Twenty-seventh session
Item 24 of the preliminary list

WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

Letter dated 12 June 1972 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I would appreciate it if you would have the memorandum entitled "Opinion of the Government of Mexico on the convening of a World Disarmament Conference", which, together with an annex I have the honour to enclose herewith, circulated as a document of the General Assembly in connexion with item 24 of the preliminary list for the twenty-seventh session.

(Signed) Alfonso GARCIA ROBLES
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations
MEMORANDUM

Opinion of the Government of Mexico on the convening of a World Disarmament Conference

1. At its 2,022nd meeting, on 16 December 1971, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 2833 (XXVI) entitled "World Disarmament Conference" by acclamation.

2. The resolution, which was undoubtedly one of those adopted by the Assembly at its twenty-sixth session which may reasonably be expected to yield the most beneficial results, contains an invitation to "all States" to communicate to the Secretary-General, before 31 August 1972, "their views and suggestions on any relevant questions relating to a world disarmament conference", and in particular on the six points listed in paragraph 2 of the resolution.

3. This memorandum, submitted in compliance with the General Assembly's invitation, summarizes the Mexican Government's opinion on those specific points and on the question as a whole.

1. **Main objectives**

4. The aim of the Conference should be to take the requisite decisions to provide the United Nations with an effective disarmament system capable of obtaining more encouraging results than those achieved to date in the vitally important task which the Charter conferred on the Organization by specifically instructing it to turn its attention to promoting "the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources".

5. In order to achieve this end and make tangible progress both towards the ultimate goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons and general and complete disarmament under effective international control and towards the immediate adoption of partial measures to limit and reduce nuclear armaments and suppress other weapons of mass destruction, it will be necessary to strengthen principles, review rules, develop procedures and update the international machinery dealing with these questions.

6. With regard to that machinery, it would seem advisable, in the light of the experience acquired during the 25 or 30 years since the San Francisco Conference was held in 1945, for the Conference to recommend to the General Assembly that in future there should be three main organs for the promotion of disarmament.

   (1) The General Assembly, which should continue to be the supreme organ, would receive and consider reports from the other two, which it could entrust with specific tasks.

   (2) The World Disarmament Conference - replacing the Disarmament Commission, which would be dissolved in order to avoid duplication and for other obvious...
reasons - would be open to "all States"; it would meet every three or four years in order to review progress in the field of disarmament, compare the development in regard to armaments and disarmament and adopt the decisions which the general review calls for. In short, within the United Nations the World Conference would have the same position in the field of disarmament as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in the economic and social field.

(3) A negotiating body of about 30 members, preferably the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, which celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. Naturally, for this to be possible, various changes would have to be made which would both increase its effectiveness and enable the People's Republic of China and France to take part in its work. First and foremost among such changes should be the abolition of the unusual institution whereby the nuclear super-Powers act as Co-Chairmen, and its replacement by a procedure more consistent with the principle of the sovereign equality of States, such as the annual election of a chairman from among the non-nuclear States members or monthly rotation among all members as in the Security Council.

2. Provisional agenda

7. The body which the General Assembly entrusts with the preparatory work should, in consultation with "all States", work out a realistic and ambitious, detailed and flexible provisional agenda for the Conference.

8. The starting point for the preparation of the provisional agenda could be the comprehensive programme of disarmament which was originally introduced in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament in August 1970 by the delegations of Mexico, Sweden and Yugoslavia and subsequently submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, sponsored by Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

9. As will be recalled, the comprehensive programme of disarmament, the full text of which is annexed hereto, was reproduced in document A/8191 1/ of 2 December 1970 and the General Assembly specifically recommended in resolution 2661 C (XXV) of 7 December 1970 that it should be taken into account in further work and negotiations relating to disarmament.

3. Site favoured

10. In line with the preference usually shown for the venue of meetings of this kind, Geneva would seem to be the most appropriate site for the World Disarmament Conference.

