international commission for the study of communication problems

The World of News Agencies
This document is one of a series of documents, prepared for the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, established in application of Resolution 100 and the Guidance Notes of the Medium-Term Plan adopted by the General Conference of Unesco at its nineteenth session. As the Commission's mandate is of wide concern, this document although being a preliminary text for discussion, is also being put at the disposal of those interested in the subject. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of Unesco.
I. PRESENT SITUATION

General

There are now national news agencies in about 120 sovereign countries and territories; this represents a considerable increase since two years ago, but some 40 countries have none; these include 24 countries with populations of more than 1 million. Almost all the agencies serve not only the press but also radio and television broadcasting organizations with domestic and foreign news.

There are also many hundreds of specialised agencies for the collection and dissemination of news in restricted areas: business, stock exchange, tourist information, weather reports, scientific news, etc.

The rapid development of need for visual news gave rise to a new type of agency specialised in supply of photos, television programmes, documentary films and so on.

There are great differences between the news agencies in the scale, scope and effectiveness of their operations:

- a few of them are enormous multinational or transnational enterprises collecting and disseminating news all over the world;
- mostly they are national undertakings for the circulation of news inside a country and the dissemination of news about the country abroad;
- some are limited only to national news reporting;
- many of them have been created to collect and supply all kind of news as a service to those interested in being objectively informed;
- some also claim political or social objectives, as partners in and supporters of broader national and international goals;
- many proclaim as a principle the satisfaction of clientele's needs and requirements to be informed;
- others follow and respect some ethical and social norms in selecting news and subjects for reporting;
- the minority of them are in a position of competition both at the national and international news market;
- most of them are in a competitive status regarding news disseminated abroad, but have a monopoly regarding home news;
- a few have exclusive rights in respect to both internal and external news inside the respective country.
There are great differences between the news agencies in their internal organisation:

- some are organised according to the rules governing ordinary business enterprises and the normal practices of national or transnational undertakings;

- some others are cooperative, non-profit arrangements controlled and financed by newspapers (and sometimes by broadcasting organisations);

- in many countries news agencies are directly controlled or operated by State;

- in some places they are autonomous public corporations, created by the State or privately owned.

Among the news agencies there are five - Agence France-Presse (France), Associated Press (USA), Reuters (UK), TASS (USSR) and United Press International (USA) - which dominate the world scene by the size and technological strength of their systems of collecting news and distributing it in many languages throughout the world.

There are, however, in some other countries also national agencies of particular importance, as for example in China, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, India and Japan, the two German Republics, Italy, Spain and Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia.

Most national agencies subscribe to or have exchange arrangements with two, and sometimes more, of the world agencies to receive foreign news and provide domestic news. Many news agencies subscribe also to the services provided by a certain number of smaller national agencies, either from neighbouring countries or from those having a particular attraction. Apart from the world agencies, relatively few national agencies (and few national newspapers and other mass media organizations) maintain their own offices or correspondents abroad to collect or distribute news.

Regular world-wide collection and distribution of news is largely effected by and through the five world agencies. Each of these has offices in more than 100 countries, and thousands of full-time staff and part-time correspondents. They collect hundreds of thousands of words a day and, including domestic distribution, transmit millions of words. Each issues news 24 hours a day, to thousands of national agencies, subscribing newspapers, radio and television organizations in upwards of 100 countries. All have regular services, usually daily, in Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish; some also issue in other languages.

* For information about 20 news agencies, mentioned or not mentioned in this document see Monographs I, II and III (Documents Nos. 13, 14 and 15 respectively, in this same series).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Press Agency</th>
<th>Number of countries served</th>
<th>Number of subscribers</th>
<th>Number of countries covered by correspondents and stringers</th>
<th>Number of words issued daily</th>
<th>Number of regular staff</th>
<th>Number of correspondents in foreign countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.P.</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1320 newspapers</td>
<td>62 foreign bureaux</td>
<td>17 million</td>
<td></td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3400 broadcasters in USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1000 private subscribers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U.P.I.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>7079</td>
<td>81 foreign bureaux</td>
<td>11 million</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2246 clients outside USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ 36 national news agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.F.P.</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>12000 newspapers</td>
<td>167 countries</td>
<td>3.350.000</td>
<td>1.990 incl.</td>
<td>171 fulltime corres. 1200 stringers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69 national agencies</td>
<td>108 foreign bureaux</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REUTERS</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>6500 newspapers</td>
<td>153 countries</td>
<td>1.500.000</td>
<td>2.000 incl.</td>
<td>350 fulltime corres. 800 stringers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4400 radio TV stations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TASS</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>13000 subscribers</td>
<td>110 countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>professional staff</td>
<td>61 correspondents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200 subscrib.to TASS photo</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>325 foreign subscribers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>144 foreign subscribers</td>
<td></td>
<td>80 countries</td>
<td>115.000</td>
<td>800 incl. 105 fulltime corres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55 film services</td>
<td>37 film services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSA</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1600 (cca)</td>
<td>69 bureaux</td>
<td>300.000</td>
<td>568 incl.</td>
<td>47 fulltime corres. 295 stringers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFE</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1734</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>500.000</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KYODO</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33 national agencies</td>
<td>37 bureaux</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40 foreign news agencies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64 Japanese newspapers</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59 commercial radio TV stations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14 non-member newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANJUG</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
<td>896 incl.</td>
<td>46 fulltime corres,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.P.S.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19 national agencies</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>400 newspapers weeklies &amp; institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13 national agencies</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>185.000</td>
<td>500 incl.</td>
<td>35 fulltime corres.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In some countries, e.g. France, the UK, the USA and USSR, there are agencies or services run by newspapers or professional groups which supply finished articles ("soft" news, along with "hard" news) giving background to and comment on the news and current events to subscribing newspapers in many parts of the world. While, at present, the scale of such services is small compared with that of the long-established news agencies, this development may have significant effects on the exchange and internationalization of views. One of them, NOVOSTI (in USSR) was founded in 1961 by the Union of Journalists and Writers. It is the channel through which articles, essays, etc. by eminent Soviet writers and public figures are made available to subscribing newspapers and periodicals and throughout the world.

