areas and should devote proportionately larger sums to that purpose. He would therefore oppose any reduction in radio broadcasts to those areas. On that point he was in agreement with the Secretary-General. In areas where information media were better developed, the effects of a reduction in United Nations broadcasts would not be too serious; where, however, information media were poorly developed, a reduction in short-wave broadcasts would reduce United Nations information activities to virtually nothing, as much of the other material the Organization provided did not meet the needs of the people of many countries: the United Nations Review, for example, could not reach the people in Chinese- and Arab-speaking countries because of the language barrier.

5. Structural changes in the Office of Public Information were largely the responsibility of the Secretary-General. He was confident that the Secretary-General would take the suggestions of the Committee of Experts into consideration; indeed, he had already agreed to some of them.

6. Mr. ARAD (Israel) said that it was inevitable that the discussion should go beyond the technical and budgetary framework in which it had been initially conceived. The Committee of Experts should not be criticized for having considered policy as well as technical issues. It could not have done otherwise. Nevertheless, his delegation had some anxiety about some of the policy and organizational changes recommended. The implication of certain paragraphs, such as paragraphs 230 and 232, required much further study. The Secretary-General had made that point quite clear in his statement at the 682nd meeting, and his remarks about his own sphere of competence were well taken.

7. The revised basic principles approved by General Assembly resolution 595 (VI) indicated that the basic policy should be to promote an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the Organization among the peoples of the world and specifically stated that the United Nations "should not engage in 'propaganda'". The Committee of Experts, on the other hand, recommended that the direct approach to the peoples should be abandoned in favour of an approach through existing agencies and institutions. The Committee had undoubtedly been guided by considerations of efficiency and economy, but a question of principle was involved. The United Nations was composed of Member Governments but their representatives addressed the peoples of the world, as was clearly demonstrated by the wording of the Preamble to the Charter.

8. The Committee of Experts further recommended a shift of emphasis to the selective approach of public relations. In the Secretary-General's view, the adoption of that recommendation would deprive the Office of Public Information of its exclusively international character, leaving it to each nation to emphasize the purposes and to communicate the decisions of the Organization to the people in a way adjusted to the requirements of its interests. That would obviously not be in keeping with the principles laid down by the General Assembly.

9. In document A/C.5/757, the United Nations Correspondents Association supported the Secretary-General's view that "the Office of Public Information in its

activities has served well the purposes of the United Nations in the relations of the Organization with the representatives of the Press accredited to Headquarters". The Association took strong exception to those of the Committee's recommendations which implied impairment of services for the working Press and downgrading of the importance of media of mass communication. It was possible that the correspondents were wrong and that the Committee of Experts was right, in which case the Committee's recommendations and their implications had been misunderstood by many representatives and many responsible organs of the Press. A report which had been so widely misunderstood could not be implemented forthwith and it would be prudent for the Secretary-General to give it further study.

10. Mr. CASSEL (Sweden) said that the Committee of Experts had made a thorough study of United Nations information activities. It was understandable that the Committee should have assumed that its terms of reference included a reappraisal of the basic principles governing those activities, and that it should therefore have recommended any amendments of those principles which it considered appropriate. However, the recommendations had been given differing interpretations, and had caused at times rather heated comments in the Press, including the Swedish Press. The shift in emphasis which the Committee recommended in paragraphs 210, 213, 217 and 226 (b), constituted a fundamental change in United Nations information policy which the Swedish delegation could not accept. It believed that those recommendations were incompatible with the objective approach that should characterize the work of the Office of Public Information. The peoples of the world should be informed both of events in the United Nations and of the principles and purposes of the Organization. Objective and factual information about the United Nations could be disseminated to the citizens of all countries, regardless of the particular views of the various Governments; it would be incompatible with the dignity of any Government to attempt to adapt or change information about the United Nations to suit its own ends.

11. The present arrangements for radio broadcasts were unsatisfactory; the United Nations should depend on no one in order to make its voice heard throughout the world. The only solution might well be for the United Nations to have its own transmitters, as had been envisaged by the Sub-Committee of the Technical Advisory Committee on Information in 1946;^{3/} that suggestion had not been acted upon, but perhaps the time had come to re-examine it.

