GENEVA CONFERENCE ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Delegations representing 54 governments attended the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information which met in Geneva, Switzerland, from March 24 to April 21, 1948. Observers represented the governments of Bolivia, Iran and Ireland. Observers were present also from the following organizations:

Inter-Government

    International Labour Office.
    International Telecommunications Union.
    United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Non-Governmental

    International Co-operative Alliance.
    International Organization of Industrial Employers.
    International Organization of Journalists.
    Inter-Parliamentary Union.
    World Federation of United Nations Associations.

Canadian Representation

The Canadian delegation consisted of:

Delegates:

Jean Desy, K.C., Canadian Ambassador to Italy, chief delegate.
Arthur R. Ford, Editor, London Free Press.
W. Arthur Irwin, Editor, Maclean's Magazine.
Lorenzo Paré, parliamentary correspondent for L'Action Catholique.
Andrew G. Cowan, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation London.

Advisers:

Campbell L. Moodie, Office of Canadian High Commissioner, London.
George Hambleton, Information Division, Department of External Affairs.

Secretary of Delegation:
L.A.D. Stephens, Canadian Legation, Berne

The Conference approved three draft conventions, draft articles for the Declaration and Covenant on Human Rights and 43 resolutions. The first Draft Convention, on the gathering and International Transmission of News, originated with the United States delegation; the second, on the Institution of an International Right of Correction, originated with the French delegation; and the third, on the Freedom of Information, originated with the United Kingdom delegation. All draft conventions, as submitted to the Conference, were amended in Committee.

The 43 resolutions range over the broad fields of:

(a) General principles;

(b) Measures to facilitate the gathering and international transmission of information;

(c) Measures concerning the free publication and reception of information; and

(d) Continuing machinery to promote the free flow of information.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in preparing a Draft Declaration and a Draft Covenant on Human Rights, decided not to elaborate a final text for Articles 17 and 18 of the Declaration and for Article 17 of the Draft Covenant until it had before it the view of the Sub-commission on Freedom of Information and of the Press and of the International Conference on Freedom of Information.

From the beginning, Canada took an active part in the proceedings of this Sub-commission, with George V. Ferguson, editor of The Montreal Star, as rapporteur of the first session held at Lake Success from May 19 to June 4, 1947.

The first session of the Sub-commission performed two principal functions. It examined what rights, obligations and practices should be included in the concept of freedom of information and prepared a report of these for the Economic and Social Council. It also prepared a provisional annotated agenda together with proposals concerning preparations for the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information.

The second session of the Sub-commission held at Lake Success from January 19 to February 3, 1948, completed three main tasks:

(1) The drafting of an article on freedom of information for inclusion in the Draft International Declaration on Human Rights prepared by the Human Rights Commission.

(2) The drafting of an article on freedom of information for inclusion in the Draft International Covenant on Human Rights, also prepared by the Human Rights Commission.

(3) Formulation of the rights, obligations and practices to be included in the concept of freedom of information.

The statement of the rights, obligations and practices to be included in the concept of freedom of information, which was based on a submission by Mr. Ferguson, was formulated by the Sub-commission to provide a general guidance for the discussions at Geneva. The ideas contained represent the