



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. EL-CHOUFI (Syrian Arab Republic)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 53: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

- (a) CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN THE APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT: REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)
- (b) INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE SPHERE OF INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)
- (c) UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES (continued)
  - (i) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO REVIEW UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES
  - (ii) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
- (d) FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (continued)
  - (i) DRAFT DECLARATION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
  - (ii) DRAFT CONVENTION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

\* This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room A-3550, 866 United Nations Plaza (Alcoa Building), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate fascicle for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL  
A/SPC/34/SR.27  
23 November 1979  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 53. QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/34/21, A/34/148, A/34/149, A/34/195 and A/34/574)

- (a) CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE IN THE APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF NATIONAL INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT: REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)
- (b) INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE SPHERE OF INFORMATION AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS: REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (continued)
- (c) UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES (continued)
  - (i) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO REVIEW UNITED NATIONS PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES
  - (ii) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
- (d) FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (continued)
  - (i) DRAFT DECLARATION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
  - (ii) DRAFT CONVENTION ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

1. Mr. NUSLIBEH (Jordan) said that questions relating to information and mass communications were important and controversial: they affected international relations and had a crucial impact upon world peace and security. The attitudes of national societies were literally conditioned by the information provided by the media, in a world which was increasingly interdependent and needed goodwill and mutual respect to enhance co-operation and reduce sources of conflict among nations.

2. The human mind could easily be manipulated. In the past it had been the family and community structure which had prescribed individual attitudes. Now it was television, satellite communication systems, radio, the cinema, newspapers, magazines and books which overwhelmingly influenced the behaviour of individuals and societies in most parts of the world. Information was an awesome weapon, and it was no wonder that it had been referred to as a "fourth authority", after the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, which it had perhaps even surpassed in real power.

3. In a fast-moving world, few people had the time or the inclination to study or do research themselves, and the information media told them what they should think was right and what they should think was wrong. For example, United Nations

/...

(Mr. Nuseibeh, Jordan)

Headquarters was located in a metropolis in which an enormous volume of news circulated and yet, for all the proficiency of local media-makers, it was disconcerting to see how little information was being disseminated about the activities of the world body. It was as though the United Nations was working within the confines of a cordon sanitaire. It was no wonder that so many of the inhabitants of the city believed that the United Nations was anathema.

4. Without contesting the right to freedom of speech and communication, the representatives of the entire world had the right to question the existing structures and functions of the media which had such a profound impact upon international relations: the world problems which were the concern of the United Nations were deserving of widespread and objective coverage.

5. The developed countries had a virtual monopoly of information, while the developing countries were no more than consumers of that flood of information which at times, was blatant misinformation. It was indeed easy for the media and for those who controlled them to manipulate the news or to ignore whatever was inimical to them.

6. Power, in the information field or elsewhere, must be counterbalanced by restraint and accountability on the part of those who exercised it. It was imperative for the Committee to start drawing up immediately a convention guiding the ethical behaviour of those working in that extremely powerful field. Establishments and individuals in countries acceding to such a convention, could, as in the case of human rights instruments, be held accountable for any abuses of media power. Obviously such a step should not be construed as in any way interfering with the freedom of the press.

7. Inasmuch as the field of information was inextricably linked to the right of every society to preserve its own system and values and to pursue its own ideological, social and economic orientation, the establishment of a new international information order must be approached with circumspection. His delegation believed, however, that Member States should have no difficulty in accepting the basic premises of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, contained in the annex to document A/34/149, which Jordan supported. It should be stressed that any suggestions the Committee might make would be intended simply to complement the work that had already been done by UNESCO in that field.

8. It was undeniable that a serious disequilibrium existed in the dissemination and evaluation of world events affecting relations among people of different cultures and different stages of development. The media gave pride of place to the exciting and the unusual at the expense of ordinary news, and thus drew a subjective and often pessimistic picture of the situation. That tendency hardly contributed to a better understanding of international relations and required a basic reorientation. It was therefore essential to explore ways of eliminating such imbalances and equalizing access to news sources, to which States, non-governmental organizations, enterprises and private citizens could all make a contribution.

/...

(Mr. Museibeh, Jordan)

9. The information media left a great deal to be desired, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, in many developing countries, which must reform their own national information systems before undertaking to restructure the international information order. Indeed, in some countries of the developing world, disproportionate attention was paid in the news to endorsing government policies and to fostering the cult of the personality; there was also excessive emphasis on the trivial and the thrilling at the expense of events which, in the long run, had the potential to transform society. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration also brought out that task of nation-building.