12. With regard to the criticism of the staff of the Central Press and Editorial Services in paragraphs 57 and 58 of the Committee's report, he wished to state without reservation that the Swedish correspondents had no complaints to make of the service they received from that section and fully agreed with the view expressed by the Secretary-General on that matter (A/3945, para.13), a view which had also been endorsed by the United Nations Correspondents Association.

13. His delegation had no objection to the Committee's recommendation that the Professional staff of the Information Centres should be increased (para.241), but

^{3/} A/INF/W.28.

would not wish to see that done at the expense of services to the Press at Headquarters. He would also like to point out that the transfer to the Information Centres of work previously done at Headquarters was likely to lead to higher costs, and no such decentralization should be undertaken without full consideration of the financial implications.

14. He thought that the Committee had been somewhat idealistic in its definition of the desirable qualifications for the staff at the Information Centres and at Headquarters. There would be very few suitable candidates available on the terms that the United Nations could offer, and he thought that a more realistic approach was required.

15. The Committee had suggested that the Secretary-General might consider reporting annually to the Fifth Committee on information activities, and that an advisory body should be established to assist him. The Swedish delegation believed that no further additions, involving increased expenditure and documentation, should be made to the United Nations administrative machinery except for compelling reasons. If a special committee were considered to be necessary, it should have a purely advisory character and be no more than a body that the Secretary-General might consult from time to time on United Nations information activities.

16. Mr. GANEM (France) said that the Committee of Experts had submitted an admirably clear report that presented a full picture of the United Nations public information activities and services, which had not previously been available.

17. Although his delegation did not endorse all the Committee's recommendations, it felt that the fears expressed by several previous speakers were excessive. The Committee had suggested that the United Nations should concentrate its efforts in the field of public information on a limited approach, and some delegations had asked whether that meant that the man in the street was to be ignored. France, which had been the first—from 1793—to uphold the principle of universal suffrage, certainly did not wish to ignore the man in the street as the ultimate target of the information services. It was necessary, however, to be realistic. Only a proportion of the adult population of the globe was capable at the present time of grasping the intricacies of the complex machinery of the United Nations and the provisions of the Charter. The latter stated three essential principles. The first was the sovereignty and equality of all States. The second was that, except on a few matters, the United Nations General Assembly could make only recommendations with which States complied if they so wished, but which, too frequently, they ignored. The third was the unanimity of the permanent members of the Security Council, a principle whose abuse in application had paralysed the Council's work. Those three principles were difficult to explain to the relatively uneducated. It was perhaps unfair to criticise the Committee of Experts for suggesting that the Office of Public Information should work through non-governmental organizations and other private agencies when it was so difficult to explain the Charter in terms comprehensible to the common man.

18. Some objection had also been expressed to the Committee's suggestion that some unrelayed short-wave broadcasts in Russian, Chinese and Arabic should

be terminated. Leaving aside, for the time being, the question of broadcasts in Chinese and Arabic, his delegation hoped that the Russian people would not be deprived of the possibility of obtaining information on important United Nations activities. It was necessary to take a realistic attitude, however, and if a reliable monitoring system revealed that the United Nations broadcasts in Russian were not reaching those who spoke that language, then those transmissions should largely be discontinued.

19. His delegation felt that there was no serious difference of opinion in the Fifth Committee and, for that reason, it had put forward its own draft resolution (A/C.5/L.530) which, to some extent, represented a compromise. It was also, in the opinion of his delegation, both more concise and simpler than the other draft resolutions submitted (A/C.5/L.527 and A/C.5/L.529).

20. The preamble to the draft resolution defined the task of the Office of Public Information and the means by which it should be performed. His delegation had intentionally mentioned private before public institutions in the fourth paragraph of the preamble in order to emphasize the need to ensure that information on the United Nations was received freely by those for whom it was intended, without being distorted to suit the policy of any Government. It had omitted a reference to educators as a possible channel for the transmission of information, as it wished to avoid any possible suggestion of propaganda.

21. Like the text submitted by the United Kingdom delegation (A/C.5/L.529), his country's draft resolution then endorsed in operative paragraph 1 the general recommendations in paragraph 227 of the Committee's report, but laid particular emphasis on subparagraphs (c) and (e), on which his delegation felt quite strongly, as it attached great importance to the human factor in public information work. However good might be the intentions of the Office of Public Information and however excellent the facilities at its disposal, they would be of little use if the individuals who did the work were not suitably qualified. He did not mean to imply that the Office did not have a good staff at the present time, but he wondered whether too many of its members did not lack a really broad outlook and understanding.

