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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND COORDINATION  
Thirty-seventh session  
9 June-3 July 1997  
Agenda item 8

DRAFT REPORT

Rapporteur: Mrs. Sharon BRENNEN-HAYLOCK (Bahamas)

Addendum

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE  
BIENNIUM 1998-1999 (item 4 (a))

Section 26. Public information

1. At its 24th meeting, on 27 June 1997, the Committee considered section 26, Public information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

Discussion

2. Delegations expressed their full support for the activities under the section and the programme of public information. Those delegations stressed the importance of disseminating information on the activities of the Organization throughout the world and the strategic role played by the Department of Public Information as information disseminator in order to enhance the image of the Organization and to promote an informed understanding of the work of the United Nations among the peoples of the world, through the implementation of mandated programme activities.

3. A number of delegations expressed their appreciation for the efforts made to streamline and restructure public information programmes, in the light of the reduction in resources. Many delegations indicated that the reduction in resources and the reorientation of the activities of the Department should not adversely affect the quality of services provided in the performance of its mandates. They stressed that the mandates of the Department should be pursued

in its reorientation. Other delegations felt that the implementation of the programme of work could be achieved from the overall resources proposed.

4. In connection with the dissemination of information through electronic networks and databases, many delegations expressed appreciation for the technological innovations introduced in that respect. Those delegations stressed, however, that the use of advanced technologies should not be made at the expense of the more traditional methods for disseminating information, such as print, posters, radio programmes and audio-visual media, since in a number of countries, access to information was available only in those media. Under the circumstances, the dissemination of information through print and radio programmes should continue to be pursued. A number of delegations cautioned that in a number of countries, advances in technologies were not yet in place. The Department should take into consideration, therefore, the various capacities of Member States in accessing information. Those delegations felt that the primary consideration should be the widest dissemination of information to all peoples of the world. Other delegations expressed full support for the dissemination of information through the electronic media since it would significantly reduce the level of resources required for the implementation of the mandates of the Department. Some delegations felt that the Department should reinforce its current relations with national print and broadcast networks.

5. A number of delegations expressed concern at the inequality in the use of languages by the Department. Those delegations considered that the General Assembly resolution on multilingualism should be strictly adhered to, and that information products should be in all official languages of the United Nations. The representative of the Secretary-General indicated that in disseminating information, the Department strived to reach the widest possible audience. It was pointed out that public information materials were not official documents, and that while information products should be in the working languages of the United Nations (English and French), to the extent possible and insofar as resources permitted, those information products were disseminated in the languages required, sometimes in the six official languages, and in other languages, depending on the local needs of the regional areas concerned. The most important consideration for the programme of public information was to ensure that the widest possible audience was reached and informed of the activities of the Organization.

6. Many delegations supported the work of the United Nations information centres and stressed the importance of strengthening the role of those centres in developing countries. Some delegations, while appreciating the strengthening of information centres, expressed concern that while information centres in the developed countries were being strengthened, those in the developing countries might be integrated with other United Nations programmes. In that regard, one delegation emphasized the importance of prior consultations with individual Governments that might be affected directly by the process of integration.

7. Some delegations felt that the proposed significant transfer of resources from the information service at Vienna to another information centre might have a negative impact on the implementation of the activities of that office. Those

delegations also expressed their concern about the reductions proposed under the activities of the information service at Geneva.

8. Some delegations expressed concern at the imbalance in the dissemination of information for different areas of work of the United Nations, by emphasizing peacekeeping operations. They stressed that appropriate attention should be given to the developmental activities of the United Nations.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

[9. The Committee recommended to the General Assembly to approve the programme narrative of section 26, Public information, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, subject to further consideration, as stated in paragraph 35 of the introduction, with the following modifications:

In paragraph 26.39 (i) a, after Yearbook of the United Nations, the words "(annual, in English)" should be replaced by the words "(annual, in all official languages)" and after the UN Chronicle, the words "(six issues annually in English and French)" should be replaced by the words "(six issues annually in all official languages)".]

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