A recent trend of particular interest is the growth of regional cooperation among Third World agencies. In 1975, the non-aligned countries organized a pool which now groups more than 40 agencies and exchanges material through 13 agencies which act as re-distribution centres. A similar operation is Inter Press Service founded in 1964 by a group of journalists to provide news services supporting political and social reform in Latin America. The 13 anglophone countries in the Caribbean, with organizational and planning help from the United Nations Development Programme and Unesco, began the operation of CANA – the Caribbean News Agency – in 1975, in conjunction with Reuters. It became an independent regional agency in 1976 and now comprises 17 media institutions, some public, some private. Regional efforts are also under way in Africa, the Arab States and Asia. Regular meetings between African and Arab States federations of news agencies have promoted cooperation between and within those regions and examined proposals for more structured links and development of cooperative technical facilities. In Asia, at the 1977 Colombo meeting of Asian news agencies, it was decided to carry out a feasibility study looking towards the establishment of an Asian regional network (For more about regional cooperation, see document No. 12 in this same series.)

Also in recent years, there have been spectacular technical developments in methods of collecting, editing and transmitting increasingly large quantities of news more and more rapidly. But, in general, only the world agencies and a few other large national agencies directly benefit from these developments. It is possible now, by use of the cathode ray, to write, correct and edit for immediate automatic transmission. Computerized systems are in use for the storage, retrieval, editing, and automatic transmission of news and economic, financial and other data. The capacity, range, speed and quality of transmission of news, messages, photos and facsimiles have all been increased. Improved and extended cable systems, telephone and teleprinter services and radio circuits within and between countries and continents are now supplemented and, in some situations, have come to be replaced by transmission via satellites. Technically, news and reports in verbal and visual form can be transmitted simultaneously via the different satellite systems to earth stations throughout the world which, in turn, can pass on the messages instantaneously by land-based systems to the news agencies.
Africa

Not surprisingly, in view of the small numbers and recent establishment of newspapers, radio and television stations in most of the countries of Africa, news agencies have developed slowly. In addition, poor although improved telecommunication facilities within and between African countries and with the outside world are still a serious obstacle. Nevertheless, there are now news agencies in 25 countries. In 12 countries, among them Nigeria, one of the biggest African states, there is no agency. The agencies are of more importance for radio and television organizations and government services than for the few newspapers. While they have correspondents at home, most have none abroad. They are the channel for foreign news received usually from one or two world agencies. Only a few of the African agencies have arrangements for exchange of news amongst themselves and therefore rely mostly on the world agencies for news about other African countries.

Arab States

There are 18 news agencies in the Arab States, of which five are of particular importance beyond their national boundaries. The Middle East News Agency in Cairo has offices in 11 other Arab countries, as well as in Belgrade, East Berlin, London and Paris. In addition it has exchange agreements with 11 agencies in Europe and Asia and subscribes to two of the world agencies and exchanges news with another. It provides 400 subscribers daily with 125,000 words in Arabic and 60,000 in French.

The Mahgreb Arab Presse has a similar organization and arrangements and issues daily 210,000 words in Arabic and 180,000 in French to 70 subscribers in Morocco and to 60 foreign subscribers.

TAP, the Tunisian national agency, maintains bureaux in Paris, Cairo and Bonn and has correspondents in Brussels and Casablanca. Besides being the North African re-distribution center for the Non-aligned News Agency Pool, it also is linked to the Inter Press Service. ARNA, the Arab Revolutionary News Agency in Jamahiriya, has bureaux in Beirut, Damascus, Nouakchott, Kuwait, Cairo, Paris and Malta and correspondents in or wireless links with 9 other centres in Europe, Africa and North America, including London, Madrid, Moscow and New York.

The cooperation between Arab news agencies and exchange of information is more expanded than in some other areas due to three main factors: the common language; the particular situation in the Middle East; the existence of technical facilities.
Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America, only 12 out of 25 countries have news agencies. With the exception of Chile and Mexico, from where agencies send out a few foreign correspondents, all countries depend entirely for foreign news on the world agencies and some other outside agencies or newspapers, notably the Spanish agency EFE. There are three private agencies in Mexico - Informex, Notimex and AMEX - each of which has correspondents or stringers abroad. Informex, the largest, serves some 200 subscribers with about 25,000 words a day on national and local news and 3,000 words of foreign news. Buenos Aires is the centre for two major regional agency operations, LATIN and Inter Press Service. In the Caribbean, CANA and Prensa Latina, the former in Barbados and the latter in Havana, are serving subscribers in various parts of the world.

