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Thursday, 9 November 1989
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. OUDOVENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic)

later: Mr. FLEMMING (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 79: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/44/21, A/44/653, A/44/509, A/44/329 and Add.1 and A/44/433 and Add.1)

1. Mrs. PELLICER (Mexico) said that in the current context of positive changes, in which the post-war political structure was no longer valid, information was one of the fundamental factors in any effort to change world politics; accordingly, freedom of information was no longer merely a principle to be reaffirmed, but a concrete goal whose practical purpose was to strengthen the search for change. For that reason, her delegation stressed the need to establish a new world information and communication order, based on the free flow and dissemination of information.
2. Eliminating the imbalances in the current information structure did not imply limiting the flow of information. The new problems confronting the world community, which required concerted action by all States Members of the United Nations, could hardly be overcome without genuine freedom of information. Similarly, firm measures should be taken to adapt the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI) to the new role of the United Nations in the international sphere. DPI required a dynamic mandate suited to the pressing needs of countries.
3. With regard to the negotiations concerning a draft resolution on the new world information and communication order, she believed that efforts should be made in good faith to reach agreement on the texts submitted by the Committee on Information, on the understanding that such an agreement would be in the interest of all delegations. Delegations had come remarkably close to a consensus, but some had withdrawn from an arrangement which had appeared to be promising, and were now insisting on incorporating new elements, which were not constructive contributions, into the negotiations. Her delegation believed that a consensus should not entail the sacrifice of fundamental principles or positions, and called upon all delegations to display a willingness to engage in dialogue and to seek an understanding which would do justice to the new atmosphere of détente.
4. Mr. WATSON (United States of America) said that his country attached importance to the work of DPI, whose mandate, as originally promulgated by the General Assembly, was sufficiently broad to require its full resources. DPI would be able to fulfil its role if its mandate was not stretched beyond its limits by additional politically- and ideologically-oriented directives from the Special Political Committee.
5. The award of the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations peace-keeping forces and other successes achieved by the Organization had enhanced the world-wide image of the United Nations. However, the world public was still relatively uninformed about the Organization and its work, and it was the task of DPI to educate it in an effective, balanced and objective manner. When DPI was asked to take on the role of a propaganda unit, it was diverted from its vital tasks and its credibility was jeopardized. Moreover, while oversight of the Department by the General Assembly was desirable and necessary, management from the outside was unavoidably inefficient and would curtail the Department's flexibility.

(Mr. Watson, United States)

6. With regard to the draft resolution on information, his country would never support a resolution which could in any way be interpreted as abridging freedom of speech or freedom of the press. That was a non-negotiable issue. The United States believed that the constitutional guarantee of free speech was the most fundamental law and it would not be a party to the sanctioning of restrictions on what it considered to be a basic right.

7. The Special Political Committee had also addressed the need to enhance the public and private media infrastructure in developing countries. That was a much more useful topic for it to consider. Free and independent news services and a well-informed public were essential elements of political freedom and economic development. Although in the debate it had been said that advances in communications technology were widening the gap between the developed and the developing countries, he suggested that it would be more useful to focus on the possibilities which those advances offered. The availability of relatively inexpensive innovations was changing the flow of information in the world. As a result of that, and of the training provided by regional centres, the countries of the third world could produce and use international news with greater self-confidence.

8. His Government and private organizations in the United States were committed to furthering the development of independent media in other countries and to broadening the free flow of information throughout the world. Moreover, at a private radio broadcasters conference held in Atlanta, Georgia, the Secretary-General had expressed the hope that the frontiers of television would extend to the developing countries, and had said that world-wide understanding was the only hope for lasting peace. His delegation shared that hope and belief.

9. Mr. Flemming (Saint Lucia) took the Chair.

10. Mr. ZAWELS (Argentina), after urging all delegations to act in a spirit of consensus, said he hoped that no changes would be made to the procedures used by the regional groups and China in their work on the texts agreed upon in the Committee on Information. Freedom of information and of the press, as embodied in article 14 of the Argentine Constitution, constituted a basic principle for the Argentine people. Principles which were not exercised and defended ran the risk of being forgotten or nullified.

11. Referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/44/1), he drew attention to the fourth paragraph of section IV which spoke of the role of information in the prevention of armed conflicts and the function of the United Nations in that regard. Timely, accurate and unbiased information not only helped to prevent war, but could also be applied to all human activities. The fact that access to information was unequal and depended on the relative development of peoples was an obstacle in human relations because it produced different perceptions that often caused conflicts.

(Mr. Zawels, Argentina)

12. In order to remedy that situation, agreement must be reached on the definition of a new world information and communication order based on freedom of information and the need to eliminate that imbalance.

13. His delegation considered the functions of the Department of Public Information to be essential. He took note of the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit regarding the reorganization of the Department of Public Information and the Secretary-General's comments on those reports. Although every process of structural change called for adjustments, his delegation was certain that DPI would achieve the objectives set.

14. Argentina had a United Nations information centre, which helped spread the image and the message of the United Nations. The important role of the information centres should be strengthened in order to improve relations between countries.

15. Mr. SUAREZ (Philippines), referring to the reorganization and restructuring of the Department of Public Information, said that he had noted with interest the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit contained in documents A/44/329 and A/44/433, as well as the Secretary-General's comments thereon. Furthermore, he noted that the Secretary-General had accepted many of the JIU recommendations as he found them consistent with the outcome of the long review by intergovernmental and expert bodies. It was to be hoped that the reform process within the Department would soon be completed and would result in effective and rationalized operations, which were essential to the reinvigoration of the United Nations information programme.

