

opinion still exist. It was with this in mind that the Canadian Delegation to the Fifth Session of the General Assembly, along with several other delegations, urged that the draft of a detailed convention on freedom of information be deferred until the draft international Covenant on Human Rights was revised and the adequacy of its provisions on Freedom of Information could be determined. However, the General Assembly decided to appoint an ad hoc committee to prepare a draft convention on freedom of information, and called upon ECOSOC to consider the ad hoc committee's report at its Thirteenth Session and, if it thought fit, to call a plenipotentiary conference with a view to the framing and signing of a convention on freedom of information.

Our task at this time is therefore to consider the adequacy of the draft convention prepared by the ad hoc committee, and to decide, in the light of the discussion on this first question, whether or not we should call a plenipotentiary conference.

I would like at this point, Mr. Chairman, to say that our Delegation has the greatest admiration and respect for the devotion and hard work that so many people have put into the thankless and difficult, if not impossible, task of attempting to hammer out a satisfactory draft.

Since the convention is intended to apply to all media of information, my Government thought it desirable to consult with the principal information agencies and associations and other interested bodies in Canada in order that their views might be taken into consideration in determining Canadian policy on the proposed convention. Mr. Chairman, the opinion was unanimous that the draft convention is unsatisfactory, and the consensus of the replies received is that it would tend to restrict rather than promote freedom of information, that the failure of the many attempts made over the last three years to reach agreement internationally on basic principles of freedom of information should be taken as proof of the impossibility for the time being of arriving at a generally acceptable text, and that the entire project should be indefinitely postponed.

I should like to quote, as an example, one answer to our enquiries which we received from one of the leading press associations in Canada. This comment outlines an attitude with which many other groups have expressed agreement: I quote:

"The Convention on Freedom of Information, as drafted by the Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, represents an attempt to assimilate into a single instrument the diverse views of governments ranging from those that maintain complete control over speech and writing to those that permit freedom of expression within very wide limits.

"As such it is bound to some extent to jeopardize press freedom where it most fully exists. It cannot be seriously expected that the proposed Convention would compel an unwilling government to relinquish whatever power it already holds over the press. The adoption of such a compromise convention would tend to restrict press freedom, where it still exists, to some point between the extremes.