10. There was a great deal to be gained from criticism and dissenting opinion which alerted national governments to their mistakes. Provided it stopped short of incitement to violence or sedition, freedom of expression was the best safeguard against illicit action designed to overthrow or destabilize legitimate governments. No society, moreover, could develop peacefully until freedom of expression was guaranteed by law.

11. His delegation supported the efforts made by Tunisia towards the creation of a new international information system. The world could not afford to leave the information field in its current state of disarray, because information controlled the most potent driving forces of the human being: the mind and the passions.

12. His delegation, which fully endorsed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, urged the United Nations system as a whole, and more specifically UNESCO, to support and promote regional and international co-operation in the field of communications and information as an integral part of the efforts to achieve a new international economic order. It thus attached great importance to the Arabic language programmes broadcast and televised by the United Nations.

13. A new international information order could help to improve the quality of life and strengthen understanding and mutual respect among all nations.

14. Mr. ALBORNOZ (Ecuador)\* said that, in considering questions relating to information, any democratic country which respected human rights owed it to itself to reaffirm the principle of freedom, without which information became propaganda and a monopoly. Those countries where the truth had been passed over in silence or distorted had insisted on the need for a new world information order to promote peaceful economic and social development and place more emphasis on the plurality of nations.

15. Initially, the Special Political Committee had dealt with the question of information concerning the United Nations. Member countries and public or private information services should co-operate in order to reaffirm the faith of nations, promote social progress, and encourage friendly relations among peoples in accordance with the obligations set forth in the Charter. One logical method of strengthening the Charter, as had been mentioned, was to disseminate more information about it in the media and educational systems of all countries.

---

\* The full text of this statement will be issued as document A/SPC/34/PV.27.

(Mr. Albornoz, Ecuador)

16. The first study undertaken in 1979 by the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities and by the Ad Hoc Working Group had highlighted various aspects of the problem. In particular, it had stressed the complexity of the problem and the need to consider it in several stages, which was in itself a sufficient reason for extending and expanding the mandate of the Committee. It had also highlighted the need to co-ordinate information activities throughout the United Nations system in order to ensure that they were in keeping with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. It had further proposed the urgent adoption of concrete measures to adapt those activities to the needs of the new international information order. Among other things, publications, radio broadcasts and films must be produced in all the official languages of the United Nations, and then in all the languages of Member countries, and greater respect must be accorded to the cultural realities of the modern world. Greater prominence should be given to economic and social matters, to which 80 per cent of United Nations activities related, and, in the political field, to basic elements such as international security, peace-keeping operations, decolonization, human rights and apartheid.

17. The time had come to expand the mandate of the Committee, taking into account the role it should play in the establishment of the new international information order, and to strengthen the Department of Public Information by the immediate adoption and implementation of all the recommendations approved by consensus by the Ad Hoc Working Group. Much could be done by the Department of Public Information, even with its present resources and staff. In certain cases, such as the monthly publication of the UN Chronicle and the publication of Development Forum, the matter must be considered by the Fifth Committee before the General Assembly approved the necessary appropriations. The United Nations system and the Department of Public Information should become sources of information about the world, and particularly about the developing countries. The Ad Hoc Working Group had also called on member States to publicize information concerning the United Nations more widely. It had urged that the Department of Public Information should be in the forefront of modern communication methods and technology. It had also reaffirmed the need to preserve the unity and identity of United Nations thinking by referring to the relevant activities of the United Nations in all publications of the system. The Department of Public Information should remain the focal point for the implementation and co-ordination of such activities. It was clear that the Joint United Nations Information Centre (JUNIC) should intensify co-ordination, particularly with non-governmental organizations, and should report to the Committee periodically on the results achieved.

18. The Ad Hoc Working Group had concluded that priority should be given to providing facilities to information media that had correspondents at United Nations Headquarters, and that a larger number of correspondents and journalists from developing countries should be given an opportunity to come to Headquarters to gather first-hand information for subsequent dissemination. The Group had also noted with satisfaction that the United Nations Correspondents' Association (UNCA) had provided further training scholarships for journalists.

19. The report of the Director-General of UNESCO was a valuable contribution to the work of the Special Political Committee and would enable the General Assembly to be

/...

