

P R E F A C E

The United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information was the first inter-governmental conference of its kind ever held. For the first time, as the President of the Conference, Ambassador Carlos O. Romulo, of the Philippines, pointed out in his closing address, press, government and peoples were joined in common counsel and united endeavour.

The Conference, in its effort to raise the concept of freedom to an international plane, explored new difficult territory. It was to be expected, therefore, that its results would lack finality. In the nature of things, the results could not be otherwise. Yet, as the Conference closed, the general opinion among delegates was that the Conference had accomplished more than had been expected. In the words of the chief delegate of the United States, it accomplished more than many had dared hope.

If the gap between the Soviet bloc and the Western democracies remained unbridged at the close, the results of the Conference at least gave some measure of hope that eventually common ground might be reached. "No one here, to my knowledge," said President Romulo, "has declared against freedom of information. Nor has anyone claimed a monopoly on truthful information. Some have advocated freedom with a minimum of restrictions; others freedom coupled with responsibility. Everyone agrees that no right is absolute, since the exercise of any right is necessarily limited by respect for the rights of others". And the President of the Conference added:

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"There are certain areas in the world where the lack of liberal political traditions resulting in the establishment of authoritarian political and economic systems has created the most formidable dictatorships of the human mind. These are the areas where the life-giving principles of freedom of information are most needed but where also they meet with the most bitter and stubborn opposition. And yet it is equally true to say that there is no single curtain which conveniently divides the world into areas of black and white; there are many patches of black or grey everywhere, and the curtains cut across all continents and run in all directions wherever men are held in bondage by prejudice and oppression, poverty and ignorance. If this conference has made one thing clear, it is that the cause of freedom of information needs to be advanced not only in one direction but in many directions, and not only across national frontiers but within the borders of every nation."

The present report endeavours to give, in brief form, the main issues before the Conference and the attitude of the Canadian delegation towards those issues. In the appendix to the report will be found the Final Act of the Conference, giving the texts of the draft conventions adopted and the resolutions passed.

I should like to express my gratitude to all members of the Canadian delegation, advisers, secretaries and secretarial staff for their unstinted devotion to the work of the Conference. The Canadian delegation worked as a team, meeting daily to exchange views and to decide attitudes on questions at issue. I should like also to pay my warm tribute to the work of Mr. George Ferguson, editor of the Montreal Star, on the United Nations Sub-commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press. During Conference deliberations, I heard many highly appreciative comments on Mr. Ferguson's work. To those appreciations, I gladly add my own.

Rome, May 5, 1948

JEAN DESY