COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixth Session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SEVENTH MEETING

Held at Lake Success, New York,
on Monday, 24 April 1950, at 3 p.m.

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Mr. VALENZUELA Chile
Mr. SORENSEN Denmark
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Mr. KYROU
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Mr. ORIBE
Mr. JEVREMOVIC

Greece
India
Lebanon
Philippines
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United States of America
Uruguay
Yugoslavia

Also present:

Mrs. GOLDMAN
Commission on the Status of Women

Representatives of non-governmental organizations:

Category A:

Miss SENDKER
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTU)

Category B:

Mrs. AIETA
Catholic International Union for Social Services

Mr. YOSKOWITZ
Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations

Miss BENDER
International Co-operative Women’s Guild

Miss TOMLINSON
International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Miss ZIZZAMIA
International Union of Catholic Women’s Leagues

Secretariat:

Mr. SCHWEIB
Acting Director, Division of Human Rights

Mr. LIN MOUSHENG
Secretary of the Commission
WELCOME TO THE MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

1. The CHAIRMAN extended a cordial welcome to Mrs. Goldman, the member of the Commission on the Status of Women.

DRAFT INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON HUMAN RIGHTS (continued)


2. The CHAIRMAN invited the Commission to continue its discussion of the United States draft Article 17 (E/CN.4/433/Rev.2) and the amendments to paragraph 2 of that proposal by the United Kingdom (E/CN.4/440), France (E/CN.4/438/Rev.1), Egypt (E/CN.4/434) and India (E/CN.4/424).

3. Miss BOWIE (United Kingdom) did not think the word "disorder" in the proposed United Kingdom amendment to paragraph 2 was too broad, as had been suggested. Nor did she feel that the word "crime" could be stretched to cover the abuses the United States representative had mentioned. Even if a dictator did sign the covenant, which she did not think likely, it would be in direct contradiction of the whole purpose of the covenant and of the terms of paragraph 1 of article 17 for him to pass a law making any criticism of himself a crime.

4. She was not in favour of the phrase "public order" because it had too specific a meaning in certain countries. Moreover, if the phrase also covered the idea in the United Kingdom amendment to paragraph 1, "by duly licensed visual or auditory devices", as well as the proposal for a new paragraph 3 (E/CN.4/445), in her opinion it was too broad. It was especially to be criticized if the maintenance of public order meant acceptance of the existing order of society. Under that interpretation, the authorities would be empowered to distort facts in any way they chose merely for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. For those reasons she preferred the proposed United Kingdom amendment "the prevention of disorder or crime".

5. She could
5. She could not accept the French suggestion to insert the words "in a democratic society" after the words "public order", in paragraph 2 of article 17. The covenant might come into force in countries where the word "democracy" did not have its traditional meaning. The French amendment would, therefore, open the door to misinterpretation and abuse.

6. Mr. THEODOROPOULOS (Greece) said that, although he could accept the phrase "the prevention of disorder and crime", it would create difficulties for those countries which used the term "public order" in their legal system. As the term "public order" had a definite meaning, he would vote for it, and would abstain from voting on the United Kingdom amendment.

7. He also thought, like the French representative, that the French amendment "in a democratic society" might be illuminating. In his opinion, however, the entire covenant was intended for democratic nations. Other countries would certainly neither sign it nor comply with its provisions. Moreover, if the phrase were expressly stated in article 17, it would also have to be stated in every other article, to avoid confusion. It would therefore be better to reject the French amendment.

8. On the other hand, he thought the Indian amendment (E/CN.4/424) was essential. It also covered the Egyptian amendment (E/CN.4/434), which dealt with only one aspect of the question, and he asked the Egyptian representative whether he could not withdraw his amendment in favour of the Indian text.

9. Mrs. MEHTA (India) said that her amendment should read "or for the prevention of spreading deliberately false or distorted reports which undermine friendly relations between peoples and States".

10. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of China, observed that the phrase "democratic society" had been used in article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to qualify the article as a whole, and not merely the phrase "public order". It might be better, however, to omit the reference from article 17 and draft an omnibus clause for the covenant as a whole.