In the countries which have no agency (including Uruguay which had one until 1967), with populations ranging from 2 to 13 million, all but two have large numbers of newspapers and hundreds of radio and television broadcasting stations. The mass media in these countries depend for their domestic news on their own reporters, government bulletins and sometimes the local offices of the world agencies from which they also receive their foreign news.

There is a growing trend towards closer cooperation among news agencies in the region.

Asia

Of the countries in Asia, all have a national agency except Maldives, Singapore and Papua and New Guinea. From Singapore, where the media depend on their own reporters for domestic news and on four world agencies for international news, some 60 foreign correspondents file news of local and southeast Asian events. Similarly, Hong Kong is a central news operating point, 8 major international and national agencies having bureaux there and many other national agencies and foreign newspapers being represented by full-time correspondents or stringers.

Despite the fact that news agencies cover virtually the entire region, the small circulation of most newspapers, difficulties in teletype transmission of characters, multilingualism and inadequacy of telecommunication facilities continue to hamper agency development at home and exchanges within the area and with the rest of the world.

Having in view the variety of socio-political systems in Asia, news agencies are organised according to divergent patterns: from privately owned to state-owned; from cooperative and competitive arrangements to complete exclusiveness. The most representative and internationally active ones are Hsinhua (China), Samachar (India - now in the process of reorganisation), Kyodo and Nihon Press (in Japan), Antara (Indonesia), Bernama (Malaysia) and Pars (Iran).
The principal source of domestic news and the only one for foreign news in China is the state-owned New China News Agency (Hsinhua). It employs some 1,300 persons in the Peking Central office and 400 in its provincial bureaux, plus thousands of part-time correspondents throughout the country. It also employs 200 persons in more than 40 countries abroad, with main foreign bureaux in Geneva, London, Paris, Hong Kong and at the United Nations. Hsinhua receives the services of AFP, AP, Kyodo, Reuters and UPI. Its daily radio service provides more than 30,000 words of national and local news and the same amount of foreign news. World-wide English and Russian language services are also transmitted. In addition, the agency publishes a daily four-page reference news journal in some six million copies, which is not on sale to the public but circulated exclusively to officials and government offices in all administrative centres throughout the country.

Japan has a particular situation, where two competing agencies, both established in 1945 and both cooperatively owned by newspapers, rank high among the important ones in the world. Kyodo has 47 offices in Japan and 34 abroad and has exchange arrangements with the five world agencies and 33 national agencies. It distributes daily some 220,000 letters in Japanese and 35,000 words in English. The Jiji Press has 62 offices in Japan and 31 abroad and exchanges news with Reuters, UPI and AFP. It has a daily output of 400,000 Japanese letters on national news for domestic use, the equivalent of 12,000 words for overseas Chinese use and 30,000 English words for domestic and overseas use.

Samachar, the Indian news agency, with world-wide operations and large domestic services, which was founded in 1976 following the merger of the country's four largest agencies - the Press Trust of India, United News of India, Hindustan Samachar and Samachar Bharati - is now being dismantled, in order to promote a wider choice of news being supplied and disseminated in the country and about the country. Among other agencies in the region, ANTARA in Indonesia and Pars News Agency in Iran, both government controlled, have extensive operations abroad.

Europe, North America, Australia

The developed regions of the world are also areas where most of the well-established and well-equipped news agencies are established. In the whole European-North American region only seven smaller countries have no agency (Andorra, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, San Marino).

Of the big international and middle-size national news agencies, most have both external and home services. Only very few cover only domestic news. All of the national agencies subscribe to or have agreements with at least one of the world agencies (and most with several) for the reception of foreign news and the distribution abroad of their domestic news. The majority have similar bilateral agreements with many national agencies. Many, in addition, maintain offices and permanent correspondents abroad to collect news and distribute
domestic news in several foreign languages. In Australia, as in New Zealand, the major national agency is a cooperative enterprise owned by the press. Both these agencies also receive overseas news from AP and UPI and in both countries a number of agencies have representatives. The Canadian agencies have broad arrangements with international news services. Canada’s CP, which is cooperatively owned and operated by 103 newspapers and serves some 400 subscribers in all the media, has branches or staff correspondents in 13 cities and 650 part-time correspondents throughout Canada and 25 abroad. CP carries world news from AP, AFP and Reuters, all of which receive CP news on a reciprocal basis. UPI of Canada, serving some 40 subscribers in Canada, is an affiliate of UPI (USA) and, through it, is another outlet for Canadian news to the world.

In the majority of industrialised countries, the agencies are owned and run by newspaper and mass media cooperatives or by autonomous public or private corporations. In ten, they are operated directly or indirectly by the State. Some have introduced innovations and particular arrangements regarding relationships with founders or outside bodies, structures and internal regulations and management or self-management practices.

Here in this area, along with conventional news agencies, there are also numerous specialised agencies providing news or features, as well as newspapers and broadcasting organizations with their own foreign correspondents and services for supply of news. In the USA, for instance, there are several hundred privately run services and agencies, some of them operated by leading newspapers, which provide subscribers with edited news stories, feature articles or photos, or specialized news services in many fields of national and international life.