(Mr. Albornoz, Ecuador)

more effective as a co-ordinating body for the whole system in that field. Regular reports were needed on progress in the contribution made by information media to the strengthening of international understanding and peace, the promotion of human rights and the struggle against racism, apartheid and incitement to war.

20. His delegation would support the draft resolutions which proposed an expansion and redefinition of the Committee's mandate, so as to give it specific instructions to consider the principles that should govern the new world information order, and which stressed the need to continue to study questions relating to information on the basis of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

21. Mr. DIEZ (Chile) proposed that the full text of the statement by the representative of Ecuador should be issued as a separate document.

22. It was so decided.

23. Miss NOWOTNY (Austria), stressing the crucial role of information and communications in relations among States, said that the United Nations had a special responsibility in that field: not only must it keep the public informed of its own activities, mobilize public opinion in support of its objectives and make the public aware of the need for international co-operation, but it must also disseminate information about member States and their attitudes to major political problems on a much broader scale than was possible through bilateral contacts.

24. Over the past few years, the prevailing system of information distribution and the underlying concept of the free flow of information had been subject to growing criticism. That concept had in fact served primarily to enable the major news agencies to impose their patterns of thinking on developing societies. Increased attention had been drawn to the quantitative and qualitative imbalance in the flow of information between developed and developing countries. Austria understood the uneasiness underlying such criticism and recognized the need to exchange the dependence of the developing countries in the field of information for relationships characterized by interdependence and co-operation. It did not think, however, that the imbalance could be redressed by stronger governmental control of information media. Freedom of information and opinion, which had been fought for passionately in some countries over the centuries, presupposed free access to all sources of information and the uninhibited distribution of information. It would be neither feasible nor desirable to attempt to change that concept, but that did not mean that certain corrections should not be made. From the quantitative standpoint, for instance, "news co-operation pools" could be created in which the news agencies of developed countries could support those of developing countries. Particular attention would also have to be given to the transfer of the appropriate technology and the promotion of regional co-operation. From the qualitative standpoint, it was important to train personnel - journalists and broadcasters - and the developing countries should therefore be helped to improve existing educational facilities or to create new facilities. A generous system of scholarships and grants should also be established.

/...

(Miss Novotny, Austria)

25. Austria had gained valuable experience in those fields: it had been closely involved in the establishment of co-operation between European and Arab news agencies; its press agency had organized the exchange of news between national news agencies by means of bilateral agreements; it actively supported the Nairobi School of Journalism, founded in 1970 under UNESCO auspices; and the Austrian Press Agency and the Austrian Broadcasting and Television system offered training facilities for journalists from developing countries. The United Nations could play a very important role in that area by drawing on the experience of Member States in co-operation projects and by channelling scholarship offers and access to existing training facilities on an international level.

26. It was to be expected that after more than 30 years, during which the objectives of the United Nations and the nature of its work had evolved considerably, certain concepts and methods relating to United Nations information activities would have to be changed. Her country had participated as an observer in the work of the Committee of 41, as well as in that of its Working Group which had produced a report containing very valuable suggestions for the improvement and co-ordination of information activities, and it would continue to co-operate with the Committee in its future work.

27. As a small country which was often dependent on the major international press agencies but which also served as a centre for the exchange of news between East European and Western television networks, Austria followed closely all developments in the field of information and communications and was therefore particularly interested in the work being done by UNESCO in that area.

28. Mr. EL-SAID (Egypt) observed that all Member States recognized the importance of a free flow and a better balanced exchange of information, the need for which was expressed clearly in General Assembly resolution 33/115 which had established the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities. With regard to agenda item 53 (a), his delegation supported UNESCO resolution 4/9.4/2, which requested the Director-General to "intensify and encourage communications development and to hold consultations designed to lead to the provision to developing countries of technological and other means for promoting a free flow and a wider and better balanced exchange of information". The Director-General had also been requested to draw up a model plan for co-operation and assistance in the application and improvement of national information and mass communication systems for social progress and development and to study, within that plan, the possibility of the establishment of an international fund for the development of communication. The establishment of such a fund would respond to the needs of developing countries in all regions and hence to the wishes of the Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Asia and Oceania, held at Kuala Lumpur from 5 to 14 February 1979.

29. With regard to item 53 (b), his delegation reiterated its support for the Director-General and for the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War. It was clear that freedom of information and the

/...