/11. Mr. WHITLAM
11. Mr. WHITLAM (Australia) supported the United Kingdom amendment. The choice was not easy, however, as neither the term "public order" nor the phrase "the prevention of disorder or crime" was entirely satisfactory. In spite of the long discussion, the precise meaning of the phrase "public order" had not been determined and he thought therefore that, although the word "disorder" was not entirely clear, it was the more satisfactory term.

12. The words "in a democratic society" raised the same difficulties of interpretation. Unfortunately, the term "democratic" had all too often been bandied about as a political slogan until it could no longer be considered precise enough in meaning for an instrument of binding character in law, such as the covenant was to be.

13. Mr. ITGOT (Belgium) repeated his contention that the phrase "disorder or crime" was too vague. Order and disorder might be differently conceived from a totalitarian and democratic standpoint. Similarly, the word "crime" was open to various interpretations. For those reasons, he opposed the United Kingdom amendment.

14. Mr. RASADAH (Egypt) preferred the phrase "public order", which had a definite meaning in most continental legal systems, to the United Kingdom amendment, which was vague and should not be included in a legal instrument.

15. He also supported the Indian amendment, which covered the general aspects of the question and was therefore more suitable for inclusion in the covenant. As the General Assembly was to prepare a detailed convention on freedom of information, however, he withdrew his amendment but reserved the right to reintroduce it in the General Assembly in due time.

16. Mr. JEVTEPAVIC (Yugoslavia) objected to the United Kingdom amendment, "the prevention of disorder or crime", which was not sufficiently concrete. Many abuses could be committed under the protection of that phrase, as all opposition to a government could be called disorder. In his view the phrase "public order in a democratic society" improved the text of article 17.
17. He contended, in contrast to what the French representative had said earlier, that the phrase "national security" would not prevent the dissemination of information for purposes of war propaganda. Such general terms as "public order" and "national security" could not offer the necessary guarantees.

18. One of the primary tasks of the United Nations was to protect the individual, and surely any measures which would help to prevent wars would protect every individual. Nevertheless, it was being argued that the covenant should contain only general safeguards. In his view, however, it was essential to restrict freedom of information and of the press so that those basic rights could not be used to promote war.

19. The CHAIRMAN put the United Kingdom amendment to paragraph 2 of article 17 (E/CN.4/430) to the vote. As a request had been made that the amendment should be voted upon in two parts, he first put to the vote the words "the prevention of disorder".

Those words were rejected by 7 votes to 6, with 2 abstentions.

20. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the first part of the United Kingdom amendment had been lost, he would not put the words "or crime" to the vote.

It was so agreed.

21. The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the French amendment to add the words "in a democratic society" after the words "public order" in paragraph 2 of article 17 (E/CN.4/433/Rev.1).

That amendment was rejected by 8 votes to 5, with 2 abstentions.

22. The CHAIRMAN then put to the vote the phrase "of national security, public order, safety, health or morals" in paragraph 2 of the United States draft article 17 (E/CN.4/433/Rev.2).

That phrase was adopted unanimously.

23. Mr. MALIK (Lebanon) suggested that the order of the last phrase of the second paragraph of the United States draft article 17 should be changed to read "of the rights, freedoms or reputations of others".

It was so agreed.

/24. The CHAIRMAN
24. The CHAIRMAN put to the vote the last phrase of the second paragraph of the United States draft article 17 as amended (E/CN.4/433/Rev.2). The phrase was adopted unanimously.

25. Mr. CASSID (France) pointed out that the phrase "le respect des droits" would have to be retained in the French text. He thought that was a matter of drafting, however, and could be left to the Style Committee. It was so agreed.

26. Mrs. MEHTA (India) said it was essential that the covenant should protect relations between nations, as well as relations between individuals. India as well as other States had suffered from abuse of the right of expression and felt strongly that the covenant should contain some provision to prevent the spreading of deliberately false or distorted reports which might undermine friendly relations between peoples and States.

27. Mr. SIMTARIAN (United States of America) said that he understood the Indian representative's point of view, but he thought no further additions should be made to article 17. It already contained a general statement on freedom of expression and a list of general exceptions, which covered all possible general cases. In his opinion, the text would not be improved by the Indian amendment, which he feared would do away with all freedom of expression.