22. His delegation had some sympathy for the recommendations in paragraph 228 of the Committee's report, but had not endorsed them specifically, as it believed that the Secretary-General should have complete freedom of action. It disagreed entirely, however, with the recommendations in paragraphs 246 and 247. Nothing could be gained by replacing the monthly reviews by a quarterly publication. There was a need for more current information than could be provided by a quarterly and he did not believe that that need was at present being met, even though it might have been in the past, by the world's great daily newspapers. The United Nations Review should be issued monthly in as many languages as possible and should include, in addition to information on United Nations activities, coverage of the activities of the specialized agencies. The reviews had proved extremely useful, even for United Nations staff and for those concerned with technical assistance activities. The cost of production could perhaps be reduced by employing internal offset production methods in preference to contractual printing.

23. The Secretary-General had agreed in principle with the Committee's recommendation on the establishment of an advisory group. His delegation also endorsed that recommendation, but with certain reservations. The six-member group suggested by the Committee would not be sufficiently representative of the main cultural groups and languages represented in the United Nations; in the opinion of the French delegation, a group of nine to twelve members would be more satisfactory. The Committee of Experts had further suggested that the group should preferably be composed of members of permanent delegations located at Headquarters. He disagreed with that view, as such individuals might, to some extent, have lost contact with the situation in other countries. It was undesirable, moreover, for the Secretary-General to be under the supervision of the advisory group throughout the year.

24. Operative paragraph 2 of the French draft resolution requested the Secretary-General to take into account the comments and suggestions made in the Fifth Committee debates, which he believed would prove valuable. Although his delegation hoped it would be possible to reduce the cost of the Office of Public Information to \$4.5 million, it nevertheless viewed the situation realistically and appreciated that the changes envisaged would take some time to carry into effect. For that reason, it had used the flexible formula: "all other means designed to keep expenditure on information within reasonable bounds" in operative paragraph 2.

25. His delegation had submitted its draft resolution in a spirit of compromise and good faith, in the hope that it might serve as a useful working basis for the Fifth Committee.

26. Mr. LEVYCHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that slanderous allegations had been made against the Government and people of the Soviet Union, without any justification, by the representative of France at the present meeting, and, in a more indirect manner, by the representative of Italy at the 682nd meeting. The Soviet delegation reserved its right to reply to those allegations at the proper time; for the present, it would confine itself to expressing regret that they had been made.

27. Mr. GANEM (France) said that his remarks had been misunderstood by the representative of the Soviet

Union. He had had no intention of criticizing the Russian people, for whom he had a warm regard, or the Soviet Government, with which his own Government maintained correct relations. He had merely referred to the fact that the Soviet Union, acting within its rights, had not agreed to relay broadcasts from the United Nations, and he had gone on to suggest that, in view of that fact, the Secretary-General should consider whether the expenditure on the Russian-language broadcasts was justifiable. His argument had been directed towards a possible economy, which the Soviet delegation might normally be expected to support.

28. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said that at the 682nd meeting he had referred only to totalitarian States where public opinion was kept in the dark about what happened in the outside free world, and had made no reference to the Soviet Union as such a State.

29. The CHAIRMAN said that he hoped that the representative of the Soviet Union would take into account the explanations just given by the representatives of France and Italy when he exercised his right of reply to the previous observations made by those representatives. The Fifth Committee's functions were essentially non-political; it had so far refrained from introducing irrelevant political considerations into the debate, and he hoped that that commendable self-restraint would continue.

30. Mr. NUÑEZ (Panama) thanked the Committee of Experts for its report, but said that having had some personal experience of broadcasting and Press work, he could not agree with all its conclusions. In most countries information media were in the hands of private enterprise, and the material relayed was accordingly subject to the influence of commercial interests. He agreed with other speakers that the information disseminated by the United Nations must be objective and undistorted if it was to serve the purpose of informing the peoples of the world about the Organization. Technical progress led to a continuing improvement in information media and the United Nations should play its full part in the field of public information. He therefore considered that the Secretary-General should receive every assistance in carrying out the Organization's information programme.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.