16. He commended the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information on the excellent information campaigns carried out during a year which had seen numerous "media events". The coverage given to the independence process in Namibia deserved special mention. His delegation was confident that DPI would continue its information activities in the priority areas mandated by the General Assembly. In particular, it urged the Department to intensify the dissemination of information on the resolution of the external debt problems of developing countries. His delegation was pleased to note that a press kit on that topic had been prepared recently and it hoped that a multi-media approach would be adopted.

17. The Philippines had consistently supported the training for radio and television broadcasters and journalists from developing countries provided by DPI and it welcomed the possibility of obtaining external financial support to broaden that programme. In its view, training was indispensable to strengthen communications and information in developing countries. His Government had made the development of information and communications infrastructures a priority, so that it would be able to participate substantially in the international communications process and redress the existing imbalances in the flow of information. It would need trained manpower to achieve that goal. Member States and governmental and non-governmental organizations should support the work of the International Programme for the Development of Communication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization with substantial contributions.

(Mr. Suarez, Philippines)

18. The appeal of the Philippines for a change in the existing information order and the establishment of a new world information and communications order was not only a reaction to the fact that 80 per cent of news on developing societies came from the Western press and was unfair and biased, but stemmed also from a desire to inform the world about those societies from their own perspective. The Philippines believed that democratizing the sources of information would in the long-term contribute to true understanding between peoples, which in turn would foster harmony and peace in the world.

19. That new order should in no way be perceived as one which imposed censorship and controls on freedom of the press, a freedom his country considered a fundamental human right. Rather, it was a matter of restructuring to permit a free flow and broader and more balanced treatment of news and information. Considering the speed with which the world was changing and the shifts in international relations, what was most needed was a true and balanced exchange of information. The international community needed the courage and wisdom to accept that fact.

20. Mr. JANOWSKI (Poland) said that Poland had abandoned the old concept of a closed, narrowly-informed society in favour of the plurality of sources and variety of information which it considered were the only way to achieve co-operation in finding solutions to the fundamental problems of the contemporary interdependent world. The communications media were an important vehicle for exchanging opinions and creating an atmosphere of trust. Furthermore, Poland was a loyal advocate of the principle that the information media should serve as an instrument for the strengthening of justice, progress and peace, and had supported the establishment of some international regulations in that area. It understood that just as a sovereign State could choose the type of information media operating within its borders, it should also respect all international regulations in that sphere. In international broadcasting, the information media should respect the sovereignty of other States, their national identity and their cultural values, and they should avoid defamatory ideas.

21. History had demonstrated that the alternative to a free flow of information was stagnation in science and development and a weakening of man's belief in imposed ideas. In that regard, Poland welcomed the priorities for the information media established in the final document of the Belgrade summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. It supported an approach to information geared to dialogue, co-operation and joint activities and based on the principles of respect for the free flow of information, the removal of all restrictions to the natural rivalry of spiritual and moral values, and respect for the right to hold different opinions and disseminate them freely.

22. As communications assumed a global character, States were less able to exercise control, and individuals were able to participate more fully in the transmission of ideas and knowledge. It was very important that greater freedom of mutual communication should be possessed not only by the official mass media but by individual citizens' groups and associations. The technological advances in communications should transform the current "philosophy of mistrust" into a

(Mr. Janowski, Poland)

"philosophy of interdependence". It should be noted that the far-reaching transformations under way in the States of Eastern Europe might be described as the "new thinking".

23. The new Polish Government was trying to define the framework of a new information order and was looking for better ways to present its views through the various mass media. Poland was opening itself up to broader co-operation. In that context, it believed that serious thought should be given to the gradual creation of a European information market and a world information programme.

24. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/44/433) reflected to a very significant extent his delegation's concern regarding the functioning of the Department of Public Information. It had read with interest the note on that subject by the Secretary-General (A/44/433/Add.1), which attested to the great intellectual potential of the Department. It believed that the Department would not fail to meet expectations.

25. Mr. POERNOMO (Indonesia) said that information and communication were an integral part of progress, and could be used to promote development, disseminate information, create trust among nations and encourage understanding among peoples. However, information was often biased. More than 80 per cent of the news was disseminated by the transnational agencies of developed countries. Electronic communications equipment, 90 per cent of which was owned by developed countries, was used to disseminate the ideas of those countries, which were often not congruent with those of the peoples in developing countries.

26. Imbalances in the flow of information could be remedied through the establishment of the new world information and communication order. The purposes of that order embodied in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in recent years, was to reverse the dependent status of developing countries and to promote greater understanding among nations. The September 1989 summit conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade had acknowledged the important work being done by the United Nations and UNESCO, particularly their collaboration with the Broadcasting Organization of the Non-Aligned Countries and the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries.

27. The training provided to journalists from developing countries by the Department of Public Information was one way of eliminating the human-resources gap in the field of information. UNESCO's efforts to build up communications infrastructures in developing countries were also noteworthy. Indonesia called upon the developed countries, to augment their support and contributions to those programmes and urged the Department and UNESCO to increase co-operation with each other, in order to strengthen ongoing efforts to improve information flows from the developing world. There was an imperative need in developing countries for greater access to technology, so that their peoples could make their voices heard and contribute to equitable interaction in international information exchanges. For their part, developing countries should promote co-operation among themselves in the field of information and communication.

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

28. With respect to reorganizing the Department, Indonesia believed that efforts to promote United Nations activities should be tailored to the specific situation of each region or country. In developing countries, for instance, radio was the most effective medium because, being inexpensive, it reached hundreds of millions of people. For that reason, Indonesia hoped that the Indonesian-language radio programme, mandated under General Assembly resolution 38/82 B, would continue. That programme was produced by staff from Indonesia, which was under-represented in the Organization.