28. The Commission had agreed that the covenant should contain general statements of principles and limitations. The addition of specific limitations in the article was therefore clearly unjustified.

29. He hoped that the Indian representative would withdraw her amendment.

30. Mr. RAMADAN (Egypt) stressed the fact that he had reserved the right to re-open the question at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly.

31. Mr. JEVREMOVIC (Yugoslavia) thought it was essential to include the Indian amendment in article 17. As an expression of one of the principles set forth in Article I of the Charter, it was fitting that it should be inserted in the covenant.

32. He failed.
32. He failed to understand how the Indian amendment could lead to abuses of freedom of expression. It clearly aimed at the "prevention of spreading deliberately false or distorted reports". It did not endanger the truth, and was therefore completely in harmony with the spirit of the Charter.

33. Yugoslavia like India had often suffered from the abuse of freedom of expression and felt the covenant should include a provision preventing the dissemination of inaccurate information. He therefore supported the Indian amendment.

34. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of China, agreed that the Indian amendment as it stood imposed an additional limitation on freedom of expression. He wondered whether it could be rephrased to meet that objection.

35. Miss BOWIE (United Kingdom) sympathized with those countries whose relations with other States had been undermined through the dissemination of false or distorted reports. On the other hand, in the effort to eliminate that danger, all information on foreign countries would have to be made subject to censorship, thus destroying the very freedom which the covenant sought to safeguard. After careful study of the problem, the only solution reached at the Geneva Conference had been to grant to all States the right of rectification of false reports.

36. Mr. SORENSEN (Denmark) would have voted in favour of the Indian amendment if the United Kingdom text had been adopted. But the phrase "public order" in the approved United States text actually covered not only the specific United Kingdom limitations but those of India and France as well. There was no need for further limitations and the Indian amendment was superfluous.

37. Mr. MALIK (Lebanon) pointed out that the Indian amendment emphasized the conflict between preservation of the fundamental freedom to disseminate news and restriction of abuse of that freedom. Perhaps the most effective way to resolve that conflict was to permit absolute freedom and introduce no government safeguards, for such limitations would necessarily constitute some form of censorship. Ideally, some middle course should be found to prevent abuse without restricting the basic freedom. In any case, the provision made in the covenant to achieve that objective would not be adequate.
38. It was not accidental that countries like India, Yugoslavia, Egypt and Lebanon had suffered from false and distorted reports and slandersome propaganda through information media and that that was likely to continue. Mr. Malik would therefore welcome a suggestion from the United States, Denmark and the United Kingdom for some positive means of eliminating it. It did not seem reasonable for the United States to accept such a limitation in the covenant unless it was prepared to approve definitive safeguards for freedom of information in a separate detailed convention on the subject.

39. Mr. VALENCUELA (Chile) conceded that the Indian amendment raised a delicate problem. It had become increasingly difficult for the press to obtain accurate information and to present it to a public which could be relied upon to exercise critical judgment in evaluating it. In some parts of the world, the press was denied access to information other than that officially issued by the government. Moreover, it could not be expected to bring an adequate understanding of the culture and thought of other peoples to the reading public, particularly when the public was not yet mature enough to appreciate such information.

40. The limitations on news reporting must be fully realized. While States were perfectly justified in complaining of abuses of freedom of the press, they should not be unduly sensitive in the matter. They should not consider the press and other information media apart from society itself and vest them with greater duties and responsibilities than the State or the individuals composing the State. It was far more dangerous, under the pretext of preventing false reports, to set up a form of censorship which could be extended to cut off all but official sources of information. Mr. Valenzuela would therefore be forced to vote against the Indian amendment.

41. Mr. SIMSARAN (United States of America), replying to the representative of Yugoslavia, pointed out that censorship would also be necessary in order to determine what were the true facts. Censorship was a weapon of totalitarianism and its effect would be to destroy free access to information.