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-Fifth Session, Annexes, agenda items 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 93 and 94.
4. Date and contemplated duration

11. In view of the urgent need to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to promote disarmament, the Conference should ideally take place in 1973. It should not be forgotten, however, that one of the basic prerequisites for its success, as Mexico pointed out in the debate at the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly, is that thorough preparations should be made before the Conference, since the latter will arouse expectations on the part of world public opinion which must not be disappointed. It would therefore probably be more realistic and convenient to plan the Conference for spring 1974.

12. In view of the breadth and complexity of the general subject with which the Conference will deal, it would seem advisable to envisage a duration of two to three months. It should be recalled that that has been the duration of various United Nations conferences, such as the first United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (24 February to 27 April 1958), the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (23 March to 16 June 1964) and the first session of the United Nations Conference on the Law of Treaties (26 March to 24 May 1968). It might also be appropriate to consider the advisability of dividing the first session of the World Disarmament Conference into two parts, as was done in the case of the last of the above-mentioned three Conferences, the first part to be held in the spring 1974 and the second in spring 1975. In that way the new body would be able to take its first steps, which as always will be the most difficult, without haste, and would have enough time for judicious consideration of the enormous problems involved.

5. Procedures to be adopted for carrying out the preparatory work

13. It would seem essential that the General Assembly should entrust the preparatory work to an ad hoc body whose membership would be sufficiently broad to ensure adequate geographical and political representation and yet compact enough for the work entrusted to it to proceed quickly.

14. In view of the foregoing and bearing in mind the composition of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (26 members), the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (27 members) and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (28 members), it may be concluded that a membership of about 30 would be appropriate for the body in charge of preparations for the World Disarmament Conference.

15. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that, although, as has been said, the preparatory body would de facto have a restricted membership, in principle or de jure it should be open to "all States", as would the Conference in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI), and that it would be extremely desirable for all the nuclear Powers to be members.
16. Accordingly, in the event that the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament should be the body entrusted with the preparatory work, it should be reorganized beforehand, as was said in the first section of this memorandum. This could be done by a General Assembly resolution similar to resolution 2602 B (XXIV), by which the membership of the Committee was increased from 18 to 26 in 1969.

17. Another particularly important element in the success of the preparatory work would be to request the Secretary-General to prepare authoritative studies on concrete questions relating to the arms race and particularly the nuclear arms race, control thereof and disarmament, in such a way that they would be available sufficiently in advance of the opening of the Conference. They should include a study on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and the obligations which nuclear-weapon States should assume with regard to them.

18. It can be seen from the many useful working documents which the Secretary-General provided for the first United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea and the Conference of Non-Nuclear-Weapon States how valuable a similar contribution could be in this case.

6. Relationship of the Conference to the United Nations

19. As has been said, the World Disarmament Conference should be an organ of the General Assembly which would co-operate with it as UNCTAD does in the field of trade and development in order to help it discharge its functions under the Charter in the field of disarmament.

20. The Conference could hold regular spring sessions at three-year intervals and special sessions whenever the General Assembly of the United Nations - to which the Conference would report periodically - deemed fit to convene them.

7. Final observations

21. The Government of Mexico is firmly convinced that, as the Assembly stated in the preamble to its resolution on the convening of a World Disarmament Conference, "it is imperative that all States exert further efforts for the adoption of effective measures of disarmament and, more particularly, nuclear disarmament".

22. A general review of developments during the past decade and of the serious situation prevailing today shows that that conviction is well founded.
23. Such an analysis provides positive proof that the resources which the world has squandered for military purposes amounted to approximately $120,000 million in 1962 and rose to over $200,000 million in 1971, an increase of 70 per cent during the period. Moreover, the number of nuclear weapons tests, although conducted largely underground, far from decreasing as a result of the partial prohibitions embodied in the Treaty of Moscow of 1963, increased during the period by approximately 60 per cent. Furthermore, it is estimated that the nuclear bombs amassed in the arsenals of Powers possessing those terrible instruments of mass destruction today represent the incredible equivalent of about 15 tons of dynamite for every person on earth.

24. It is thus obvious and axiomatic that, in the face of the potential threat which that situation poses to mankind's very survival, "all peoples of the world have a vital interest in the success of disarmament negotiations", as affirmed in General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI), and that the United Nations should strive with ever-increasing energy to discharge its responsibilities in the quest for disarmament, in the conviction that, as was stated in 1959 and reiterated 10 years later, the question of general and complete disarmament is the most important one confronting the modern world.