29. The United Nations information centres disseminated information of importance and interest to the world at large and could make that information a source of education by presenting the experiences and progress of the countries in which they operated. In that way, the centres could also participate in the establishment of the new world information and communication order. Indonesia wished to re-emphasize the importance it attached to the United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta which had, since its establishment, made significant contributions to the country. It was committed to facilitating the effective functioning of the Centre.

30. With regard to the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/44/329 and A/44/433), Indonesia shared the Inspector's view that officials of the Department and directors of United Nations information centres could co-operate in preparing those reports within a specific time-frame.

31. With the eyes of the world once again on the United Nations, the work of the Department had become more important. He hoped that, in performing its duties, the Department would effectively fulfil the mandate of the General Assembly. The Special Political Committee should try to help it to do so by assigning clear, pragmatic tasks. Through negotiations under way between regional groups and China, substantial progress should be made, thereby making it possible to establish a basis on which a consensus on recommendations might be built. Such an approach would contribute to removing the imbalances and disparities in communication capabilities and to ushering in an era of democratization of global information and communication processes.

32. Mr. PHAM NGAC (Viet Nam) said that the many changes in the world political climate were conducive to improving international peace and security and to promoting political solutions to many regional conflicts. The mass media had great political and moral responsibilities in disseminating objective information in that regard. However, there were serious imbalances in communication infrastructures and information flows between the industrialized and the developing countries. Viet Nam strongly supported the establishment of a new, more just and equitable information and communication order. While it would take considerable time and resources to rectify the disparities, for the time being due attention should be given, in the light of the new positive tendency in world politics, to improving the content of information, which should cease to be ill-intentioned and biased and should instead promote friendship and better understanding among peoples and enhance international co-operation for peace and development. Freedom of information and the press must go hand in hand with full respect for the national

(Mr. Pham Ngac, Viet Nam)

sovereignty, social values and cultural traditions of every people. The international community should condemn and eliminate any kind of discrimination in the dissemination of information.

33. Viet Nam shared the view that in order to achieve a new order, it was essential to rectify the dependent position of developing countries by assisting them in improving their own information and communication infrastructures. It therefore supported the International Programme for the Development of Communication of UNESCO and urged all countries, particularly the industrialized countries, to contribute further to the implementation of the Programme.

34. It was pleased at the activities of the Department of Public Information in informing the whole world of the work of the United Nations, and it believed that, in the near future, the Department should continue to focus on United Nations efforts in the areas of world peace and security, disarmament, national independence, human rights, the environment and the economic and social difficulties facing developing countries. It should also give more objective and impartial coverage to the constructive initiatives being made by all the parties involved in regional conflicts for the purpose of achieving just and lasting political solutions.

35. Once again, the Committee on Information had failed to achieve consensus on recommendations to the General Assembly, despite the tremendous efforts and great flexibility demonstrated by the Member States, particularly developing countries. His delegation hoped that the current session of the Special Political Committee would help overcome the deadlock, thereby contributing to the establishment of the new international order.

36. Mr. YUAN Shibing (China) said that, since the mass media had an enormous influence on social development and mutual understanding among peoples, it was appropriate that the item should be regarded as an important matter in the international community. The issue had been debated year after year in the United Nations with a view to promoting, by means of highly advanced mass media, international peace and security and the economic development of all countries. Therefore, accurate and objective information and reporting could become an important factor in the context of world stability and development. His delegation considered it to be of fundamental importance to establish a new world information and communication order aimed at achieving a free and balanced flow of information on the basis of respect for State sovereignty and equality through the strengthening of the information infrastructure in the developing countries. Regrettably, it had still not been possible to obtain a consensus resolution on the item.

37. There was no denying the fact that the flow of information between the developed and the developing countries remained extremely unbalanced because the developed countries had monopolized the production and dissemination of information. That was due to the inferior position of the developing countries, which lacked the necessary infrastructure, technology and technical personnel.

(Mr. Yuan Shibing, China)

Certain Western mass media, when reporting on the developing countries, judged things by their own set of values; their reporting lacked objectivity, and sometimes they resorted to fabrications or distortions. As a result, they brought harm to friendship and mutual understanding among nations.

38. The developing countries were making efforts to redress the existing imbalances in the field of information. Both the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of the Islamic Conference had discussed the question at their meetings. Moreover, some developed countries were helping the developing countries to improve their information infrastructure. For its part, his delegation would do its best to work for the establishment of a new information order, and was prepared to hold consultations with spokesmen from all regional groups.

39. As the role of the United Nations gained prominence in the cause of international peace and development, the responsibility of the Department of Public Information was also growing. In that regard, it was to be commended for the assistance it had given to the information programme of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia and for keeping the international community abreast of the Group's activities. His delegation expected that the restructuring of the Department would make it more efficient and that it would be more careful to adhere to the principle of equitable geographical distribution in the recruitment of personnel. His delegation also appreciated the continued efforts of UNESCO, despite its financial constraints, to carry out the International Programme for the Development of Communication.

40. Mr. TANASIE (Romania) said that information played a crucial role in the promotion of peace, international understanding and co-operation based on unanimously recognized principles of international law and consistent with the new democratic spirit that should govern international relations. However, it was unfortunate that so far neither the Committee on Information nor the General Assembly had been able to promote the goals of a new world information and communication order because of the opposition of some countries which still believed that the new order was just an attempt to impose restrictions on freedom of the mass media.

41. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that information was an essential instrument in educating peoples for peace, rapprochement and collaboration. The main objective of a new order was to correct the inequalities between the major advanced countries and the developing ones and the disparities in structural and cultural conditions which hindered the North-South dialogue. Moreover, it was necessary to put an end not only to ideologically motivated distortions of information, but also to the skewed image of the world which the media of some countries presented.