42. Referring to the remarks of the representative of Lebanon, he pointed out that the prevention of abuse should not have the effect of curtailing the very freedoms which the covenant was intended to preserve. Further limitation of freedom
of freedom of information would not help to safeguard that right. Moreover, the General Assembly had completed work on the Convention for the Transmission of News and the Right of Correction and would soon open it for signature. It provided that signatory States had the right to rectify false reports appearing in the press of other countries. The General Assembly might also decide to introduce further safeguards of freedom of information in a separate convention on the subject.

43. In the circumstances, the Indian amendment was unnecessary; the covenant should contain only the general limitations enumerated in paragraph 3 of the amended text of article 17.

44. Mr. JEVEROMOV (Yugoslavia) noted that, while the Indian amendment did not specify who was to determine the truth or falsity of reports, neither did article 17 stipulate who was to determine what was necessary for the protection of national security, public order, etc. Obviously the same criterion would apply. It had not been determined inasmuch as the Commission had not yet discussed how governments were to discharge all their obligations under the covenant. Yet it seemed clear that it would be no more difficult to detect violations of the freedom stated in article 17 under the various limitations listed in paragraph 3 than under the limitation mentioned in the Indian amendment. The question of censorship was therefore irrelevant. It was an undisputed fact, and many examples could be offered to corroborate it, that false reports had frequently been deliberately spread to undermine friendly relations between States. Smaller States, in particular, had been subjected to such abuse.

45. Mr. CASSIN (France) emphasized that the problem was largely one of method rather than of substance. The General Assembly had asked the Commission to include in the covenant a general statement of basic principles governing freedom of information; it had not called for a complete convention on the question. The Commission could not attempt to work out detailed provisions and means of applying them without exceeding its terms of reference. Presumably, that was why the Commission had quite properly rejected the French amendment to article 17 concerning the removal of economic obstacles to freedom of information and Egypt had withdrawn its amendment (E/CH.4/434). When the General Assembly resumed discussion of a detailed convention, France reserved the right not only to include further limitations of the freedom of information, but also a precise statement of the responsibilities of the press and other media.

/46. Mr. Cassin
46. Mr. Cassin regretted that he could not support the Indian amendment at that stage; however, France would support the substance of the proposal when the Assembly resumed consideration of a separate convention.

47. Mrs. MENON (India) said that those who exercised the important right to disseminate information must be reminded of their responsibilities. In view of the fact that the main objective of the United Nations was to achieve peace by maintaining friendly relations between States, there seemed to be no reason to omit that additional limitation on the freedom of information. It was not the intention of India to institute a form of censorship; the truth could always be reported. On the other hand, not only the press, but the radio, cinema and individuals should be prevented from spreading deliberately false and distorted information. They should be made to realize their responsibility for maintaining peace in the world. For those reasons, the Indian amendment would not be withdrawn.

48. Mr. WHITIHAM (Australia) thought that India had submitted a valid case and agreed in principle that it called for some kind of action. The covenant, however, was to be an instrument of international law and should, as far as possible, not be open to various legal interpretations. It was difficult to see how false and distorted reports could be prevented without some form of censorship. It would be almost impossible to enforce such a provision by law. The experience of Australian tribunals had shown that the interpretation of what appeared to be simple, laymen's language could become extremely controversial. For those reasons, despite its concern, Australia could not vote to include the limitation expressed in the Indian amendment in the covenant.

49. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) also found it difficult to vote for the Indian amendment. Recent history seemed to indicate that freedom of information was most effectively abused by the propaganda machine of the State when the State overstepped its powers and encroached on the freedom of individuals. For example, the first measure taken by the Japanese occupiers in the Philippines was to suppress all newspapers, the most important instrument of free expression. The Indian amendment might give governments a wedge by which to control the press, thus interfering in a realm reserved to the private citizen. Unwittingly, India might be helping to justify the ultimate imposition of censorship.
50. The covenant was essentially designed to safeguard human rights and not to offer a code of ethics for the press. It must be confined to statements of general principles; it should not set out in detail the responsibilities of individuals and agencies engaged in the dissemination of news. When the Convention on the Transmission of News and the Right of Correction came into force, the reputations of States as well as private individuals should be adequately safeguarded under libel laws.