Most Australian newspapers rely on their own large reporting staffs for national and local news (as does the Australian Broadcasting Commission) and several of the larger ones have overseas correspondents).

The present day situation is thus characterised by: large coverage; constant expansion; wide discrepancies; multiplicity of models; variety of scopes; divergent experiences.
II. PROBLEMS

Despite the news agencies' constant expansion and growth, the steady increase in their numbers and the enlargement of their regional and world coverage, many obstacles and barriers continue to hamper the development of infrastructures for supplying and disseminating news throughout the world. Obviously, these obstacles differ considerably from country to country, their existence of disappearance being due to the particular conditions prevailing at any one time and place, while the ability or inability to deal with or eliminate them stems from political, financial or professional causes. However, it may be useful to mention those most frequently referred to.

Establishment and structure of news agencies

The basic factors that have long prevented the establishment of national news agencies in several countries are: lack of concern to secure a sound information infrastructure coupled with the belief that compromise solutions and more or less make-shift arrangements will be enough; low priority accorded to communication and information in development plans; the assumption that external news agencies can cater, at least provisionally, for existing needs; lack of financial and other resources.

There are some countries where the dearth of funds may be remedied by pooling private resources, through cooperative arrangements between those wishing to benefit from the services of a news agency. There are others, however, where not only government policy but the scarcity of financial resources make it possible for an efficient information structure to be financed solely from public funds. In some cases, therefore, there is room for choice between different ways of founding and funding the news agency, whereas in many others the alternative is between a State-owned or State-supported agency and no agency at all.

In the case of existing agencies, difficulties arise because the laws in force prevent many of them from developing their structures in accordance with their real needs, allowing sufficient flexibility for this very special type of undertaking. Bureaucratic stringency runs counter to the agencies' desire for adaptability.

At the same time, many agencies are not wide-ranging enough in their activities, restricting themselves to news collection and a number of printed services, and neglecting photo, features, economic and other services. More particularly, the lack of documentation and data services frequently affects the quality of their daily output.

News collection

Journalists working in their own countries in certain cases encounter serious difficulties due to their being misinformed or because they are denied access to information or to certain sources of information, or have no opportunity to check their news and thus sometimes find themselves obliged to transmit doubtful news. These difficulties may stem from technical constraints, political practices, bureaucratic procedures or to the de facto monopoly held by certain departments or individuals on news and information.
Journalists working abroad, whether as foreign correspondents or otherwise, must contend with several additional obstacles that hamper news collection. For example, in some countries the procedures for opening offices and for accreditation of correspondents are lengthy and complex; it is sometimes an easier, sometimes a still more complicated matter to obtain clearance for special assignments, but usually takes long enough for the purpose of the assignment to have ceased to exist by the time the newspaper or agency correspondent is at last able to tackle it; again, formalities governing entrance visas are not always designed to suit a profession such as journalism; journalists' freedom to travel is curtailed, restrictions are placed on news coverage as well as on access to news sources; bureaucratic red tape, specially intended for foreign correspondents, prevents them from meeting their deadlines. There is a further difficulty that should be mentioned: the practice of secrecy, for which there are often genuine, understandable grounds, but which not seldom is trumped-up and unnecessary, and constitutes escape from a sense of insecurity and a screen to hide the incompetence of individual officials.

News dissemination

All the obstacles that impede news collection also affect its dissemination. Concomitantly, censorship of telephone communications and mail, restrictions on the dispatch of photos and films, in particular undeveloped film and video-tape materials, refusal of export licences for journalists' written reports and communiqués are but a few examples of measures, legal or illegal, which make it impossible for individual journalists or the profession as a whole to do their work effectively.

This is not to say that there are no justified cases for complaint against certain journalists, reports or photographers for transgressing the bounds of their professional duties, abusing the hospitality shown them, disregarding the ethical norms adhered to by the vast majority of their profession, showing no respect for cultural identity, particularly that of the host community, paying no heed to the harm they may do to individuals or to institutions, behaving in an egocentric manner, etc. Certain of these shortcomings might be eliminated through better recruitment and selection and particularly through more efficient training and in-service training. However, something more than training may be necessary. In some countries, the profession itself has shown the right way, and set an excellent example, by promoting its own deontology.

Technical problems

Problems of this nature arise firstly at the most elementary, "grass-roots" level: lack of facilities for making simple trunk calls in many countries, particularly in certain remote or mountainous areas; lack of postal services; restrictions on use of local languages for communications; uncertainties affecting transport facilities and road communications; even the lack of vehicles available for purposes of news collection and distribution.
At another level, news supply is hampered by lack of coordination and cooperation between post office authorities and information services; by lack of international telephone and telegraph communications and by the fact that in some cases communications between neighbouring countries still have to be transmitted via the ex-metropolitan countries; by the scarcity of teleprinter lines and the difficulty of installing new lines; by lack of radiophonic transmission equipment, etc.

Needless to say, many news agencies, newspapers, broadcasting organizations and indeed countries experience even greater difficulties where the use of modern, up-to-date technology for news collection and dissemination is concerned: transmission of video news; ground stations for transmission capacity in a particular region or on an international scale.