(Mr. El-Said, Egypt)

free flow of information were vital to the establishment of a constructive international dialogue. The current imbalance between developed and developing countries in the dissemination of information nullified the very idea of a dialogue, which, by definition, must be a two-way process. The international community therefore had a responsibility to provide the developing countries with the means of creating a better information infrastructure so that they could participate in international exchanges of information more effectively and in a more balanced way without impeding the free flow of information or its wide dissemination.

30. His country was convinced of the validity of the right to freedom of information and was currently drawing up amendments to its Constitution which would in effect turn the press into a fourth branch of government; safeguards were envisaged to ensure the complete independence of journalists in a multipartite democratic system; the press would be protected against any arbitrary administrative decision, such as the confiscation or suspension of a publication; journalists would have free access to information; journalists would have to serve society and reflect trends in public opinion; finally, a Supreme Council of Journalists would be established to strengthen the independence of the profession.

31. All States agreed that the establishment of the new international economic order was closely linked with the establishment of the new world information order. The latter must be based on co-operation rather than on confrontation, which was in no one's interests. The new world information order must also be more clearly defined, avoiding slogans which could give rise to conflicting interpretations. The new world information order must redress the existing imbalances in the flow of information between developed and developing countries and must comprise definite plans and programmes for international co-operation under United Nations auspices which would help to improve the information infrastructures of developing countries, e.g. through the transfer of technology and the training of qualified professionals, in order to help those countries to achieve their goals, particularly their economic and social goals. The United Nations could play a vital role in that area through its Department of Public Information. The non-aligned movement, of which Egypt was a member, had for its part already made significant progress in co-operation to establish the new world information order.

32. Clearly, if the United Nations was to achieve its noble objectives, the support of the peoples of the world was essential. That support would be forthcoming, however, only if those peoples were convinced that the United Nations played a vital role in international affairs. His delegation therefore attached great importance to the activities of the Department of Public Information and to strengthening the Department. It had also supported General Assembly resolution 33/115; it welcomed the activities undertaken by the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, of which it was a member, and commended the Committee's Ad Hoc Working Group on its report (A/34/21, annex III). That report was the fruit of a long and constructive debate and must be put to the best possible use rather than consigned to oblivion like so many other reports. His delegation hoped that the recommendations contained in the Working Group's report would be

/...



(Mr. El-Said, Egypt)

adopted and implemented and that the General Assembly would allocate the necessary resources for that purpose. It attached particular importance to the recommendation on balance in the use of official languages, particularly Arabic, and in the geographical distribution of personnel of the Department of Public Information, especially in higher grades. It also endorsed the idea of involving the developing countries to a greater extent in the planning and implementation of the Department's activities. It was in favour of renewing the Committee's mandate and making it more precise so that the Committee could define the new world information order in clearer terms.

33. There was no conflict between the Committee's activities and the part played by UNESCO in the field of information. On the contrary, an attempt should be made to establish ongoing communication between the two bodies in order to enable the Committee to make the best possible use of UNESCO's experience and studies. For example, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems could contribute to the Committee's work. His delegation hoped that the report of that Commission would be presented shortly to the General Assembly and then to the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities.

34. With regard to the composition of the Review Committee, his delegation believed that the present balance was satisfactory and that the participation of other States as observers was a perfectly acceptable solution. His delegation was not, however, opposed to enlarging the Committee, provided that its work did not suffer as a result and that geographical balance was maintained.

35. The report of the Secretary-General on United Nations public information policies and activities (A/34/574) once again confirmed the importance of information in promoting the objectives of the United Nations and, indirectly, the importance of the Department of Public Information. Even though DPI's responsibilities had increased, the resources available to it were declining steadily. DPI must therefore be given the funds and the flexibility required for it to function effectively, as must the Secretariat's other information activities. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that greater co-operation was needed within the Department of Public Information and between it and the Secretariat's other information units.

36. The United Nations Information Centres played a vital role in publicizing the United Nations and its objectives and in mobilizing States in favour of its activities. They must therefore have the necessary resources and be strengthened, particularly in the developing countries.

37. The United Nations should also encourage the use of local languages, as had in fact been recommended by the Ad Hoc Working Group.

38. As a country whose language and culture were Arabic, Egypt appealed to the Director-General of UNESCO and the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information to encourage wider use of Arabic in order to help to redress the existing imbalance. His delegation supported the publication of the UN Monthly Chronicle, which gave a straightforward account of the work and main resolutions of the different organs of the United Nations, and hoped that an Arabic edition would be issued within the period indicated by the Secretariat.

/...