51. The CHAIRMAN put the Indian amendment (E/CN.4/424) to the vote.

It was rejected by 6 votes to 5, with 4 abstentions.

52. Miss BOWIE (United Kingdom) noted that in the two final paragraphs of document E/CN.4/440 and in E/CN.4/446, the United Kingdom had submitted four additional limitations. In the course of the discussion of "public order" various representatives had stated that all of the United Kingdom amendments were covered by "public order". If that interpretation was formally confirmed by the Commission, the United Kingdom would not ask for a separate vote on its amendments.

53. Mr. NISOT (Belgium), supported by Mr. HAMADA (Egypt) and Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines), stated that all four of the United Kingdom amendments were juridically covered by paragraph 2 of article 17; they were therefore superfluous.

54. In the absence of objection, the CHAIRMAN noted the general consensus that the United Kingdom amendments were covered by paragraph 2 and that a separate vote was therefore unnecessary.

55. He called for a vote on the text of article 17 as amended.

Article 17 as amended was adopted by 13 votes to none, with 2 abstentions.
56. Mr. MALIK (Lebanon) said that he had voted for the text of article 17 but felt that an investigation should be made of the English term "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of opinion without governmental interference" in connection with the French equivalent "Nul ne peut être inquieté pour ses opinions". An important question of substance was involved and the Drafting Committee should study it carefully. While those expressions were used as equivalents in the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was one of several instances of translations which were not quite precise.

57. Mr. CRIBB (Uruguay) stated that he had voted in favour of article 17 subject to the reservation that the text be studied and its language made juridically acceptable and on the clear understanding that the article did not authorize censorship in peacetime. He stressed the danger to freedom of information when governments controlled newsprint and other material.

58. Mr. JEVREMOVIC (Yugoslawia) explained that he had abstained from voting on article 17 as a whole because in his opinion it was impossible to safeguard the freedom of information of individuals without also protecting free information for entire peoples. The text of article 17 as adopted violated basic provisions of the Charter, which called for peace and friendly relations between nations. General phrases such as "public order" and "national security" would continue to jeopardize freedom of information and leave the door open to abuse of all kinds. He had therefore been unable to support a text which in his view cast a deplorable shadow on the entire covenant.

59. Mr. SIMSARIAN (United States of America) stated that he had voted in favour of article 17, but reserved the right to study the text further with regard to the phrase "without governmental interference".

60. Mr. WHITLAM (Australia) indicated that he had voted in favour of article 17 on first reading to show his support of freedom of information without any shadow of censorship.
61. Referring to the United Kingdom's four amendments, he stated that it was his understanding that the points there raised were implied in the term "public order".

62. Miss BOWIE (United Kingdom) said that she had abstained from voting on article 17 because the United Kingdom could not accept two basic points, although it was in agreement with much of the text. "Freedom of opinion without interference", as proclaimed in the first clause, would be very difficult to achieve in practice. Moreover, the limitations set forth in paragraph 2 should have been stricter. The United Kingdom delegation reserved its right to submit further amendments at a later stage.

63. Mrs. MEHTA (India) stated that she had voted for the text of article 17, although she still felt that the text was incomplete without the provision for the prevention of the spread of deliberately false or distorted reports. It was her hope that that limitation might still be included in the covenant.

64. Mr. CASSIN (France) said that he had voted for article 17 as a whole despite the omission of "in a democratic society". He expressed the hope that that provision of article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights might yet be placed in the covenant.

65. He agreed with the representative of the United Kingdom that governmental interference was sometimes necessary and felt that time would prove that the formula adopted by the Commission was not the worst possible choice.

66. Mr. RAMADAN (Egypt) noted that he had voted for article 17 subject to the reservation expressed earlier on behalf of his delegation.

67. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Commission had agreed first to consider the United States text of article 17 and the various amendments thereto as its basic text and then to study the alternative texts submitted by the Philippines (E/CN.4/365) and Yugoslavia (E/CN.4/415).
68. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) stated that in view of the preponderance of support for the basic text of article 17, which covered the essential points of the Philippine proposal, he would not press for a vote on his text.

