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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In resolution 42/162 A of 8 December 1967, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its forty-third session on the implementation of that resolution. The Secretary-General was also requested to report to the Committee on Information, at its substantive session held in 1988, on the implementation of the Committee's recommendations contained in paragraph 1 of the resolution.

2. The following documents, related to topics covered by General Assembly resolution 42/162 A, were submitted to the Committee on Information at its tenth substantive session, held from 27 June to 13 July and on 8 and 9 September 1988: 1/

(a) Report on the feasibility and financial implications of applying modern technologies for the collection, production, storage, dissemination and distribution of information materials, including the use of satellite facilities (A/AC.198/1988/2);

(b) Report on the enhancement of co-operation with Member States in short-wave broadcast of radio programmes of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1988/3);

(c) Report on the coverage of United Nations activities pertaining to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine (A/AC.198/1988/4);

(d) Report on the situation regarding the staff of the Department of Public Information in posts subject to geographical distribution (A/AC.198/1988/5);

(e) Report on **improvement** in the distribution of **taped** radio programmer and curtailment of radio **programmes** of the Department of Public **Information** (A/AC.198/1988/6);

(f) Report on **reassessment** of the effectiveness of the **UN Chronicle** (A/AC.198/1988/7);

(g) Report on the programme **and** activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee¹ report of the Joint United Nations Information Committee at its fifteenth **session** (A/AC.198/1988/8).

3. In addition, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information provided further information in several oral statements to the Committee on Information.

4. The deliberations of the Committee on Information *on* those topics and others on **its** agenda, are **reflected** in **its** report to the General Assembly, **1/ As** in the past, the **present** report avoids, **as** much as possible, repetition of the **contents** of the reports submitted to the Committee on Information. This report deals mainly with items not considered by the Committee or updates the information in the reports submitted to the Committee,

II, CO-OPERATION WITH THE POOL OF NON-ALIGNED NEWS AGENCIES AND WITH THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

5. In recommendation 6 contained in General Assembly resolution 42/162 A the Department **was urged to strengthen** its co-operation with the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries, with the Eco-Pool of the News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries and with the Broadcasting Organization of the Non-Aligned Countries (BONAC). In line with **this** recommendation, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information attended the Third **Conference** of Broadcasting Organisations of the Non-Aligned Countries, held at Limasol, Cyprus, on 13 **and** 14 December 1987. She indicated the Department's willingness to co-operate with BONAC and **discussed** possible areas of mutual interest with the **Conference** participants. As a **result**, the **organization** was proposed of regional training programmes for **broadcasters** from developing countries, with the assistance of interested donors. The Department will continue its efforts to **attain** concrete co-operative arrangements with BONAC.

6. With regard to developing further the Department's co-operation with UNESCO at the working level (recommendation 7), several projects are being considered on a number of communication **issues**. The Department has just completed a **video** documentary entitled "Telling Their Own Stories", produced in South-East Asia and the Pacific, in co-operation with the local media. It is through this kind of activity, **as** well as through an expanded global *and* regional training programme for **broadcasters** and **journalists** from developing countries, **that** the work of UNESCO can be strengthened in its endeavour to promote *a new* world information and communication order.

III. ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

7. The Department was requested in recommendation 9 to make broad use of the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the dissemination of information on human rights. In response to this request, a multi-media public information programme has been developed by the Department in co-operation with the Centre for Human Rights, focusing on the fortieth anniversary, with the theme "People only live full lives in the light of human rights".

8. Launched on 10 December 1988, the programme seeks to mobilise non-governmental organisations in support of the fortieth anniversary and to alert the news media to United Nations activities in the field of human rights. The information strategy has been designed to extend beyond the fortieth anniversary year end, should the General Assembly endorse the idea of a world human rights campaign to be launched in 1989, the Department's public information campaign would encompass this idea.