42. Attempts at using the press to distort the realities and achievements of countries or to pass unfounded judgement on economic and social policies simply because they did not follow "models" established by those who owned the main information media was not only harmful, for the development of normal international

(Mr. Tanasie, Romania)

relations, but also affected the long-term interests of the very countries which practised that irresponsible policy; while information could be an instrument for promoting peace, if wrongly used it could also lead to confrontation. That was why, more than ever before, there was a need for a responsible political approach to the whole question of information, in order to create the mutual respect necessary to promote détente, peace and co-operation in an increasingly interdependent world.

43. Romania had constantly advocated the adoption of specific and efficient measures which would eliminate disparities in the field of information and promote the cause of national sovereignty and the cultural values of all peoples. It had supported all activities aimed at creating in the developing countries adequate infrastructure and training local media staff so that everyone should be able to benefit from information and from the technological advances related to it. Moreover, it had always held that the media should exclusively serve the cause of understanding and co-operation, disseminating the values of the contemporary world, such as confidence-building and the democratization of international relations.

44. All Governments, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, had the responsibility of promoting understanding and co-operation among States and peoples. It was also the duty of the Committee on Information to examine ways for channelling the efforts of States and mass media in order to attain those objectives.

45. With regard to the work of the Department of Public Information, his delegation appreciated the reports submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 43/60 A and B, of 6 December 1988, and the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, which provided useful information on the progress achieved in the reorganization of the Department and in the way it had carried out the work assigned to it in a period of transition. He was confident that the work of the Department would further improve, for the benefit of all States Members of the United Nations. He also commended the work done by UNESCO, particularly in connection with the International Programme for the Development of Communication.

46. Mr. Oudovenko (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) resumed the Chair.

47. Mr. MONTANE (Cuba) said that the subject of information had acquired critical importance in recent years as significant technological progress had been made, thereby accentuating the inequality and imbalance between the developed and developing countries. Accordingly, the new world information and communication order, whose purpose was to promote development and peace through the exchange of objective information on the basis of equality and respect, had for years been the focus of the discussions in the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee.

48. Multilateralism had to be strengthened in order to achieve the new order. The movement of non-aligned countries had taken up that question at its ninth summit

(Mr. Montane, Cuba)

conference, reaffirming the need further to intensify co-operation between the non-aligned countries and other developing countries in the field of information in order to stimulate efforts for the establishment of a new world information and communication order based on a free and balanced flow of information and the bridging of the technological gap separating the developing countries from the developed countries in that area. Moreover, the non-aligned countries at the summit conference were urged to help to implement various decisions adopted to that end.

49. That seemingly technical question was of fundamental interest for such intergovernmental organizations as the United Nations, UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union, owing to the emergence of transnational and supranational centres that used satellite technology and integrated networks to formulate policies that were outside of the purview of nation-States. That situation created international problems and imposed restrictions on countries' sovereignty. The Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee thus had a crucial role to play in seeking a solution to those conflicts before they were unavoidable.

50. The Special Political Committee should review the situation in southern Africa, as the Organization played a role in disseminating information about the struggle of the world's peoples who wished to see Namibia free and apartheid eradicated from South Africa. Moreover, the question of Palestine and the struggle in the occupied territories were a priority for the Department of Public Information.

51. The restructuring of the Department should not affect the information policy approved by the General Assembly and should maintain the necessary balance in languages, posts, etc., inherent to the unity of that international forum.

52. The far-reaching changes in the international situation had yet to bring about solutions to the overwhelming problems facing the developing countries. Moreover, serious conflicts remained unsettled in various parts of the world. That was why the mass media must play a more active role in eliminating confrontation and interference in the internal affairs of States, such as the interference which his country must yearly report to the Special Political Committee: radio broadcasts against Cuba with subversive intentions and the recent effort to transmit television programmes in Spanish, solely for Cuba, in a vain attempt to destabilize that country. That activity was an element in the psychological war which the United States was waging against the Cuban revolution, as were the Bay of Pigs invasion, the economic blockade, the acts of sabotage, the attacks against its key leaders and the infiltration and encouragement of armed gangs. However, like those other elements, it was doomed to failure.

53. Those new forms of aggression, subversion and destabilization violated the rules of international law, particularly the International Telecommunications Convention signed by the United States at Geneva in 1963 and the 1982 Nairobi Optional Additional Protocol, and constituted an aggressive escalation to which he was alerting the international community. The Ministers of Information of Latin

(Mr. Montane, Cuba)

America, who had met in February at Quito, had condemned that project, as had the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at the Meeting in Harare and the heads of State or Government during the ninth summit Conference of the Movement, held in September at Belgrade.

54. As its highest officials had stated, Cuba would not accept passively that violation of international legal rules and would give an appropriate response to the aggression if it continued.

55. That case was a clear example of the urgent need to establish a new information order. Moreover, the Committee on Information and the Special Political Committee should take note of the violations of international law and the political pressures concealed under the "freedom of information" that was being advocated in some quarters. In fact, an attempt was being made to impose the "free-market" doctrine and the philosophy of pragmatism, which were instruments of expansion of the transnational capitalist enterprises, whose objective was to control communications internationally and to dominate the information networks in order to use them for the "export of services" and the "consumer culture". In that regard, it should be noted that the third-world countries had access to scarcely 10 per cent of the information and telecommunications media, which was why over 100 countries did not even enjoy that longed-for "freedom".