The list of technical problems is certainly very long, and probably inexhaustible. Without wishing to supersede existing expert reports on these highly specialized problems, it may nevertheless be useful to stress in this document the various factors that are slowing down efforts to solve them: (i) scarcity of financial resources experienced either by certain countries in general or by particular information organizations and services; (ii) lack of qualified technicians in many areas of communication and information; (iii) unbridled competition between suppliers of technical equipment and modern media; (iv) under-developed industrial capacity in Third-World countries for the production of communications equipment; (v) lack of reliable information available to potential customers in developing countries concerning appropriate information infrastructures and facilities; (vi) insufficient readiness in developed countries to provide assistance in these areas, which have not yet been given the priority they deserve in international cooperation.

Financial constraints

In addition to the lack of financial resources, which severely limits the activities of many agencies and newspapers, the cost of news transmission is a factor of major importance: not just because it is high, but because it has a discriminatory effect. Indeed, communication costs are crucial to the survival of many smaller agencies and newspapers.

Originally, low tariffs were introduced for those means of news transmission which have been largely by-passed by new technologies and are thus no longer used by most agencies and newspapers, particularly in their international communications: special press telegram and telephone rates have thus become of little importance to most of them; radio transmission of news is also on the decrease; telex communications are developing rapidly, while the leasing of lines has become of paramount importance. Although point to multi-point transmission (broadcasting) is less expensive than point-to-point transmission (e.g. telex), the advantages of the latter have led to its gaining predominance throughout the world. Hence the need — and the strong pressure — to lower telex rates (many carriers do not offer special press rates for telex services) and to reduce the rates applied for leased lines and circuits. In the view of many, the immediate
future belongs to broadcasting by communication satellite as probably
the best means of securing low cost news transmission (see for
example the paper "International telecommunications and the requirement
of news services" by J. de Sola Pool and S. Dixard of the Massachusetts
Institute of Technology.)

At the same time, the necessity is urged of maintaining or in certain
cases even reducing the concessionary rates applied by the Press Broadcast-
ing Service, for all those still using these services.

Another aspect of this problem is of particular concern to the
Third World countries: the discriminatory effects of the high
costs and tariffs applied in international communication. In
principle, the rates are meant to be roughly the same in either
direction between two given points. In point of fact, however, they
are mostly lower from developed to developing countries and higher in
the case of news transmitted in the other direction. The fact that
there are few direct communication links between many developing
countries, even between neighbouring countries (for example, compared
with the 1391 direct telephone circuits linking the USA with the UK
and the 496 circuits linking the UK with France, there are no more than
two between India and Malaysia, while most new and developing countries
have none at all), not only severely handicaps communications but increases
their cost for many developing countries, since their traffic has to
be channelled through remote transit centres (a point highlighted by the
International Press Telecommunication Council in its study "Spreading the
Word"). It should be added that the actual communication costs
represent a much heavier financial burden for the developing countries,
given the fragility of their economies in general. To take a single
example, Professor Meltzer of the Swiss Institute of Technology
calculated last year that telephone communication charges in Africa,
weighted by the per capita GNP, were 267 times higher than in the
countries of the European community.

Three conclusions may be drawn from the foregoing: (i) that the high
costs, and more particularly the discriminatory disparities in costs,
tariffs and rates applied between different countries adversely affect
the dissemination of information and constitute one of the major factors
of the imbalance in news flow; (ii) that the carriers may and often actually
do exercise influence or control, either directly or indirectly, on the
dissemination of news; (iii) that one of the best ways to eliminate
or minimize these adverse effects is to promote cooperation between
news agencies and their clients, both at the regional and international
levels.
III. Contents

Since the early 1970's, there has been a growing debate — and increasing confrontation — on the general question of the international flow of information.

The protagonists in the debate are many and various: on the one hand, representatives of the "western" media, epitomized by certain of the major news agencies; together with — but distinct from — them, certain representatives who are nevertheless ready to consider controversial issues from a dialectical point of view; some representing more moderate viewpoints and searching for mutually acceptable solutions; others offering radical criticism of news circulation inevitably distorted in a certain type of society and in the present-day world situation; on the other hand, those of the Third World, with the Non-aligned countries as their chief champion, characterized by light disparities in their approach and differences in their experiences but closer to one another in their choice of alternatives.

This is why the interpretation of the debate as a 'West-East' or a 'North-South' confrontation seems too simplistic, unreal and harmful. The broadening of the dialogue on controversial issues has already shown: (a) that there is a wide variety of views and perceptions concerning these issues; (b) that there are visible modifications of rigid position and a softening of hard and fast, hostile standpoints; (c) that the open debate together with pressures from developing countries have already resulted in improvements in news circulation, as well as in a decrease in the distortions noted.

It is therefore not without interest to note some of the basic positions stated in the debate:...in the same measure that Third World countries have been coerced in their sovereign right to the free utilization of their natural resources over many years by the actions of imperialist interests...in the same measure, the developing countries are victims of domination in the field of information that transgresses their most authentic cultural values, routinely distorting their reality, limiting their liberating action and in the last instance, subjecting their interests to those of imperialism" (Symposium of the Non-Aligned countries on Information, Tunisia, 1976).