39. Mr. BURKE (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the nine member countries of the European Community, recalled that the UNESCO General Conference had adopted by consensus the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War. The Nine had participated actively in the elaboration of the Declaration and believed it to be a useful contribution to the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order, which was intended to strengthen international peace and understanding on the basis of the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information.

40. The Nine attached particular importance to the right to freedom of opinion, expression and information and to the recognition of that right as an integral part of human rights.

41. The free dissemination of information should be the primary objective of international co-operation in that field, and the strengthening of international communications could contribute to that end. That required intensified co-operation among developing countries and between those countries and the industrialized countries. Practical measures must be taken to close the gap between the highly developed information systems of the industrialized world and those of the developing countries.

42. In that connexion, the Nine welcomed the efforts being made by UNESCO to provide assistance in the application and improvement of national information and mass communication systems. They noted the central role which UNESCO was increasingly playing in relation to communication and information problems. The progress which it had made in implementing its mandate was outlined in documents A/34/148 and A/34/149. The nine member countries of the European Community had, for their part, already made substantial contributions in that field both bilaterally and under the Lomé Convention and were prepared to continue to do so.

43. With regard to agenda item 53 (c), the Nine noted the first report of the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities (A/34/21) and were in favour of renewing its present mandate. The report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (A/34/21, annex III) contained many useful recommendations. Of course, the financial implications of those proposals would need to be examined, but it was clear that much work remained to be done within the mandate entrusted to the Committee under General Assembly resolution 33/115 C. In the meantime, the Nine endorsed the recommendation in the Ad Hoc Working Group's report that the Department of Public Information should be the focal point of co-ordination of the information activities of the United Nations system. That should reduce the duplication of activities and functions between the Department of Public Information and other United Nations information units.

44. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations Information Centres, like the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities (A/34/574), drew attention to the various possibilities for more effective utilization of the resources available to the Department of Public Information and therefore deserved serious consideration.

45. Mr. NISIBORI (Japan), quoting the words of the Secretary-General in his annual report on the work of the Organization (A/34/1, sect. X), said that it was "necessary to convince people that the struggle for peace, justice, equity and human dignity which is waged here at the United Nations is very much their struggle, and that their support, understanding and, if necessary, criticism, can make a real difference to the outcome. We shall not be able to do this by information programmes alone. We shall need, on important issues above all, to be able to show that the world Organization can, and does, treat them on their merits; that it can, and does, produce results which, however imperfect, constitute the difference between order and chaos, or even, in extreme circumstances, between peace and destruction." In that regard, the unanimous decision at the thirty-third session of the General Assembly to establish a 41-member Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, had been a wise one. The frank and positive nature of the discussions held in that Committee and its Ad Hoc Working Group augured well for the future. However, the task entrusted to the Working Group had been found to be too large to be concluded in a single one-week session, and lack of time had prevented the Committee itself from discussing in detail the report of the Group, reproduced as annex III to the report (A/34/21). For that reason, his delegation considered that the mandate of the Committee should be renewed so that it might present to the General Assembly at its next session a comprehensive report containing adequately prepared general guidelines. Some delegations had expressed the view that Committee membership should also be increased. His delegation had no objection to that, provided the number of members was kept low enough for there to be no risk of hampering its efficiency; any Member States could in any case attend its meetings as observers, as some had done.

46. Turning to the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group, he endorsed most of the recommendations it contained, in particular those mentioned under co-operation and co-ordination, the publication Development Forum, short-wave broadcasting, and the possibility of setting up an FM station (paras. 18, 19, 20, 32, 35 and 39, respectively). On Development Forum itself, his delegation hoped that the Department of Public Information would enter as swiftly as possible into consultations with the United Nations University, UNESCO and other relevant organs and agencies in the United Nations system, so that adequate financial resources might be secured to assure its continued publication, as it had proved to be very useful.

47. With regard to the role of the United Nations Information Centres, he welcomed the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/379), which contained useful suggestions and recommendations. Some of them could be implemented in the very near future, others required close consultations between the Department of Public Information and various agencies and organs in the system, and still others would have to be discussed in the Fifth Committee because of the financial implications involved. Any such consideration should take full account of the comments by the Secretary-General on the report (A/34/379/Add.1). For the moment, he simply wished to make a few preliminary observations. In the first place, directors of the centres should have a solid understanding of the country or countries in which they worked, together with an intimate knowledge of the structure and functioning of the mass media in the catchment area of their particular Centre. Secondly, the posts of

(Mr. Nisibori, Japan)

information assistants and reference assistants which required considerable qualifications should be allocated to locally recruited staff with the requisite professional expertise, who should be paid at levels appropriate to the nature of their assignments. Thirdly, host Governments should support the operations of such centres. Fourthly, contacts between the centres and non-governmental organizations should be strengthened and the establishment of United Nations Associations in Member States should be encouraged, while those that existed should be strengthened. At the same time, the centres should make greater efforts to enlist the co-operation of educational institutions.