56. Mr. BEN LAMINE (Tunisia) said that the discussion begun in 1970 by UNESCO on information and the integration of the mass media in the development process had not produced the expected results. The establishment of a new world information and communication order was not easy, because it was not easy to reconcile the leading information media and those of the third-world countries. The point of view of readers from the developed world frequently prevailed, to the detriment of the reality of the developing countries, which was misunderstood or intentionally disregarded.

57. His delegation welcomed the role played by UNESCO in reinforcing the communication infrastructures of the developing countries through its International Programme for the Development of Communication and trusted that the co-operation between the Department of Public Information and UNESCO would be strengthened.

58. The profusion of ideas and values from the North, which the third world absorbed for lack of its own information infrastructure, was a cause of serious concern in some cases, because it resulted in imbalances. The News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, which was inspired by the principles of non-alignment and whose objective was the decolonization of information, should reduce those imbalances. That was why his delegation welcomed the co-operation between the Department and the Pool, which should be strengthened further.

59. He welcomed the measures adopted by the Department to fulfil its mandate and stressed the need consistently to pay attention to such matters as the situation in the Middle East, the question of Palestine, Namibia, the elimination of apartheid, the promotion of human rights and economic and social development, and expressed the hope that programmes concerning the Arab world would be expanded.

(Mr. Ben Lamine, Tunisia)

60. Moreover, the introduction of new technologies in the Department was commendable, as it represented a significant qualitative contribution to its work. Lastly, he welcomed the strengthening of the role and the mandate of the United Nations information centres and the future co-operation between the Department and UNDP.

61. Mrs. MIRANDA (Chile) said that the changes now taking place in the world shed light on the interrelationship of all countries: the fact that a phenomenon such as freedom was understood with equal clarity in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe was an example of the process of international communication.

62. Ten years previously, the Committee on Information had been created to rearrange the existing information system and to give a clear mandate to the Department of Public Information for a United Nations information policy based on free and balanced information and devoted to improving the mutual understanding of the inhabitants of the planet and enhancing the Organization's image.

63. With regard to information and communication, it was necessary to put an end to the enormous imbalance between the developing countries, which focused their attention only on subjects of concern to them, and the developed countries, whose reality was distorted. One way to achieve that goal was through new advanced technology, such as compact television cameras and videos, by means of which official political information could be offset. In such areas as teaching, the developed countries must demonstrate the political will to promote a free exchange of information.

64. Freedom of the press was one of the bulwarks of democracy. That could be seen in the transition to democracy to which the Government and people of Chile were committed. With little more than a month remaining until the presidential elections, his delegation reiterated that they would take place with the most complete freedom of information for all participating political tendencies.

65. With regard to the reorganization of DPI, his delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that the review of the United Nations public information networks (A/44/433 and A/44/433/Add.1), having been submitted late, had not permitted full benefit to be drawn from what might have been expected of such a report and that it would have been preferable for it to be submitted when the reorganization of DPI had begun. In any event, the report requested for 1992 would provide more adequate information and cover a longer time period. His delegation also had doubts about the effectiveness of the decision to entrust United Nations information efforts to the offices of UNDP in those countries that had no information centres. The UNDP personnel might be experts in their own fields, but they were not qualified to act as journalists.

66. His delegation was prepared to continue working in the Committee towards the desired consensus, which was the best way to promote the smooth functioning of DPI. The Department, despite financial constraints, had been accomplishing miracles in providing the public with a true picture of the United Nations.

67. Mr. MAHMOUD (Lebanon) said that information, which had always been indispensable to all societies and which had been used both to disseminate creative and constructive ideas and to manipulate and control public opinion and bolster the power of autocratic régimes, was at the core of the evolution of today's world and was opening wide the way for the exchange of ideas and innovations among citizens of the world.

68. Lebanon had played a leading role in developing information in the Arab world since the last century. The press in Lebanon, regarded as the fourth power, had survived the past 15 years of war and violence despite constant intimidation. Dozens of Lebanese journalists had sacrificed their lives for freedom of information and the right of expression.

69. The new world information and communication order, which had been a subject of controversy among various groups, was a means of promoting the democratization of global information processes, strengthening the communication infrastructure of developing countries, fostering free circulation and a better-balanced dissemination of information and strengthening the cultural diversity of the world. It could be achieved through practical measures involving co-operation between the developing and the developed countries. But the concept should not be understood as imposing restrictions on the means of communication or information. The public could be the victim of information manipulated not only by the State-run media but also by powerful mass-media corporations in free-enterprise systems. An obvious example was the stereotyped way in which certain Western media, motivated by political considerations, portrayed Arabs.

70. A new world information and communication order could only be achieved with time and through mutual understanding, commitment and co-operation. In that connection, the concept of democratization of information should be taken in the broadest sense to include democratization of access to sources of data, which would enable the majority of developing countries to contribute to the international exchange of information and to use the latest innovations in their development programmes.

71. The United Nations could play a vital role in ensuring access to the creation of data bases, and DPI could serve as a liaison centre for co-operation programmes to bridge the gap between the developing and the developed countries.

72. For those who, like the members of his delegation, believed in the role of the United Nations, it was a matter for concern that DPI had come under systematic attack by groups in certain developed countries whose interests often conflicted with the Organization's principles. It was necessary to make public opinion favourable to the United Nations through an intensive campaign of information about its work.

73. As to reorganizing DPI, a careful examination of the effectiveness of the new structure was necessary at a time when DPI, like other United Nations bodies, was facing more challenges and demands owing to the Organization's increasing involvement in tackling world problems.