25. It would truly be somewhat ironic if the proclamation of the decade of the 1970s as the Disarmament Decade led only to words, not deeds. The convening of a World Disarmament Conference and its institutionalization within the United Nations would undoubtedly be an excellent way to promote and facilitate the simultaneous cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date - which would require a strict moratorium followed by specific limitations and substantial reductions - and the conclusion of additional agreements on specific related measures, without thereby losing sight of the ultimate objective, namely the elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and the conclusion of a treaty on general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

26. In order to facilitate the convening of the Conference and avoid problems such as those which the Secretary-General unfortunately had to face in connexion with the circulation of resolution 2833 (XXVI) - problems to which, it might be observed in passing, his note A/3661 of 2 May 1972 provided a suitable and practical solution - it would appear that the General Assembly, in taking a decision at its forthcoming session on the various matters still pending with respect to the convening of the Conference, should define the scope which should be ascribed to the phrase "all States". The Government of Mexico, which has always favoured using that general expression in all resolutions on disarmament, wishes to reiterate its position that, when the time comes to send invitations to States to participate in the World Disarmament Conference, the phrase in question should be interpreted by strictly applying the principle of universality. In other words, all States would have the right to be invited to take part in the Conference, and an invitation to that effect would have absolutely no juridical or political implication concerning their international status.
27. The Government of Mexico is convinced that consideration of the item which appears in the preliminary list of items to be included in the provisional agenda of the twenty-seventh regular session of the General Assembly as item 24, entitled "World Disarmament Conference", must not and should not be adversely affected by disagreements which exist or may arise among the permanent members of the Security Council. The balanced and calm consideration of this highly important subject, leading to the unanimous adoption of the requisite resolution or resolutions, would no doubt be greatly facilitated if no State claims to have taken the initiative with regard to the convening of the Conference and if all recognized, as is actually the case, that the initiative is being taken by the United Nations as a whole. As early as 1957 the General Assembly decided in resolution 1011 (XI) to consider the advisability of convening "a general disarmament conference"; eight years later, in 1965, the Assembly endorsed the "convening of a world disarmament conference to which all countries would be invited"; and, as everyone is aware, its most recent resolution on the subject was adopted by acclamation on 16 December 1971.

28. If we wished to seek out the deep-rooted origins of the sweeping collective movement which culminated in General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI), we would have to look for them in the efforts of the large majority of countries generally known as the Third World. First, in Belgrade in September 1961; then, in Cairo in October 1964; later, in New York, where 42 of them sponsored the draft resolution which on 29 November 1965 was to become General Assembly resolution 2030 (XX), adopted by a very eloquent majority of 112 votes in favour and none against; after that in Geneva, when in August 1970 the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament received from the delegations of three non-aligned States the draft of a comprehensive programme of disarmament, the final conclusion of which was that the feasibility of convening "a world disarmament conference of all States" should be thoroughly studied; one month later in Lusaka and, finally, at United Nations Headquarters during the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly, when a number of non-aligned delegations successfully conducted a patient campaign of conciliation which enabled them to elaborate in its totality what was to become General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI). Thus little by little, thanks to their aspirations and perseverance, have been built the foundations on which it is hoped to establish the World Disarmament Conference as an institution that will, without delay, help to strengthen the concerted efforts of Governments to put a stop to the uncontrolled arms race, in particular in the nuclear field, which entails such incalculable risks for world peace and places so heavy an economic and social burden on all nations.
ANNEX

Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament *

INTRODUCTION

The present comprehensive programme of disarmament has been elaborated in compliance with the request made by the General Assembly in resolution 2602 E (XXIV) adopted on 16 December 1969, by which it declared the decade of the 1970s as a Disarmament Decade.

In the light of the contents of that resolution it would seem fully justified to state that the request of the General Assembly implies that the comprehensive programme of disarmament should embrace not only the work of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament but all negotiations and other acts on this matter, in whatever forum and form they may take place, and that the programme should include effective procedures in order to facilitate the co-ordination of such activities and ensure that the United Nations General Assembly be kept informed on their progress so as to permit the proper performance of its functions, including the constant evaluation of the situation.

