

I have commented only on a few of the most important articles, but I believe that I do not have to go further to demonstrate that the present draft is unacceptable to our own interested people in Canada. The draft convention has so many loopholes that it could be used to offer unhappily convenient excuses to governments who are currently, sometimes habitually, applying press controls in varying degree. For other countries like mine, where freedom of information flourishes, it would mean the acceptance in the international field of a limited degree of freedom of information well below the one which we now enjoy. The distinguished delegate of France said that our duty was to consider the draft convention as the starting point of a wide measure of possible agreement. I wish to answer that, for the reasons I have outlined, my Government sees no really effective purpose in the articles of a convention based on the principles outlined in the draft.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to discuss, in a few words, the calling of a plenipotentiary conference.

It is generally considered that the calling of a plenipotentiary conference for the framing and signing of an international convention should be arranged only when a wide measure of agreement has been reached on the basic principles, and when there is good reason to hope that, with minor polishing, a substantial proportion of the states participating in the conference will authorize their representatives to sign the convention. The progress made over the last three years in reconciling divergent points of view and in widening the area of agreement on the principles of freedom of information to be included in a convention, would seem at present scarcely to justify the hope that a plenipotentiary conference could hammer out a text which would be generally acceptable to the free world. The delegate of France asked what would happen if the Council decided not to call the plenipotentiary conference. He maintained that an unfavourable atmosphere would be created and that we would be further than ever from a convention. I cannot agree with my colleague and I sincerely believe that the best way to make positive progress is to keep on trying to enunciate generally acceptable basic principles of freedom of information.

It has been decided by the General Assembly that the International Covenant on Human Rights should contain an article or articles on freedom of information. These provisions would be basic, enunciating the general principle of the fundamental right of individuals to seek, receive and impart information, and defining the specific areas in which governments may impose limitations on this basic right. An article of this nature in the Covenant on Human Rights would provide a framework within which a detailed convention could be worked out if it were decided that the general provisions of the Covenant were inadequate to give full protection to freedom of information. It would seem logical to reach agreement first on the basic provisions on freedom of information to be included in the Covenant on Human Rights before attempting to draft a separate convention.

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