74. Mr. BOUTSKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that current trends showed that the new economic thinking was forging ahead with greater determination in areas of international concern. The United Nations was playing an increasingly important part in concluding international agreements and giving concrete form to the ideas of co-operation, joint development and an international approach to peace-making. Its activity reflected a greater recognition of the global nature of such problems and a greater understanding of the need to resolve them through joint effort. The desire and willingness to maintain a dialogue and achieve mutual comprehension was of decisive importance, and that tendency could be seen in the growing number of resolutions approved by consensus.

75. It was therefore regrettable that, in its treatment of the questions before it, the Committee had not made the same progress. It would be difficult to resolve the vital international problems facing humanity in the last decade of the twentieth century unless the international community participated directly in the various activities being carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. Otherwise, there could be no guaranteeing the success of the solutions being negotiated at the multilateral and governmental levels.

76. That highlighted not only the importance but also the need of genuinely increasing the effectiveness of the activities of the whole United Nations system in the sphere of public information. In that regard, the proposal made by the representative of the Ukrainian SSR at the tenth session of the Committee on Information, concerning the creation of a data bank on questions relating to the dissemination of information on United Nations activities should be recalled. In his delegations's view, that would contribute to the elaboration of a more realistic criterion for determining the effectiveness of the work of the Department of Public Information.

77. He took note with satisfaction of the tasks carried out by the Department in implementation of General Assembly resolution 43/60 A of 6 October 1988. Emphasis should be placed on the agreements concluded with the World Disarmament Campaign for the joint production of two publications and the videos to be made on the subject of apartheid in collaboration with the Centre against Apartheid. It would be appropriate for the heads of the Department to concentrate their attention on the tasks that still needed to be carried out in order to achieve a better understanding of United Nations activities outside Headquarters. That work was all the more important in that it must be carried out bearing in mind the limited resources.

78. With regard to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/44/433), his delegation would welcome explanations about the Inspector's statement that he had not received a timely reply to his letter and telex addressed to the heads of the Department of Public Information when he was preparing his reports.

79. He also requested explanations about a series of conclusions, such as that contained, for example, in paragraph 97 of document 44/433, concerning the small degree to which reform contributed to the effectiveness of the administrative machinery. It would also be interesting to know the view of the

(Mr. Boutsko, Ukrainian SSR)

Under-Secretary-General on the Inspector's reasoning that a differentiated approach was required in order for the centres to be useful (A/44/329, para. 72).

80. The Ukrainian SSR fully shared the Secretary-General's position that the documents of the Joint Inspection Unit contained a series of factual errors and unjustified statements that detracted from their value, and also the view that the subjectivity of some of the Inspector's observations showed that there were procedural and communication problems. He also agreed that the associations that gave assistance to the United Nations could contribute to the work of the information centres and even intensify it but, in the current circumstances, could not replace it. The Inspector's recommendations concerning the closing of some information centres, in particular, at Paris, Prague and Lisbon, gave rise to doubts.

81. At the current stage, his delegation considered it appropriate that the Department of Public Information should urge the national associations that supported the United Nations and the non-governmental organizations to contribute to the conduct of an analysis of the effectiveness of the Department's information programmes. It should involve the participation of individuals and organizations with a view to the republication of press materials directed towards a larger segment of public opinion. It should begin to seek new forms of information materials prepared by news services and audio-visual publications that would correspond not only to the new administrative structure but also to the time requirements and the wishes of the recipients. It should transform itself into a centre for co-ordinating United Nations information activity (which would require support for the Secretary-General's proposal contained in paragraph 85 of document 44/653). It should maintain periodical consultations between the Under-Secretary-General and the representatives of the various regional groups, not only at the beginning of the substantive session of the Committee on Information but also thereafter; in that way, if the Committee could not adopt decisions on the question of the activities of the Department, the Department would be able to study the measures that should be taken for the adoption of definitive solutions.

82. Delegations today had before them the task of mobilizing and utilizing effectively the Organization's potential for pursuing the process of disarmament, the strengthening of international peace and security and the solution of regional conflicts and also of contributing to the co-operation of States in the economic, ecological, social and humanitarian fields, including human rights. The Department could and should make a contribution to that end. Whether or not it did would depend to a large extent on the efforts of the delegations members of the Committee. His delegation was prepared to contribute to the task of submitting a concrete plan of work at the current session.

83. Mr. VARKONYI (Hungary) said that freedom of information was a fundamental right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations was consecrated. Free flow of information was an indispensable means of promoting better understanding among peoples and nations. Inspired by that conviction, Hungary accepted as obligatory the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and the documents of the follow-up meetings that had taken place ever since.

(Mr. Varkonyi, Hungary)

84. As a consequence of the deep social and political changes in Hungary, it was necessary to elaborate a new law on information to replace the 1986 Law on the Press, which had primarily concerned the legal status of the press and journalists and had not recognized the right of every individual to freedom of expression and the press. The new Law on the Freedom of Information was based on the following principles: regulation of the methods, guarantees and legal limits of the exercise of freedom of expression and the press, focusing on the individual. The exercise of those rights excluded criminal acts or instigation to commit such acts, as well as acts that violated the rights of others. The law also stated that the function of the press was to facilitate exchanges of views and to participate in the public control of the executive power. Private persons would be entitled to print, publish and distribute press products and to operate radio and television stations. The law had already been heralded by the appearance throughout Hungary of dozens of independent papers.

85. Hungary, which promoted a knowledge of its country among the rest of the world, facilitated the entry of foreign journalists, who could circulate with entire freedom throughout the country. Since July 1988, no permission was needed to work as a correspondent or to shoot films. His delegation was convinced that the United Nations could facilitate the free and wide flow of information and encourage co-operation and the exchange of information between countries. In that regard, he hoped that the members of the Committee on Information could arrive at a consensus on the draft resolution on information.