48. During the general debate in the Committee at the thirty-third session of the General Assembly, a number of delegations had referred to the imbalance in the flow of information between developed countries and developing countries. They had stressed the need to rectify the situation, and the General Assembly had adopted resolution 33/115 B affirming the need to establish a new world information and communication order. In 1979, during the discussions in the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, many delegations had stressed the urgent need to rectify the inequality that their countries suffered from. Japan, whose modernization process had been relatively late, understood the aspirations thus expressed and considered that that difficult problem could only be solved through a constructive dialogue in the spirit of the Declaration adopted the previous year by the UNESCO General Conference on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War.

49. His country, which attached the greatest importance to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, wholeheartedly endorsed the need expressed in the above-mentioned resolution to establish a world information and communication order that was more just and more effective and was based on freer circulation of information as well as its wider and more balanced dissemination. Praiseworthy efforts in that direction had already been made. Particularly noteworthy examples had been the regional conference in San José (Costa Rica, 1976) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia, February 1979), as also were the conference for the African region scheduled for 1980, and the recent Washington planning meeting for the UNESCO Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Development and Transfer of Technology to be held in April 1980. In addition he was also happy to note that the establishment of a Pan-African news agency had been approved in principle at the sixteenth Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (Monrovia, July 1979). That was a combined self-help effort by developing countries to improve the imbalance that existed. Japan intended to continue both its technical and financial assistance to help developing countries set up national information and communications systems of their own. To that end, it had been active in providing training programmes for communications specialists from developing countries and in 1979 had made a voluntary contribution of \$240,000 to the Trust Fund for Economic and Social Information. Of that sum, \$20,000 had gone to support the information seminar on UNCTAD V.

/...

50. Mr. DELGADO SANUDO (Colombia) said that his delegation had a strong interest in information-related matters, which were closely interlinked and which should therefore be studied as a whole. As early as its fourth and fifteenth sessions, the General Assembly had already considered the question of drafting a convention and a declaration on the freedom of information, and in 1978, under decision 33/425, had called for the item to be brought once again to the attention of the Committee. Information-related matters had also been considered by other United Nations bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights and UNESCO, a fact which underscored the importance attached to it.

51. In every age, man had felt the need for communication. Communication was a clear and logical symptom of the principle of man's social behaviour. It was an innate characteristic of man and the tools used for giving expression to it, ranging from the simplest to the most complex, always showed the uniqueness of different ethnic groups and the degree of civilization of those employing it. The need for communication lay at the heart of the right to the freedom of opinion and expression recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Respect for that right, the development of accepted written standards and its range of sensible application should be given particularly close scrutiny.

52. The imbalances of the contemporary and rapidly changing world highlighted the need to establish a new international economic order, and that was not possible without a new world information and communication order which responded effectively to the whole range of problems of modern-day society, ensured maximum use of technological advances and reflected a more just world, thanks to the free and balanced flow of information. His delegation hoped that it would be possible in the near future to draft the main guidelines of that order, to set up appropriate machinery, and to find the resources necessary to implement it.

53. The use of electronics for the purposes of communication required the establishment of rules which ensured respect for the cultural heritage of peoples and safeguarded their special characteristics. Information, which was part and parcel of the economic and social development process, had to accord with the aspirations of the peoples, to strengthen the principle of democracy, equality of nations, respect for human rights and freedoms, and, in the final analysis, to be based on justice and truth.

54. The United Nations had an important role to play in providing co-operation and assistance in the establishment and improvement of national information and mass communication systems for social progress and development. Its activities should give priority to the developing countries, supplying them with information on technical innovations and training their personnel in the use of modern communications systems that were currently controlled by the developed countries. His delegation hoped that practical projects would be worked out in that field and that the information centres would broaden the scope of their activities by organizing seminars and exchanges. A dynamic approach had to be adopted in the face of the growing pace of change and the upsurge in the peoples' aspirations.