One of the initial reactions at that time was to the effect that "...the specific case against the agencies' journalism...is, in fact, little more than a slogan. It does not spring from any genuine desire on the part of Third World governments for the publication of truth. The motive is control, and the verbiage attaching to it originates in a genuine disbelief in anything which educated men understand by freedom" (The Sunday Times, 25/7/76).

However, controversial reactions have also been voiced: "The Third World rightly denounces the control of news by the Western world: financial, political, cultural control...It was thus logical that decolonization should begin one day in this field...The Western world doesn't have any lessons to give in this domain to the non-aligned countries. It has misused formal freedoms which it now demands..." ("Le Monde", editorial, 15 July 1976).
The concern for Third World contentions is widening: "We (in Sweden) have also clearly stated our belief that current developments in the area of the mass media arouse alarm in several respects. Monopoly and trends toward a concentration of influence are clear in both the rich and poor countries. The stronger these trends become, the greater the risks of one-sidedness and conformity...It is also a regrettable fact that the gap between rich and poor lands also continues in the area of the mass media and grows greater...Another side of the problem is the dominant role which a few international news agencies play in the communication of news between countries and continents. This dominance has led to an imbalance in the news flow which must be corrected." (Jan-Erik Wikstrom, Minister of Education, Government of Sweden, 13 January 1978).

Most recently, similar understanding for Third World claims was voiced by an ex-Vice President of UPI, at present professor of journalism at the California State University: "There can be no substantial quarrel with these general conclusions about the state of international news flow: There is in fact imbalance in the flow of news, both in content and volume from the developed to the developing world, or as some commentators prefer, from the North to the South. It is true that this reflects the disposition of global military, economic and political power. But that does not alter the truth that the news imbalance exists...There is great disparity in the quality and quantity of regional coverage provided by the Western agencies of and to the Third World...Agency coverage often tends to seek simplistic solutions or Cold War Ramifications in situations that are typically Asian, African or Latin American...There is an acknowledged tendency among Western media, including the news agencies, to devote the greatest attention to the Third World in times of disaster, crisis and confrontation. The agencies are no less interested in disaster, crisis and confrontation when it occurs in the developed world. But their daily file of news of the developed world is vast, even when there is no crisis. The same is not true of much of the Third World." (Roger Tatarian, at the Conference on "The International News Media and the Developing World", Cairo, April 1978).

Apart from these general positions, there are a certain number of particular issues and aspects of information flow which are prominent in the ongoing debate:

Basic distortions of news circulation

The criticism of news agencies' operations has been summed up in the following terms:

"The Third World under the stimulus of an increasingly vocal non-aligned movement, argues its case on three separate but inter-related fronts. In the first place,...the international news media network is dominated by the powerful news media of the West (in particular, the international news agencies of the U.K., U.S.A. and France): secondly, it is claimed, these news media are imperialist; and finally, the Third World asserts, the 'pictures of the world' transmitted by these news media are imbalanced." "News Dependence: The Case for a New World Information Order" Report to Unesco on a Study of International News Media, November 1977.)
In reply to these criticisms, the major international news agencies have "...steadfastly rejected the complaints, arguing that (they) are providing adequate, comprehensive, reliable and impartial news services to subscribers of differing political, economic, social and cultural backgrounds worldwide. Moreover, it is argued by the West, the Third World's concern with the international news media network is not motivated solely by a genuine desire to rectify perceived imbalances but is tainted with the spectre of political considerations."

The creation of the Pool of News Agencies of Non-Aligned Countries was a concrete step towards overcoming the imbalance and opened the way to a better exchange of information between developing countries. In its original concept, the 'pool' was not conceived of as a rival to, let alone a supplanter of, the major Western news agencies. Nevertheless, this was how some journalists saw it and reacted to it as a threat to press freedom.

However, it may not be out of place in this respect to quote three statements: one from the Pool's organisers: "This cooperation among 'non-aligned countries' is not intended to compete with existing information systems...but to fill the vacuum existing in the international information system and it is in this sense that it has become increasingly attractive." (Pero Ivacic, Director of TANJUG, 1977); another from one of the major news agencies: "To be sure, we have nothing against attempts by the developing countries, either in the form of "pools" or in any other form, to improve their news production and exchange. We are ready, if necessary, to help them, as indeed we have always done in the past. However, we cannot allow the freedom of action of foreign correspondents, in particular those of AFP working in these countries, to be limited..." (Claude Roussel, Chairman and Managing Director of AFP); and a third from another major agency to the effect that the Associated Press "believes that the more journalistic voices the world hears, the better informed it will be. For that reason, AP has expressed repeated support of the Third-World Non-aligned News Pool concept" (Monograph on Associated Press).
News flow

The international flow of news is at the center of the current debate. Obviously, certain aspects of this flow are being challenged.

It has often been pointed out that existing news networks largely follow links of former colonial periods and remaining economic ties, as well as cultural and language propensities. This tends to channel the North-South news flows and inhibit the development of the virtually non-existent exchanges between developing countries themselves.

While there is a flood of news on the East-West axis between North America and Europe, as well as, albeit on a lower level, between Socialist and Western countries, the much lesser flow that exists between North and South can hardly be called an exchange due to the imbalance. Furthermore, Ghana resents having its news from the Ivory Coast filtered through Paris, the same as India gets her news from Thailand via London or New York. Such patterns reflect an inequality and, perhaps, a touch of lingering paternalism, which exacerbates the information debate.