86. With regard to the work of the Department of Public Information, he hoped that the reorganization of that Department would produce constructive results for the United Nations system as a whole. He added that a more balanced geographical distribution of the posts of that Department would increase its effectiveness.

87. For the nations of the world, information was a means of hearing and being heard; accordingly, the flow of information should be increased and co-operation should be promoted in order to reduce the technological gap. To that end, UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication could make a useful contribution. Lastly, his delegation was prepared to participate in the joint efforts to increase mutual understanding and the effectiveness of the Organization's activities in order to attain common objectives in that important sphere.

88. Mr. ANAKI (Côte d'Ivoire) recalled that when, some weeks past, a violent earthquake had occurred in the western part of a great country, the international community had been able to extend its condolences and offer its co-operation on the next day. The speed and quality of the transmission of that information had been made possible by advances in information and communication technology, which showed that objectively-used information could be a factor for rapprochement, understanding, solidarity and peace.

89. In establishing the Committee on Information, the General Assembly had given it responsibility both for establishing the policies of the Department and for

(Mr. Anaki, Côte d'Ivoire)

promoting, in co-operation with UNESCO, the establishment of a new world information and communication order. It was hoped that that initiative would over the long term correct or at least diminish the great differences that remained between North and South. However, difficulties soon arose in the Committee on Information as a result of conceptual differences concerning the new order and because of DPI's apparent lack of consistency in choosing its themes, and in its expenditures and policies of staff reduction and internal promotion. For its part, UNESCO had undergone the consequences of the withdrawal of some large contributors at a time when it was going through a financial crisis. In the past two years there had been some changes in UNESCO and the Committee on Information had made some encouraging progress.

90. In connection with documents A/44/653, A/44/509 and A/44/21, his delegation warmly congratulated the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information on the restructuring efforts she had carried out. Recent events had also contributed to a wider dissemination of information on the United Nations, which in turn strengthened the image of the Organization.

91. His delegation considered that among the many themes before the Committee, emphasis should be placed on the importance of economic and social questions, such as the economic crisis in Africa, the worsening of the debt situation as a result of the erosion of commodity prices and the readjustment efforts that had been made. In that connection, it supported the preparations being made for the activities referred to in paragraph 30 of document A/44/653.

92. His delegation also supported the restructuring measures and was concerned at the financial difficulties which made the careful and rational planning of activities necessary. Turning to document A/44/509, he said that the report was encouraging, in spite of the limited resources available for the International Programme for the Development of Communication. His delegation considered that the concentration of effort on selected projects was a realistic approach and hoped that, as part of the reinvigoration of UNESCO, some States would reconsider their decision and increase its possibilities of action.

93. Turning to the report of the Committee on Information (A/44/21), he noted that the Committee was still at the stage of defining its role, and confined itself to submitting recommendations to the General Assembly; the lack of consensus hindered it from carrying out its mandate fully. It was to be hoped, however, that with the help of détente, the negotiators from the various groups would find a platform acceptable to all.

94. With regard to the establishment of the new international information and communications order, he noted that the competition among the developed countries for audio-visual communication technology was sharpening the differences between them and the developing countries, and creating new problems related to the social environment and cultural identity. In that connection, he applauded the position of the developed countries which had stated that they were prepared to help strengthen the structures of the developing countries, which, in their turn, should guarantee the conditions necessary for freedom of information.

(Mr. Anaki, Côte d'Ivoire)

95. In his country, fundamental importance was attached to information, on which no restrictions of any kind were imposed. The country had two radio stations, and since 1987, national television reached the entire country. Information was used to support economic and social development and not as a means of disparagement and blackmail.

96. That was the case, however, with regard to some foreign newspapers, which, in explaining the critical economic situation in Africa, had not hesitated to attribute the specific case of Côte d'Ivoire to reasons other than the dizzying and continued fall in the prices of its two main exports, coffee and cacao. His country had replied with silence and was glad that its image had not been affected.

97. The North-South imbalance was the result of a long historical process, and the establishment of the new world communication and information order needed to rectify it required enormous human, technical and financial resources which the developing countries did not have. The task would be long and difficult and would require international co-operation in which the efforts made at the national level received the support of the industrialized countries. The latter should come to agreement and ensure that information played its basic role in the strengthening of peace, the safeguarding of democracy and human rights, the elimination of imbalances and poverty and the peaceful solution of conflicts.

98. Mr. BUSEK (Czechoslovakia) emphasized the importance of information in the present ever more interdependent world. Information should be an instrument of mutual knowledge and enhanced understanding among nations and, consequently, of the strengthening of peace, stability and security. The mass media, and above all the most influential of them, bore a great responsibility for the quality and impact of the information they provided.

99. The positive changes in the general political climate, which were primarily a result of the improvement of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, had introduced new elements of confidence and transparency into information policies, which also found their way into the communication media, as was shown by the great attention most of those media were devoting to the processes of restructuring in the socialist countries. In general, the realistic approach taken in that information could be regarded as positive if it was freed of some still selective and lopsided elements.

100. The essential prerequisite for a democratic and balanced dialogue of States was reliable information based on facts and on a pluralism of views. However, in the present conditions of information monopolies and the inferior position of some countries, that goal remained distant, for a balanced and free flow of information would be possible only after the discrepancy between the means and opportunities of the producer and receiver countries was eliminated.

101. For that reason, his country had always supported the just requirement of the developing countries for a new world information and communication order which would meet their development needs and contribute to the democratization of

(Mr. Busek, Czechoslovakia)

international relations, strengthening peace and security and co-operation between nations.