(Mr. Delgado Sanudo, Colombia)

55. While UNESCO had the necessary competence to study and analyse international relations in the sphere of information and mass communications, it ought not to be the only appropriate forum in which to discuss information problems and the complexities of communication. It should be possible to establish fruitful co-operation in the study of existing links between modern technology on the one hand, and social change and development in various societies and cultures, on the other, the better to understand the links between mass communications and social change. Consultant services also had to be provided in order to develop appropriate policies and, as a matter of priority, to decide on measures aimed at bridging the gap between the developed and developing countries in matters of mass communications, within the context of the principles of the new world information and communication order.

56. The Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War, which presupposed the free and well-balanced flow of information and should contribute to eliminating ignorance and misunderstanding among peoples, marked a big step forward.

57. The work of the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities had been fruitful. The mandate of that Committee should be renewed in order to enable it to complete its task, without however enlarging its membership.

58. The information transmitted by the Secretary-General on the Department of Public Information (A/34/574) indicated that that Department was well-organized, had the necessary technical facilities, and was carrying out its tasks efficiently. Nevertheless, Member States would like to be more closely associated with its work: a committee or a council should be established to guide the work of the Department in a manner consonant with the purposes, goals and ideals of the United Nations. Governments should be kept informed of information activities directed towards their respective countries.

59. The information should reflect the current membership of the Organization, and thereby take account of the sizable presence of the third-world countries. Care had to be taken to ensure that public information activities did not become propaganda and give a distorted image of the Organization, of whose purposes and achievements all countries were entitled to be kept fully informed. That meant the dissemination of information in all its working languages. His country advocated the establishment of a council for policy and administration responsible for co-ordinating the information activities of the United Nations system and defining those activities most likely to reflect closely the concerns and legitimate aspirations of the developing countries.

60. Special attention should be paid to freedom of information, which was variously interpreted, depending on whether the information media were State- or privately-owned, or a mixture of the two. The economic independence of the information media

/...

(Mr. Delgado Sanudo, Colombia)

was crucial in that regard. However, given the large investment required to install and operate information media, freedom of information was in danger of becoming the exclusive privilege of the developed countries. As several studies had indicated, international tariffs for the transmission of news were financially out of reach of the average press agency in a developing country. They therefore had to be brought down to a level compatible with freedom of information. The threat posed to the cultures of various countries by the presentation of imported programmes could not be underestimated. There was a serious qualitative and quantitative imbalance in the world-wide circulation and dissemination of news, which had to be remedied. The objectivity of news was equally essential and could only be guaranteed by a diversity of sources. Any biased information damaged freedom of information. Any incomplete or distorted information could do harm to peoples, in particular in the developing countries, which got a "bad press". The decolonization of information was a matter of urgency, otherwise the developing countries risked becoming the victims of political, cultural and economic neo-colonialism imposed by the owners of international information media; that would stifle national values. The establishment of a new world information order was therefore imperative in order to propagate the ideals of justice, independence, equality and freedom among men and nations.

61. His country had a long tradition of respect for freedom of information. The press was free but responsible. Legislation guaranteed the confidentiality of sources of information; journalists enjoyed a special status and the benefits of training programmes.

62. Mr. MANSOURI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that delegations attached great importance to United Nations activities in the sphere of public information and to the need to adopt new policies to meet the requirements of the developing countries in that sphere. His delegation had carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General (A/34/574) which was both clear and concise, and made suggestions for the improvement of the activities of the Department of Public Information and the strengthening of communication media in the developing countries. It had also participated in the work of the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities.

63. All the developing countries were convinced of the need to establish a new, more just, world information order intended to strengthen international peace and understanding and based on the free and balanced circulation of information reflecting the economic and social concerns and needs of the developing countries. The Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Havana in September, had reaffirmed the importance of attaining that objective and had emphasized that co-operation in the information field was an integral part of the efforts of the non-aligned and other developing countries to establish new international relations in general and a new information order in particular. The Summit Conference had also reaffirmed the importance of the contribution of the United Nations and the specialized agencies to the establishment of the new information order.

/...

(Mr. Mansouri, Syrian Arab Republic)

64. His delegation supported the efforts of the Department of Public Information to bring its activities into line with the new concept of public information. Nevertheless, it was his delegation's view that the mandate of the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities should be renewed so that it could, in close co-operation with UNESCO and the Department of Public Information, complete the tasks assigned to it. It was to be hoped that the Committee would be able to hold a greater number of meetings in 1980 and that it would not encounter the practical problems which had hampered its work during the past year.

