

The General Assembly, at its thirteenth session, unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the holding of three seminars in the field of human rights in 1959 (agenda item 34). One will be held in Bogota, Colombia, on the participation of women in public life. The others will be held in Argentina and Ceylon on judicial and other remedies against the abuse of administrative authority.

### **Freedom of Information**

The draft Convention on Freedom of Information has been before various bodies of the United Nations since 1948.<sup>1</sup> The question was on the agenda of the Third Committee (agenda item 35) again in 1958 as a result of the General Assembly's decision in resolution 1189A (XII) of the twelfth session requesting the Secretary-General to consult with governments concerning the project and to report to the Assembly on his consultation.

There was considerable discussion in committee on whether the Assembly should discuss the draft Convention during the thirteenth session. The vote on this question resulted in 32 votes being cast in favour, 32 against (including Canada), with 4 abstentions. Canada has maintained that serious differences of opinion make the establishment of a convention on freedom of information undesirable and that the text of the draft Convention would restrict, rather than promote, freedom of information as it is understood and accepted in Canada. The Committee decided, however, by 49 votes to 14, with 10 abstentions, to recommend that the Assembly proceed at its fourteenth session to a discussion of the text of the draft Convention. The Secretary-General would be requested to write governments to transmit comments, observations, suggestions, proposals or amendments concerning the text of the draft Convention and to report on this consultation to the next session of the Assembly. (Draft Resolution "C").

The Committee's debates touched on other aspects of freedom of information, including the problem of developing media of information in underdeveloped countries. The Committee's draft resolution, which was adopted by the Assembly, expressed the hope that the Economic and Social Council would draw up a concrete programme for the development of information enterprises in 1959, and the Commission on Human Rights was also invited to give particular attention to this problem. UNESCO and other Specialized Agencies were also invited to join in this effort.

The Assembly also adopted the Committee's recommendation that all member states endorse mutual understanding between peoples by taking practical measures to open their countries to greater freedom of communication by facilitating access to United Nations information programmes, supporting the activities of United Nations information centres, and facilitating the free flow of accurate information through all media. (Draft Resolution "B").

### **Self-Determination of Peoples and Nations**

One of the purposes of the United Nations as provided in the Charter is "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples". During the years this provision has proved to be extremely controversial; member states have given widely different interpretation both of its meaning and of the criteria

<sup>1</sup>See previous issues of *Canada and the United Nations*.