Another important issue is the link between international and national circulation of news. Neglect of the domestic flow and failure to deal with the obstacles hampering news collection and dissemination can be a danger to all societies in that such centralization could lead to limiting the public's right to be adequately informed and to a not necessarily well-founded conformity of opinion and diminished political, social and cultural plurality. Sean MacBride referred to this in his speech at the opening meeting of the first session of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. He said: "There is an obvious link between communication on the national and international levels. To isolate one from the other, to treat them separately, as so often happens, would not only be a mistake, but is really impossible. So many complaints and criticisms on the international sphere, justified or exaggerated, about monopolies and imbalances in communication, or about the role of transnational companies or the neglect of cultural identity and heredity, are certainly connected with what is often taking place inside various countries".

That is why, in addition to improving the news flow between countries, it is equally important to eliminate barriers inside countries and to improve conditions so as to permit journalists to carry on their professional work without let or hindrance.

News imbalance

Claims have been put forward on many sides that Western agencies and media in a great many industrialized countries tend to give relatively low coverage to the Third World, and that what coverage there is tends to give a distorted picture of Third World countries and goals. These charges are refuted more or less effectively, since the claims made on both sides are difficult to judge on the basis of empirical evidence, only limited studies having been made of the quantity, quality and content of news stories.
One such study, contained in the previously cited Harris report to Unesco analyzed the stories transmitted by AFP, Reuters and UPI on five different days during a one-month period in 1975. A review of the datelines for the 4139 stories tabulated showed the following regional coverage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Reuters No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>AFP No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UPI No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WESTERN EUROPE</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTH AMERICA</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE LEVANT</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/EASTERN EUROPE</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATIN AMERICA</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIAN sub continent</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAR EAST</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1723</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td><strong>1394</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td><strong>1022</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A thematic analysis showed the following percentage breakdown between the five major subjects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reuters Story type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>AFP Story type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UPI Story Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS: FOREIGN</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>POLITICS: FOREIGN</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>CRIME</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS: DOMESTIC</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>SPORT</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>POLITICS: DOMESTIC</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIME</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>POLITICS: DOMESTIC</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>ECONOMICS: DOMESTIC</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPORT</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>ECONOMICS: FOREIGN</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>POLITICS: FOREIGN</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILITARY</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>CRIME</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>HUMAN INTEREST</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this analysis of the summary presented above, Harris concludes, "While the findings do not support the view that these major organs of the news media present in a highly noticeable form a picture of tragedy and disaster as endemic in the Third World, the data do however indicate reasonably serious grounds for concern...In general terms, the Third World and actors in the Third World are presented sketchily, particularly in comparison with Western areas of the world and Western actors, (and) information from and about the Third World is reported within ethnocentric perspectives and is an affirmation of the view that the demands of the Western-dominated market for news structure the image of reality".

As is clear from these rather limited data, and is moreover evidenced by the emotional rather than factual statements often interposed in debates on communication problems, there are many areas in which differing positions are unsupported by empirical evidence. For this reason, both professionals and academics concerned with communication practice and theory call for ever more thorough research and study in the field, research intended to obtain definitive answers concerning the volume, direction, content, etc., of international news via the news agencies, and foreign correspondents.

The basic data and broad surveys of responsible opinion are necessary if possible answers to the many problems are to be solidly founded and sensibly supported. If it is axiomatic that the public must be well-informed in order to take responsible decisions, it is equally valid that media professionals should also have sufficient facts on which to base their opinions and actions.

News values and news content

The controversial issues relating to balance and imbalance in news flow are closely linked to the basic question of news values. Three aspects frequently mentioned are: (i) what constitutes news; (ii) the ratio between supply and demand on the so-called 'news market'; (iii) the role of news transmission.

In the first place, the basic debate is often embittered by the insertion of a highly sensitive issue: the belief held by many in the Third World that Western journalists and editors are in general indifferent to their problems and aspirations, that they are prone to "crisis reporting" and, worse, that they deliberately distort the news.

On the whole question of "what is news?", and how it is reported, there are obviously numerous valid contentions made by proponents of quite different theses.

Many still contend that there is only one way of producing valid news: through comprehensive, accurate and objective reporting on phenomena and events of interest mainly and preferable of an unusual and exceptional nature. Many others, particularly - but not solely - in the Third World maintain that different societies have different needs for and approaches to news and that the value attached to the
same item of news may vary from one sector or community to another. Some strongly argue the necessity, especially as far as developing countries are concerned, of enlarging the concept of news from individual "events" to the entire "process" - hunger being a process, a hunger strike being an event; a flood being an event, a long battle against flooding being a process - in the hope that in today's world reporters and newsmen will be ready to devote more attention to the "process" and to long-term trends. The same point is emphasized by those who advocate a new style of journalism in which good news is just as newsworthy as bad news: "our need is urgent and acute - we belong to societies which are in the process of restructuring and reshaping themselves. In our environment there is, and there will be for a long time to come, much that is ugly and distasteful. If we follow the Western norm we will be playing up only these dark spots and thus helping unwittingly to erode the faith and confidence without which growth and development are impossible." (Dilip Mukerjee, an Indian journalist).