65. The Department of Public Information should be the mass media's main source of information on the activities and problems of the United Nations in the political, economic and social fields, and, to that end, contacts should be increased with local news agencies, especially in the third world, and with the Pool of News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries.

66. With regard to the inadequate financial resources allocated to information activities, his delegation endorsed the statements made by the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and hoped that he would submit specific proposals for increasing those resources which could be adopted in principle by the Special Committee and later approved by ACABQ. The strengthening of the Department of Public Information would make it possible to carry out a wider range of activities and would promote implementation of the concept of a new world information order. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/34/379) also highlighted the inadequacy of the resources available to the Department of Public Information in comparison with the tasks assigned to it. The allocation of funds to the Department under the budget should be reviewed, as should the distribution of those funds between Headquarters and the Information Centres.

67. The Department of Public Information should attach equal importance to the dissemination of substantive information in the social and economic fields, while focusing its attention on questions relating to international peace and security, disarmament, human rights and apartheid. It should also organize training courses for press and radio journalists and technicians from the third world, who would be assigned to managerial and technical posts in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It was to be hoped that the Under-Secretary-General would take duly into account the equitable geographical distribution of experts when considering the restructuring of the Department, a large part of whose staff came from developed countries.

68. As an Arab country, Syria wished to strengthen the Arabic-language radio and television services of the Department, which reached more than a hundred million Arabs, both by improving the quality and scope of programmes and by increasing the number of staff assigned to those services. The staff of the Press Division of the Department should also be increased in view of the fact that summary records had been eliminated for certain subsidiary bodies. Press releases, which would thus be the only direct source of information, should be as objective and accurate as possible. Member States should be invited to provide assistance to the Information Centres, and the latter's directors should be nationals of a country in the region having an intimate knowledge of regional problems. Lastly, his delegation

/...



(Mr. Mansouri, Syrian Arab Republic)

welcomed the decision of the Director-General of UNESCO to convene a meeting on information questions in Paris in 1980 and hoped that the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities would participate in its work.

69. Mr. BLOMBERG (Finland), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - said that he would limit his remarks to the follow-up of resolution 33/115 C.

70. The Nordic countries felt that a review of United Nations public information activities was long overdue. In recent decades, information and communications had acquired tremendous importance in political activities and had become a central prerequisite for carrying out the mandate of the Organization. To take only one example, information activities had an essential role in the implementation of international decisions concerning economic and social development and the establishment of a new international economic order. A number of conclusions emerged from the two reports before the Committee (A/34/21 and A/34/574): since its inception, the basic structure of the United Nations public information system had changed very little. New elements had been added as needs had arisen, and efforts had been made to keep abreast of the development of communications technology. However, the volume of work had increased considerably and the network had grown so large and complex that co-ordination had become an important function. Active participation of Member States in the framing of United Nations policies and programmes had become imperative in a field of far-reaching changes.

71. Although the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities had been unable to complete its mandate, it had made a good start. As the Secretary-General had stated (A/34/1, sect. X), the Committee could be expected to provide "the general guidelines within which new directions for United Nations information activities may be sought" and to take "practical measures ... with a view to widening public support for the Organization". The Nordic delegations, which supported the recommendations to that effect in document A/34/21, favoured extension of the Committee's mandate and hoped that it would continue to stress the principles of effectiveness and economy in information activities.

72. With regard to the planning of information materials, whether written or audio-visual, geographical and linguistic balance should be a prominent concern. In that connexion, adequate resources should be provided for the units concerned in view of the growing demand for printed materials and programmes in different languages, both official and non-official. Since every organization of the United Nations system had its own specific function and responsibilities, each must have information activities tailored to its needs and objectives. It was vital, however, to preserve the identity and unity of the United Nations system while striving to improve co-ordination and to promote co-operation. The Department of Public Information and JUNIC had major roles to play in that regard. The importance of non-governmental organizations in forming public opinion and supporting United Nations activities was generally recognized, and their activities should therefore be encouraged. Lastly, he wished to refer to the financial problems of the Development Forum, the only regular publication of the United Nations system in the

/...

(Mr. Blomberg, Finland)

economic and social fields, which co-ordinated development information from various United Nations bodies and organizations and from external research institutions. Because it was financed from extrabudgetary resources, the Forum was in a precarious situation which could only be improved if part of its costs were included in the regular budget of the Organization.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.