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Africa General

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Establishment of a consultative panel
on public information
(as requested by the Gen. Assembly in Reso-
- lution 1405 (XIV))

4/5/60

ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSULTATIVE PANEL
ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

(as requested by the General Assembly in Resolution 1405 (XIV))

1. Paragraph 6 of the General Assembly Resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959 reads as follows:

"Requests the Secretary-General to appoint, in consultation with Governments of Member States, a panel of qualified persons representative of the various geographical areas and main cultures of the world, and to consult with members of that panel from time to time on United Nations information policies and programmes in order to ensure maximum effectiveness at minimum cost."

2. The above paragraph was an amendment adopted by a vote of 32 to 15 with 19 abstentions replacing a paragraph in the resolution submitted by Colombia, Cuba, Peru and Venezuela, which had invited "the Secretary-General to appoint a United Nations Advisory Board on Public Information composed of ten Member States representing the main cultural and geographic areas to meet periodically at United Nations Headquarters with the Secretary-General to discuss and consider information policies and programmes in order to ensure maximum effectiveness and minimum cost."

3. The record of the debate in the Fifth Committee provides little guidance as to the character of membership envisaged for the panel or the organization of its work beyond what is stated in the resolution itself.

4. Since no provision was made for the payment of travel, per diem, or consultants fees, it seems to be a fair assumption that the General Assembly did not wish the panel to involve any extra expense for the Organization.

5. It may also be noted that the resolution calls for the appointment of "qualified persons" to the panel rather than "experts", as was the case with the Experts Committee appointed in 1958.

6. In this connection the Secretary-General's own view, as stated to the Fifth Committee, may be recalled: "This is not a field in which it is possible to arrive at helpful views without careful prior studies and a thorough acquaintance with current problems. It is impossible to apply here without such thorough knowledge experiences gathered in other fields of public relations activities". It remains the Secretary-General's opinion that a thorough knowledge of the United Nations and of the special public information problems and possibilities of the Organization is an important qualification for membership of the panel.

7. In the light of all the above considerations, it is suggested that the best and most practical approach in the circumstances might be the somewhat novel one of appointing representative permanent delegates as members of the panel.

8. They would bring to the consultative work of the panel a combination of first-hand knowledge of the United Nations, of the needs of "the various geographic areas and main cultures of the world" and of the public information services of the Organization which would be of

great value to the Secretary-General and to the purposes intended by the resolution. They could be assisted by such technical advisers as they considered useful.

9. Since permanent delegates also serve as delegates to the General Assembly, the prior service of a representative number among them as members of the panel could also help to enlighten and inform the Assembly's annual discussion of the public information program and budget of the United Nations.

10. It is desirable to keep the size of the panel within workable limits. A panel consisting of ten permanent delegates would seem to be sufficient to provide for reasonably adequate representation of "the various geographical areas and main cultures of the world".

11. Method of Work - The resolution requests the Secretary-General "to consult with members of the panel from time to time on United Nations information policies and programmes in order to ensure maximum effectiveness at minimum cost." It also requests him to report to the fifteenth session of the General Assembly "on the implementation of the above recommendations and on the measures taken and planned for the further implementation of resolution 1335 (XIII)". The Secretary-General, after appointing the panel, might consult its members on the main trends and problems in policy and programmes as reflected in his 1961 budget estimates and in relation to his draft report to the fifteenth session of the Assembly. This would call for meetings of the panel in May or June. Perhaps three or four meetings would suffice for these purposes, with the aid of suitable documentation.