

presented by the Secretary-General for holding three seminars in 1960, one in Asia, one in Africa and a third in Europe. The first, to be convened in Japan, is to discuss certain problems of substantive criminal law. The second, in Ethiopia, is to deal with the participation of women in public life. The third, in Austria, will consider the protection of human rights in criminal procedure.

Freedom of Information

The problem of freedom of information has been debated by various bodies of the United Nations for many years. The specific proposal for a Draft Convention on this subject has been discussed in the United Nations since 1958, and in 1959 it was again on the Agenda of the Third Committee (Agenda Item 35) as a result of the General Assembly's decision in 1958 contained in resolution 1313.C(xiii) of the thirteenth session of the Assembly. Under this resolution the Secretary-General was requested to write governments requesting comments on the text of the Draft Convention on the basis of which he would report to the fourteenth session of the General Assembly. A number of governments submitted comments in answer to this resolution and at the fourteenth session of the General Assembly discussion was resumed in the Third Committee.

The debates which took place in the Third Committee during the fourteenth session of the General Assembly reveal again the familiar and long-standing differences of opinion that have existed on whether the adoption of a convention on freedom of information would in practice restrict, rather than promote, freedom of information, at least as understood in the countries such as Canada. Canada has consistently considered that these serious differences of opinion could make adoption of a convention undesirable and, moreover, that such a convention might have the reverse of the effect intended. These views are shared by approximately one-third of the members of the Third Committee.

However, in view of the wish of the majority in the Third Committee to discuss a Draft Convention, those countries who are critical of such a convention did not oppose discussion of a draft text. In the event, the preamble and Article I of a Draft Convention were both adopted (as amended in discussion) in the Third Committee by the following votes: preamble—43 in favour, 5 against and 24 abstentions; Article I—41 in favour, 4 against and 12 abstentions. In its final sitting the Committee also approved a resolution, subsequently adopted by the General Assembly, whereby priority will be given to this item at the next session of the General Assembly. The total votes on this resolution were again approximately 40 in favour, 2 against and 17 abstentions. Canada abstained on this resolution for the reasons mentioned above.

Functional Commissions of the Economic and Social Council

Introduction

The eight functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council were set up to assist the Council in its work in technical and specialized fields. The activities of seven of the Commissions which held meetings during the past year are discussed in the following sections. The remaining, the Statistical Commission, assists the Council in developing the work of international statistical services and in promoting the development of national statistics and improving their comparability. It meets biennially and will hold its eleventh session in New York from April 20 to May 6, 1960.