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Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2000

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 46/72 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit the reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, which covers the activities of JUNIC during 2000, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. JUNIC held its twenty-sixth session in Geneva at the headquarters of the World Meteorological Organization Geneva from 11 to 13 July 2000, under the chairmanship of Tore Brevik, Director of Communications and Public Information of the United Nations Environment Programme. Directors of information and officials of 31 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. JUNIC considered a variety of topics related to inter-agency cooperation in public information and communications matters. The report on the session was submitted to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). A summary of discussions and follow-up action on decisions taken at the twenty-sixth session of JUNIC is set out below.

3. In the context of its ongoing broad-based discussions of the ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations, JUNIC considered different aspects of the "The United Nations works" campaign, which

the Department of Public Information had developed as part of its promotional activities leading to the Millennium Summit of the United Nations. The Deputy Secretary-General took part in discussions through a video-conference. Members of JUNIC expressed support for the concept of the campaign, which was intended to effectively link the priority issues before the Organization to the concerns of people everywhere, and thereby project a positive image of the United Nations as an indispensable institution dealing with global issues. At the conclusion of the debate, JUNIC decided to propose to ACC the endorsement of the "The United Nations works" promotional campaign as a system-wide initiative, to be coordinated by the Department of Public Information as a lead agency. The Organizational Committee of ACC endorsed that proposal in October 2000.

4. With the participation of the Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, JUNIC also discussed various aspects of the communications strategies for media relations of the United Nations system. It was recalled that in his millennium report (A/54/2000), the Secretary-General had indicated as the main objective of the Millennium Summit the repositioning of the United Nations at the beginning of the new century. Accordingly, the corresponding communications strategy needed to show the United Nations as a renewed and changing organization, relevant to the broad range of aspirations and concerns of the peoples



of the planet and essential in the search for global solutions to global problems. Stress on partnerships was an important aspect of this endeavour, both within the United Nations system, through coordination mechanisms, such as JUNG, and externally through cooperation and coordination with Governments, civil society and other interested partners, since "problems without passports required solutions without visas". In that context, several members of JUNG raised the issue of the distinction between public information and advocacy, and agreed on the need to discuss that matter in more depth.

5. Members of JUNG noted that the organizations of the system served as repositories of unique knowledge on hard issues, and accordingly their analysis of the state of issues, global trends and scientific results could provide the public with a unique analytical tool. In addition, as a result of the field-oriented work of many member organizations, field-based technical experts were often called on to comment on developing stories and issues, without time or opportunity for guidance from headquarters. In that regard, JUNG stressed the crucial importance of communications training of staff at all levels as a means of enabling them to better communicate the United Nations message to the media, both at headquarters locations and in the field. JUNG agreed on the need to develop an action plan for communications training for staff at all levels, and several members agreed to work on the preparation of system-wide media training modules. It was noted that, with funding from private sources, the United Nations Staff College, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information, was organizing two experience-sharing workshops in communications for senior officials. The workshops were held in New York and Turin in October 2000 and February 2001, respectively.

6. JUNG also held a panel discussion on the role of television in communicating United Nations messages to audiences around the world and developing greater system-wide cooperation in that area. Experts from both inside and outside the United Nations system took part in the discussions. It was noted that recent breakthroughs in information technology, the demand for broadcast material created by the explosion of 24-hour news networks and the budgetary constraints faced even by major broadcasters all provided the United Nations with an extraordinary opportunity to produce and disseminate television programming

globally at an affordable cost, and to become an important actor and partner in the global television market, particularly in the news area. Similar opportunities were arising to disseminate United Nations information via the Internet. Deployment of the new technology, particularly broad-band Internet transmission, to create an infrastructure that would allow the United Nations to transmit daily and, where possible, instantaneous, images and/or finished news segments that could be used by television stations worldwide, was an essential element of that endeavour, which required the pooling of the joint resources of the system as a whole. The Department of Public Information offered to appoint a focal point to coordinate the development of the system-wide approach to the cooperation in the field of television, as well as the further development of the United Nations News Service on the Internet and the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the Organization. Members of JUNG expressed strong interest in participation in all three projects. JUNG also exchanged views on the matter of the editorial control of programming produced or aired by commercial broadcasters on the basis of footage or feature stories emanating from the Organization, as well as on the issue of attribution of footage, news and programming from the United Nations system.

7. To take advantage of evolving information technology, JUNG endorsed the proposal by the Department of Public Information to establish an interactive Intranet web board for the exclusive use of the members of the Committee as a means of effectively exchanging information on upcoming public information products and activities, coordinating system-wide participation and avoiding duplication of effort. The web board, moderated by the JUNG secretariat, has since become operational, with the technical assistance of the Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC). Its current features include a system-wide calendar of major communications activities, such as launches of important reports, major statements by the executive heads of member agencies and launches of global campaigns; the bi-monthly JUNG *Information Exchange Bulletin*, which has been a useful planning and coordinating tool for the members of the Committee since 1993; an interactive chat room; and a discussion group on information technology. Considering that technological developments had made information technology an integral part of all activities

of the member organizations, JUNG agreed that the web board-based discussion group on information technology would replace the JUNG Technical Advisory Group on the use of information technology in the field of public information. Accordingly, JUNG decided to abolish the Group. Moreover, in view of the fast pace of developments in that area, JUNG decided to hold a half-day discussion on the Internet and multimedia matters at its 2001 session, and to invite industry experts to take part in the discussions, as appropriate.

8. JUNG also considered the public information and communications strategies leading to upcoming international conferences, special sessions of the General Assembly and other events. The Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights briefed the members of JUNG on the issues before the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Also, the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations briefed the members of JUNG on preparations for the Year. The Committee also discussed public information/communications aspects of preparations for the observance of the International Year of Volunteers; the 2001 World Youth Forum of the United Nations System; the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries; the high-level international intergovernmental event on financing for development; the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects; and the special sessions of the General Assembly concerning the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, among others.

9. JUNG also reviewed various aspects of preparations for joint participation in the 2000 Hannover Exposition, on the theme "Humankind, nature, technology". It was noted that despite an extremely delayed start of work on the United Nations pavilion owing to the delay in the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the United Nations and the host Government and the late availability of the necessary extrabudgetary funding, the team led by the Commissioner-General of the pavilion, Nadine Hack, had been able to prepare an impressive presentation on the work of the United

Nations system, relying strongly on the concept of the "The United Nations works" promotional campaign.

10. JUNG welcomed the contribution of other organizations of the United Nations system that were not represented in ACC, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, ISCC, the United Nations Staff College, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Volunteers, and invited them to participate in its sessions as observers.

11. JUNG recommended holding its twenty-seventh session at the headquarters of the World Intellectual Property Organization from 10 to 12 July 2001. It decided to take up at that session such issues as the communications aspects of the United Nations fight against the AIDS pandemic, as well as the Internet and media matters.

12. Finally, it should be noted that, as reflected in the summary of the conclusions of ACC at its second regular session of 2000 (see ACC/2000/20), ACC has initiated a further review of its subsidiary machinery with a view to enhancing flexibility, strengthening capacities for inter-agency dialogue and interactions on a continuing basis, and ensuring timely and concerted responses by the system as a whole. The Committee on Information will be kept informed of developments in the review as they affect the work of JUNG.