102. His country supported UNESCO's role in the field of information and communication, and hoped that the outcome of the General Conference would give its activities new impetus. It was encouraged by the calls for a further strengthening of co-operation between the United Nations Secretariat and UNESCO in order to achieve a wider and better balanced dissemination of information by reinforcing the communication capabilities of developing countries. That assistance to developing countries could be supplemented through bilateral channels. Within its possibilities, Czechoslovakia had always given assistance, providing training for journalists, mass media specialists and technical personnel from developing countries, and it intended to increase that co-operation in the future.

103. His delegation had always followed with interest the measures to increase the efficiency of United Nations information and public-relations activities, in particular those designed to improve the structure of the Department of Public Information. He welcomed the Department's achievements, especially in the light of staff retrenchment and financial restrictions. He reiterated his delegation's view concerning the importance of equitable geographical distribution of DPI posts, and hoped that that subject would receive continued attention from the Department.

104. Furthermore, his delegation supported the Secretary-General's decision about the need for further strengthening of the United Nations information centres, and endorsed his comment in document A/44/329/Add.1 about the need to retain rather than reduce their number, especially in places where no other United Nations presence existed, given that direct contacts between the United Nations and the various countries were irreplaceable. His delegation also shared the views expressed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/44/653) concerning the need to rationalize and improve co-ordination of the work of the United Nations information centres, in particular with regard to intensifying direct and systematic communication exchange with local media, information and educational institutions and non-governmental organizations.

105. The Information Centre in Prague, for its part, had promoted useful contacts between the United Nations and the respective Czechoslovak communications media and had helped to increase public awareness of United Nations ideals and aspirations.

106. Mr. ZEGELBONE (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the charges levelled by the representative of Cuba were false and inappropriate in the Special Political Committee, which did not concern itself with bilateral issues. Refuting those charges, he observed that the Voice of America had been transmitting radio programmes to Cuba for 20 years. Since the start-up in 1985 of the programme of Radio Martí, the transmission power had not been increased and no new frequencies had been introduced that might have caused interference with local Cuban transmitters, nor had standards of objectivity and accuracy been abandoned. The fact was that the Radio Martí programme was transmitted on a frequency that was legally registered with the International Telecommunication Union.

(Mr. Zegelbone, United States)

107. In a country that enjoyed freedom of information, information programmes from abroad, like those of the Voice of America and others which were received in many countries represented in the Committee, would be regarded, at best, as a source of accurate information; at worst, they would have no influence. By contrast, in a country whose population hungered for information about the world - and, indeed, about its own country - because of the restrictions imposed by its Government on the information media, any source which provided such information had wide repercussions.

108. The attitude of the representative of Cuba appeared to be especially anachronistic at a time when other countries were proudly accepting the challenge of opening up to the free international exchange of information.

109. Mr. MONTANE (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he wondered how a foreign country could arrogate to itself the right to adopt projects aimed at destabilizing another country: that was what was being done by the Government of the United States, where approval was being sought in Congress for a television transmission to be beamed at Cuba. Despite the changes occurring in the world, the Bush Administration was intensifying the blockade and radio transmissions against Cuba and was now setting up a television transmitter hostile to Cuban listeners.

110. At the recent international academic meeting in Halifax, Canada, it had been said that the United States project for an anti-Cuban television transmitter reflected Washington's aggressive policy towards Cuba and that such transmissions caused even greater friction between the United States and Cuba. Opposition to that project had also been expressed by the ministers of information of Latin American countries and by the heads of State and ministers for foreign affairs of the non-aligned countries. He warned the international community about aggression of that kind, which could be a source of tension between the two countries, and repeated that Cuba would be able to give an appropriate response to such aggression. If the United States wanted to exchange programmes with Cuba, it should say so; although they had always broken down, negotiations between the two countries on other matters had already been held. If people in the United States wanted to see Cuban television or witness the progress made in medicine, education, biotechnology and various sectors of the economy, Cuba could offer them its information products, which were undoubtedly well known to the Department of Public Information. What his country could not accept was influence imposed from abroad.

111. Mr. ZEGELBONE (United States of America), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, if the representative of Cuba watched television at home or in his country's mission, he would realize that Cuban television programmes could be seen on United States cable television networks. A week earlier, in its programme World Report, the CNN channel had carried a programme on Cuban education without any censorship or cutting. The United States was much more prepared to receive transmissions from Cuba and felt less vulnerable to them than did Cuba in the reverse situation. He added that the reason why a country felt itself vulnerable to information from abroad was that its information system was not open. If the

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Cuban people were not interested in such information, it would not be listened to, but that was not exactly what was happening in Cuba at the present time.

112. Mr. MONTANE (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said it was clear that Cubans did not like a radio station to be called "Martí" since Martí had always been anti-imperialist. Furthermore, everyone knew that 90 per cent of United States information about Cuba was reactionary and did not describe the actual situation in his country. However, over 60 per cent of the information available in Cuba came from Western countries and the United States. During the past year, for example, 80 films from the United States had been seen in Cuba. On the other hand, according to studies by United States universities, only two Cuban films had been shown in the United States. Was that an example of freedom of expression, or the free circulation of information?

113. In the United States, there had been hardly any reference to the meeting of ministers of information of Latin America or of the non-aligned summit meeting. However, when a whale appeared in the Caribbean Sea, everyone rushed to the scene to give it the necessary protection, but only for publicity reasons. Lastly, he repeated that he was ready to reach a mutually acceptable solution over the problem at hand.

114. The CHAIRMAN said that, having consulted the members of the Committee and the Department of Conference Services, he wished to announce that the session of the Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations would be held approximately between 16 April and 4 May 1990. Since those dates were only approximate, it was possible that the Special Committee might hold other meetings, as necessary, with the authorization of the General Assembly. In his report to the General Assembly, the Rapporteur would include that point.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.