69. Mr. JVREMCOVIC (Yugoslavia) requested a vote on the Yugoslav proposal for article 17.

70. In reply to a question from Mr. WHITLAM (Australia), Mr. JVREMCOVIC (Yugoslavia) explained that the expression "relations of inequality between the nations" was designed to prevent a state from using any means at its disposal to bring another state into a position of inequality, politically, economically or in any other way. He noted the frequent tendency of great Powers to use their overwhelming resources to limit the freedom of smaller states and make them subservient. Yugoslavia, as well as many other smaller states, had been the victim of repeated aggression by more powerful states and was forced to make strenuous and constant efforts to safeguard its national existence and preserve its independence.

71. The CHAIRMAN put the Yugoslav proposal for an alternative text of article 17 to the vote.

The Yugoslav proposal (E/CN.4/415) was rejected by 5 votes to 1, with 8 abstentions.

72. Mr. WHITLAM (Australia) said that he had voted against the Yugoslav proposal not because he opposed its principles but because the text was not, in his opinion, suitable for inclusion in the covenant and did not provide an effective substitute for the basic text just adopted.

Article 13 (E/CN.4/449, E/CN.4/L.4) (continued)

73. The CHAIRMAN noted that the drafting group had submitted an agreed text for paragraph 2 (e) of article 13 (E/CN.4/449).
74. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) suggested that the text of paragraph 4 might more appropriately appear as paragraph 2 (e), the proposal of the drafting group then becoming 2 (f).

It was so decided.

75. Mr. MALIK (Lebanon) expressed the view that the word "desirability" weakened the text submitted by the drafting group. It would be preferable to stress the necessity of promoting the rehabilitation of juveniles. He therefore suggested that the text should read "necessity of promoting" or merely "promoting".

76. Mr. ORIBE (Uruguay) stated that it was difficult for him to support a text which had little juridical significance. The Spanish term "juveniles" was legally meaningless. Moreover, the French and English versions hardly seemed equivalent on that point or in connexion with "rééducation" and "rehabilitation".

77. Miss BOWIE (United Kingdom) stated that the English term "juveniles" was quite elastic; it referred to young people for whom the codes of most countries made special provision, though the maximum age might be different in different countries. While the French text employed a long paraphrase for that word, the sense was the same.

78. She thought that the English term "rehabilitation" involved moral, physical and educational rehabilitation; the French delegation had stated that the French equivalent was not "réhabilitation" but "rééducation".

79. Referring to the suggestion of the representative of Lebanon that "desirability" should be deleted, Miss Bowie pointed out that rehabilitation was not necessary in every case of juvenile delinquency.

80. Mr. RAMADAN (Egypt) explained that juvenile under the penal code would mean anyone who had not achieved his majority under the legislation in effect in each country.

81. Mr. CASSIN (France) noted that the French word "mineur" was not equivalent to the English "juvenile" and that therefore a paraphrase had been /necessary.
necessary. Spanish-speaking representatives were free to adopt any translation which accurately conveyed the idea of "juvenile".

82. Referring to the proposal to delete the word "desirability", he stated that it was advisable not to make rehabilitation mandatory in all cases involving juveniles. Juveniles were not always guilty as accused and even in cases where they were found guilty, rehabilitation was not always essential. Unlike the English, the French term "réhabilitation" implied prior condemnation. The French equivalent was therefore "rééducation".

83. Mr. KIROU (Greece) said that he was prepared to vote for the joint draft text although he preferred his earlier suggestion "age and moral interest" which avoided the difficulty of "rehabilitation".

84. Mr. MALIK (Lebanon) stated that, in view of the discussion, he would not press for a vote on the deletion of "desirability".

85. The CHAIRMAN put the text submitted by the drafting group (E/CN.4/449) to the vote. The text submitted by the drafting group was unanimously accepted.

86. Mr. VALENZUELA (Chile) said that he had voted in favour of the text of the drafting group without raising technical questions of language. In the opening phrase, he accepted the French text, while he preferred to follow the English text regarding "rehabilitation".

87. The CHAIRMAN put article 13 as amended to the vote. Article 13 as amended was unanimously adopted.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.