9. Since Human Rights Day in 1987, the following information materials have been disseminated to United Nations information centres and United Nations Development Programme offices in the field and to non-governmental organisations:

(a) 27,800 copies of the fortieth anniversary information kit (English/French), containing basic reference materials on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

(b) 50,000 copies of a special fortieth anniversary booklet entitled Human Rights: Questions and Answers, in English, French and Spanish;

(c) 20,000 copies of a flier on the fortieth anniversary, in English and French. Information centres were provided with the text in other official languages for local distribution;

(d) A special resource kit in English and French, to be distributed to non-governmental organisations in their preparation for the fortieth anniversary celebrations. The kit will include a catalogue of available products on human rights prepared by the Department;

(e) A poster on the fortieth anniversary theme "People only live full lives in the light of human rights", in English and French, will be distributed to United Nations information centres and non-governmental organisations. In addition, the current poster of the text of the Universal Declaration is being re-designed and printed in all official languages;

(f) A 30-second television spot on the fortieth anniversary will be distributed in all official languages;

(g) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, already published in 70 languages by the Department, is being published in an additional 13 languages.

10. In addition, video news releases announcing news events connected with the fortieth anniversary will be distributed to broadcasters around the world and a number of other special television features will be produced by the Department and distributed.

IV. THE DEPARTMENT AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

11. In recommendation 12 the Secretary-General was requested to provide the Committee on Information at its substantive session in 1968 with a feasibility study on the consolidation and co-ordination of all public information activities within the United Nations with specific reference to the financial implications as well as to the effectiveness of the Department of Public Information as the focal point for public information activities.

12. A study on this subject was undertaken by the Management Advisory Service. The report, which has been completed, was not available in time for submission to the Committee on Information at its tenth session. It will be presented to the Committee at its eleventh session.

V. ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS

13. In recommendation 14 the Secretary-General was requested to ensure that the Department continued to do its utmost in bringing to the attention of the international community the real dimensions of the plight of the African people and the tremendous efforts of the African countries towards recovery and development. The need was stressed for the Department to disseminate widely and to publicize the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (resolution S-1312, annex).

14. In line with the major priority assigned to Africa's economic crisis, the Department, with the support of other bodies of the United Nations system, established a special Africa Recovery Unit and launched a major effort at the beginning of 1987 to keep Africa's economic crisis in full view of the media and, therefore, the international community. The Department carried out an intense campaign, producing publications, press kits and pamphlets, and writing articles directly for the international media. A report (A/C.5/43/2/Add.1) has been prepared on present and future public information activities on this subject.

15. The bi-monthly publication Africa Recovery received the World Hunger Media Award in December 1987. The publication reports on major developments in economic and social matters and provides background material on key issues. Among its recipients are over 3,000 print and broadcast journalists in Africa and in donor countries, as well as non-governmental organizations and Governments.

16. The Department organized media coverage, including attendance by international journalists, for the two international conferences organized by the Economic

Commission for *Africa*, and held at Abuja, Nigeria, and at Khartoum, the Sudan. A staff member of the Department was sent to the conferences to act as conference spokesman. The Department also produced two multi-media press kits, which included electronic video press releases and graphic materials ready for reproduction by the print media. Three materials were widely reproduced in the international press.

17. A comprehensive press kit is being prepared to widely publicise the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the mid-term review of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (A/43/500 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and 2). The kit will be distributed by United Nations information centres and services.

18. The Department worked closely with the Non-Governmental Liaison Service of the United Nations Office at Geneva in its major "Africa four Years On" conference in April 1988, and is also supporting the Non-Governmental Liaison Service at United Nations Headquarters in its outreach activities, which include the "Africa Focus" project in 10 United States and Canadian cities.

VI. ACTIVITIES ON ECONOMIC ISSUES

19. In recommendation 15 the Department was urged to ensure the widest possible dissemination of information pertaining to acute world economic problems in general and, in particular, to the severe economic difficulties of the least developed countries and the need for strengthening international economic co-operation aimed at resolving external debt problems of developing countries.

20. Major activities of the Department on economic issues in 1988 include publicity on the release of the World Economic Survey and the presentation - from September to December 1988 (in London, Tokyo, New York and Washington, D.C.) - of the fourth Survey on Transnational Corporations in the World Economy. For each of these, press briefings are to be arranged through United Nations information centres in the developing countries. In addition, an information programme is being planned to publicise the hearings in Europe in 1989 on the activities of transnational corporations in South Africa and Namibia.

