

THE UNITED NATIONS SOUND RECORDING COLLECTION*

by

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On the 25th of April, 1945, the first meeting of the United Nations Conference on International Organisation opened in San Francisco.

Mr. Robert Vincent, who was in charge of recording the meetings, decided to record them in their entirety in the original language on 16-inch discs. This procedure was followed for all the various meetings which were ever recorded for the United Nations.

During the signing of the Charter, which took place on the 26th of June, 1945, Mr. Vincent approached each delegate and asked him to say a few words before the microphone before he signed the document. All these statements were collected, and an album of 12-inch pressings was offered for sale. This album was the first to be issued under the United Nations label and has been out of stock for the last twenty years.

When the first session of the General Assembly took place in London, the BBC took over the recording of the various meetings, and when the United Nations moved to New York at Hunter College in the Bronx, all these recordings were forwarded there.

Each meeting is covered by an individual 5 x 8 inch card listing the name of the meeting, its number, its date, its origin, serie and catalogue number of the tape or disc, the starting time of the disc or tape, the name of the speaker's country, the language spoken, the time the speaker started, and the time the meeting closed. These cards are filed consecutively according

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to the meeting, as well as to the body of the United Nations to which they belong.

In 1946 the United Nations moved from Hunter College to Lake Success on Long Island, but during the move an emergency meeting of the Security Council was scheduled. The Security Council Chamber of Hunter College had already been dismantled, and the one at Lake Success was not yet ready. In one night the Grand Ballroom of the Henry Hudson Hotel in Manhattan was wired and made ready for the meeting which took place as scheduled on 10 July 1946. In 1948 and 1951-52 the General Assembly and the meetings of the Security Council took place at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris.

When the United Nations was located at Lake Success, the General Assembly meetings, except for those held in Paris, were held at Flushing Meadows in Queens. In September, 1952, the permanent headquarters on the East River in Manhattan were completed, and the meetings were held in the various conference rooms. Various meetings and conferences were also held in Geneva at the Palais des Nations. However, no recordings from Geneva were kept until 1970, when a decision was made to put on tape certain meetings and forward the tapes to New York for inclusion in the collection.

I remember a few years ago a delegate requested to hear the statement she had made during a meeting of a certain committee. I therefore picked up the disc on which her statement was recorded and played it for her. When she came to the end of her speech, she took a knife and scratched the whole disc, giving as her reason that she did not like the sound of her voice. She returned a few weeks later and requested to listen to another of her statements. She went through the same motions, but I did not complain for the simple reason that after she had done this once, I had ordered two copies made of any meetings she would have sat in. I therefore discarded the damaged set and still had an original set.

In 1963 the recording facilities were changed from disc to tape. The system used was the recording on four track simultaneously on 1/4-inch tape on recorders especially designed for our use. All the meetings are

recorded on 7-inch reels, 3 3/4 ips, 0.5 mil tape (Scotch 200). In New York we can now record a total of twelve simultaneous meetings, and we shall be able to go to sixteen meetings within a year. Each tape can record four meetings, two hours on each track. When the segue is made, the same track is used on the following tape.

In 1970 Geneva also started recording on four-track tape (Scotch 220) and forwarded the recorded tapes to New York to be included in the collection. In January-February, 1972, the Security Council met in Africa Hall in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the meetings were recorded and sent to New York.

In 1966 the United Nations published three albums under United Nations labels. These albums, which are now out of print are: (1) Pope Paul at the United Nations, (2) El Papa en Las Naciones Unidas, (3) Never again war?

In 1963, when the change was made from disc to tape, the original discs of the Security Council were dubbed onto tape for better preservation. Later other discs were also dubbed. Some discs which were damaged beyond repair or which covered meetings which were recorded only for temporary reference were destroyed. Others, such as the discs covering the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, were transferred to the Library of Congress in Washington. It was thought that in later years the petitioners of the various territories which became independent and who became themselves their first head of state might originate requests concerning copies of the statements they made for their archives.

In 1963 the collection consisted of more than 100,000 discs. This has now been reduced to approximately 25,000. The number of tapes is now around 8,000.

Every two years the Sound Recording Unit of the Telecommunication Section publishes a catalog of its holdings. In addition a special booklet has been published giving the names, dates, visits, speeches, if any, of all the heads of state and dignitaries who have been at the United Nations. This booklet

covers the years 1945-1972, and a supplement is published every year to keep this information up to date. These documents are distributed upon request.

In addition the collection includes recordings from the League of Nations which were transferred from Geneva, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), International Refugee Organisation (IRO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Appeal for Children, International Trade Union (ITU), International Court of Justice (ICJ), Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), press conferences of the Secretary-General, address signings and ceremonies, and various seminars, as well as various recordings relating to the United Nations.

It has always been our policy to try, as much as possible, to have our recordings of broadcast quality. Some of the old recordings, which were originally on disc, cannot be considered of that standard due to damage which occurred years ago during storage, but a constant check of the tapes since 1963 has given us hope that these tapes have not suffered.

With the exception of certain closed meetings, copies of any meeting or speech can be provided according to a rate schedule set by the Controller of the United Nations. Quite a few requests were received asking for copies of the famous shoe incident by Mr. N. Khrushchev in 1960. This incident was never recorded because he was not at the podium at that time but was sitting at his delegation seat.

Pierre G. Furst is Head of the United Nations Sound Archive. A sample tape of the United Nations collection, which was played at the April 25, 1945, meeting referred to in this article, can be obtained by writing to Mr. Furst at the United Nations.