In essence, the Third World's reaction to Western reporting focusses on the development problem. "At the root of the Third World's information problem lies the West's lack of commitment to that which developing nations value above all else: the ideology of development. The fact that the West does not share its ideology, along with the fact that Western agencies do not have to answer either to the foreign countries in which they operate or to the international community, has made the Third World anxious to ensure accountability for the media in some form. Thus they are attempting, at international conferences and in Third World forums, to create a new international information order where such accountability could be guaranteed" (Shashi Tharoor in a paper prepared for a conference on "The Third World and Press Freedom" sponsored by the Edward R. Murrow Center of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University). Many others have expressed their faith in journalists' willingness to change their attitudes. Realizing that national development policies should not be subverted by contrary media influences, and that communication is vital if development is to receive the support and cooperation of the masses, the journalist should not only report objectively "newsworthy" events but should also function as a social analyst and educator, playing a vital part in a national and international struggle for human progress.

This problem emerged clearly in connexion with the reporting on the world-wide debate on the New International Economic Order, many Third World leaders and journalists claiming that the richer nations were "not prepared to treat seriously the developing nations' case for change" or that their case was "either not being sympathetically presented" in certain media, or was "not being presented at all", and that willingly some Western media had been "manipulated as 'an instrument' for defending and promoting Western interests." The same or similar contentions concerning "manipulation" and "implicit involvement" were voiced in connexion with other international issues, such as disarmament, racial problems and apartheid.
Admittedly, this new journalism or new approach to reporting and news values - raises some disquieting issues. The thin line between education and propaganda, or between support for worthy human endeavors and apologetic attitudes in response to political or bureaucratic pressures, is one that few Third World analysts have analysed deeply and one that some, indeed, are not prepared to draw.

With regard to the second aspect, the basic controversy centers on the question of the "nature" of news: is news - and should it be - a "commodity", a 'marketable good' or should it be a 'social service' a 'public utility'?

Two short quotations will provide an insight into the conceptual difference.

The Managing Director of Reuters, Gerald Long, said in a recent interview: "We sell news. The sort of detailed reporting they (the Third World) might want and which they wish to get out of a news exchange would be enormously expensive - so expensive that nobody would be likely to pay the rates required...Any news service or medium does have to look at its market as well as its responsibilities, to give what it sees as a complete picture of events. Obviously there is an ethical task which must be fulfilled. This may involve delivering to some subscribers information the agency knows isn't wanted and won't be used. (But) if you go too far you will simply make the service unacceptable, so you have to strike a balance, and a balance exists".

The opposite thesis has often been voiced in numerous forums. Juan Somavia summed it up when he wrote that "the commercial concept of news (has) a built-in systematic discrimination against those events that cannot be sold, which"...are not news because the controlling market has no interest in them. At the same time, there is a tendency to distort by projecting those aspects of events that make them more marketable". The end product is "an out-of-context message whose content is determined by the logic of the market".

While it is acknowledged that particular weaknesses such as the coverage of Third World news do exist, standard reply to such comments is that news editors must give their audience what they want within very tight limits of space or time. It is estimated, for example, that American newspapers print only about one-sixth of the stories supplied by AP alone. The New York Times publishes only about 15 per cent of the material it receives. Television has particular difficulties, stressing stories suitable for fast visual presentation. Therefore, the agencies are somewhat justified in claiming that they produce the information, but cannot enforce its use. Agence France-Presse has stated: "The distribution of news concerning Third World countries is hindered by two major factors: lack of telecommunication facilities or their excessive cost, and the limited or guarded reception that the rest of the world gives to news from the Third World agencies...Like most Western news agencies, Agence France-Presse has no power to impose on the French media, and even less so on foreign media, to use news from the Third World agencies, any more than it can impel them to use its own reports from or about the Third World, even though this news is abundant, precise and interesting".
While it is true that the news market and the public's requirements do play a certain role, it is relevant to repeat here the well-known observation that public opinion is not a phenomenon sui generis, being partly the product of government policies and messages, transmitted through the various communication channels and media. Thus, to paraphrase a saying, by definition neither politicians nor communicators can hide behind their own creation.

In other words, the whole issue of journalists' responsibilities is implicitly involved - and is indeed often voiced, more particularly by journalists and leaders in developing and socialist countries. On the other hand, there is the whole question of journalism as a profession and the rights of correspondents, with the Western agencies insisting that the latter are often circumscribed. The Associated Press reports that the major obstacles it encounters "in collecting a factual global news report are restricted access, explicit or implicit censorship and pressure against correspondents extending in some cases as far as expulsion. The most serious and widespread of these constraints is the inability to gain entry for professionnally qualified AP representatives".

In addition, the detailed accounting of the physical harassment, imprisonment and even assassination of journalists makes an extreme mark on the picture of news gathering in the world today. The question of drawing up international standards for the protection of journalists should be seriously faced by all those concerned with improving the free and balanced flow of information.

The discussion is continuing. Many fundamental issues are being debated and are eminently debatable. But the process has been set in train. In the last few years, a certain progress has been achieved - not only in the reciprocal exchange of ideas and mutual understanding, but also in the form of concrete improvements, modest but real in news collection and dissemination.