21. Information materials concerning the external debt of developing countries are also being prepared. Several series of television programmes on development issues are being initiated by the Department and pilots of these programmes will be tested in different regions. One series will deal specifically with the external debt issue. A programme is also under way to provide information on the impact on women of structural adjustment policies.

VII. ANNUAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR BROADCASTERS AND JOURNALISTS

22. With regard to recommendation 28 on the continuation of the training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, the ninth annual programme will run from 20 September to 28 October 1988. As in the past, it will

provide skills training and briefings on major issues before the United Nations for 16 young journalists. Trainees will be assigned activities in the Department and will be encouraged to cover the proceedings of the General Assembly for their home media,

23. Visits have been arranged to major national and international media organisations located in New York City and Washington, D.C., in order to discuss editorial policies and coverage of third world issues. In Washington, briefings will be held at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

VIII. SEMINARS FOR EDUCATORS

24. In recommendation 29 the Department was requested to continue to organize seminars for educators and education policy makers. In this regard, the Department has requested Member States to provide it with information on the progress made in teaching about the United Nations system during the period 1976-1986 in their respective countries. So far only 38 Member States have responded. A reminder is being sent to those which have not responded. The information gathered will provide interested Member States with comparative experience regarding the place of such teaching in the national curricula of primary, secondary and higher educational institutions, teacher training, production of teaching materials, out-of-school activities and adult educational programmes on the United Nations. Such a report could be presented to the Committee on Information at its substantive session in 1989 or, if an appropriate outlet is found, it could be published for dissemination to the educational institutions around the world,

IX. WORLD DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGN

25. In recommendation 30 the Department was requested to encourage coverage aimed at the promotion of a climate of understanding, confidence and co-operation, peace and development, and the enhancement of human rights. During the period from July 1987 to June 1988, the Department continued to promote United Nations activities for disarmament through press releases, lectures, briefings, film screenings, exhibits etc. United Nations information centres reported more than 1,090 loans of various United Nations films dealing with disarmament; at the same time, over 753 film screenings took place at information centre premises. Over 45,570 United Nations documents on disarmament were distributed to non-governmental organizations in New York, while information centres reported distributing over 68,700 publications. An Arabic version of the film The Doomsday Clock was completed and distributed.

26. Most of the activities focused on the fifteenth special session of the General Assembly, the third special session devoted to disarmament. They included three World Chronicle television-interview programmes featuring the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Third Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, and the Chairman of the Group of Consultant Experts to Carry Out a Study on the Climatic and Other Global Consequences of Nuclear War. Activities by United Nations

information centres and services included lectures and speeches made by the Directors, radio and television interviews, distribution of press kits and fact sheets, press conferences, briefings for non-governmental offices, round tables, and workshops - with the participation of local media and authorities. In addition, the 1988 international disarmament poster competition was organised in all regions, with exhibits of local entries set up at information centre premises.

X. ACTIVITIES AGAINST APARTHEID

27. In recommendation 32 the Department of Public Information was requested to continue its activities and dissemination of information on the policy and practice of apartheid, giving due attention to the unilateral measures and official censorship imposed on the local and international media with regard to all aspects of this issue.

28. In addition to the regular audio and visual material regularly produced by the Department, new campaign programmes have been formulated with the Centre against Apartheid. Access was gained to prestigious television shows where the United Nations story was seen by hundreds of millions of viewers. Projects that have been undertaken have included the "Art against Apartheid" exhibit, the participation of the cast of the musical "Sarafina" in the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the preparation of a film vignette for the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting of the Committee against Apartheid, the observance of the seventieth birthday of Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned leader at the African National Congress, the ceremony to honor the president of the World Boxing Council and boxers for individual and collective action against apartheid in sports, and coverage of numerous events at Headquarters and in the field, including the Latin American seminar on the role of the mass media, held at Lima.

29. Other planned activities included the organisation of a travelling exhibit against apartheid and preparations for the Symposium on Culture against Apartheid, held at Athens from 2 to 4 September 1988.

30. A more extensive audio-visual programme, including activities to be undertaken by the information centres, is planned for the rest of the biennium.

XI. THE STRUGGLE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF NAMIBIA

31. In recommendation 33 the Department and the United Nations system as a whole were called upon to disseminate information relating to the struggle of the oppressed people of Namibia for self-determination, national independence and freedom. In this regard, a co-ordinated, multi-media campaign is being implemented, in close co-operation with the United Nations Council for Namibia. Elements of the campaign include radio and press coverage of seminars held at Istanbul and Toronto on Namibian independence; coverage of missions of consultation undertaken by the Council for Namibia to Asia and Latin America; promotion of the

Namibia exhibit installed on the Visitors Tour Route at Headquarters; writing, revising and updating numerous publications, including Namibia: Trust Betrayed; and negotiations with the British Broadcasting Corporation about a documentary on the Namibian struggle for independence.

XII. STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES AND SERVICES

32. Recommendation 36 stipulates that United Nations information centres should continue to assist press and information media in their respective countries in accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly and should intensify direct and systematic communication exchange with local information and educational institutions and non-governmental organisations in a mutually beneficial way.

33. With the establishment of regional desks in the Information Centres Division, it will become possible for Department headquarters to monitor, evaluate and manage the activities and programmes of the global network of 67 operational United Nations information centres and services in a more accurate and effective manner,

34. The introduction of office automation by modernising communications equipment has begun for the information centres, in particular by linking 25 of them through electronic mail with Headquarters. In addition, a new system of rotation and mobility has been introduced by the Department, involving centre directors and Headquarters officials. In this connection, clear procedures and guidelines have been established with the co-operation of the Office of Human Resources Management for the appointment of centre directors, including the designation of qualified female candidates to posts. Next year, some 11 directors of information centres will be reassigned under those guidelines for rotation, which will also involve a number of Headquarters staff in the procedure.

35. In order to bring about a better comprehension of the world media environment, media profiles are being developed for all countries where the Department maintains information centres. This information, among other advantages, will help identify the countries which could benefit from training programmes in broadcasting.

XIII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

36. In recommendation 36 the Secretary-General was requested to continue to strengthen and accelerate his efforts to develop a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the activities of the Department, particularly in the priority areas determined by the General Assembly, taking into account the need to improve data collection procedures, analysis of feedback data and end-use of the Department's materials, and maximising the efficiency of the operations in all their aspects.

37. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of planned activities will continue to be emphasised. These functions will be carried out by the Programme Evaluation and Communications Research Unit of the Division for Committee Liaison and Administrative Services in the reorganised Department. In

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addition to monitoring and ● valuation, a modest function seeking to generate data on public opinion trends about the United Nations will be added for the purpose of providing a reliable information base in programming for impact.

38. Current monitoring reports are produced on a half-yearly basis. They include the following:

(a) A narrative, which highlights production undertaken at Department headquarters (such as publications, films, video programmes and information kits) and the promotional activities undertaken by the information centres and services in their efforts to reach local audiences through broadcasting organisations, newspapers and other publications, governmental ● and non-governmental organisations and educational institutions;

(b) Statistical charts on the work of the entire Department (by topic and by information centre and service). Data in the charts includes information on distribution of Department information materials, lecturer and speeches, press briefings, briefings for non-governmental organisations; loan made of Department films; and film screenings on information centre and service premises.

39. Following the approval of the revisions to chapter 9 of the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (see A/43/16 (Part I), para. 118), Department data collection forms will be refined and adjusted to reflect the new programmatic and other changes in the Department. The objective is to have a system that will provide management with clear, timely and reliable analysis of feedback on the end-use of the Department's materials, maximising the efficiency of its operations in all their aspects.

XIV. PRESS RELEASES AND BROADCAST PUBLICATIONS

40. With regard to recommendation 44 concerning balanced use of the two working languages of the Secretariat in the Department's written and audio-visual materials, the Department now provides coverage of all United Nations intergovernmental meetings in both English and French. The Department will continue to issue daily summaries of meetings with objectivity and accuracy so as to promote a more accurate understanding of United Nations activities.

41. While recommendation 46 encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to intensify his efforts to secure adequate resources for the continuation of the World Newspaper Supplement, the principle held by the agencies supporting this project is that the World Newspaper Supplement should be self-financing. Thus the participating major newspapers are continuing their efforts to find ways to make it a self-financing project.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21).