It seems advisable to point out that the term "disarmament" is used here in the same manner as it has been in the various forums of the United Nations, that is, as a generic term which encompasses and may designate any type of measures relating to the matter, whether they are measures for the prevention, the limitation, the reduction or the elimination of armaments, or the reduction of military forces.

I. OBJECTIVE

The aim of the comprehensive programme is to achieve tangible progress in order that the goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control may become a reality in a world in which international peace and security prevail, and economic and social progress are attained.

II. PRINCIPLES

1. The measures in the comprehensive programme should be carried out in accordance with the joint statement of agreed principles for disarmament

negotiations of September 1961; a/ taking into account the obligations undertaken in various treaties on disarmament and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and all new elements and possibilities in this area.

2. The highest priority should be given to disarmament measures dealing with nuclear and chemical and biological weapons.

3. The problem of general and complete disarmament should be given intensive treatment, parallel to the negotiations of partial disarmament measures, including measures to prevent and limit armaments and measures to reduce armaments, in order to facilitate further clarification of positions and possibilities, including the revision and updating of the existing draft treaties submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America respectively, or the submission of new proposals.

4. The principle of balanced disarmament should be kept in mind. It concerns both a numerical decrease of men in arms and types of arms to pre-fixed levels, and packages of disarmament measures by which an over-all balance is achieved that is judged by all parties to be satisfactory in the light of their own security. Particular efforts will have to be undertaken by militarily important Powers in order to reduce the gap that exists between them and other countries. It is understood that the final solution of the limitation and reduction of conventional armaments can be obtained only within the framework of general and complete disarmament.

5. Verification methods form an indispensable part of disarmament measures. When elaborating such methods it must be recognized that a 100 per cent certainty can never be obtained by any such system. A single method of control is rarely sufficient. As a rule, a combination of several methods should be employed, mutually reinforcing one another in order to achieve the necessary assurances that a certain disarmament measure is being observed by all parties.

6. The comprehensive programme is correlated with other United Nations programmes for peace-keeping and international security. Progress in the former should not, however, be made dependent on progress in the latter and vice versa.

7. The necessity should be kept in mind of avoiding, when concluding disarmament agreements, any adverse effects on the scientific, technological or economic future of nations.

8. A substantial portion of the savings derived from measures in the field of disarmament should be devoted to promoting economic and social development, particularly in the developing countries.

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9. In disarmament agreements every effort should be made not to prejudice or prejudice juridical or other unresolved issues in any outside field.

10. Concerted efforts should be made to associate militarily significant States, in particular all nuclear-weapon Powers, with the negotiations for disarmament.

11. The United Nations, which has specific responsibility for disarmament under the Charter, should be kept informed of all efforts thereon, whether unilateral, bilateral or multilateral.

12. Public opinion should be given adequate information about armament and disarmament, so that it might bring its influence to bear on the strengthening of disarmament efforts.

III. ELEMENTS AND PHASES OF THE PROGRAMME

A. Disarmament treaties in force or in preparation

1. The results achieved so far in the disarmament field and the agreements anticipated for the immediate future consist of partial or collateral measures, facilitating and forming part of the final aim of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. Such results consist mainly of the following treaties:

   (a) The Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (1925); b/

   (b) The Antarctic Treaty (1959); c/

   (c) The Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water (1963); d/

   (d) The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (1967); e/


d/ Ibid., vol. 480 (1963), No. 6964.

e/ General Assembly resolution 2222 (XXI), annex.
(e) The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and its two Additional Protocols (1967); f/

(f) The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968). g/

Particular attention should be paid to the fulfilment of the obligations arising from these treaties, to the review conference provided for in some of them, and, when that is the case, to the adoption of measures intended to complete them.

2. Efforts and negotiations to reach agreement at an early stage of the Disarmament Decade, on treaties and conventions whose contents have been for some time under consideration by the General Assembly, the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and other competent international forums should be urgently intensified. This work has included consideration of:

(a) The prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons and the destruction of existing stocks of such weapons;

(b) Further measures in the field of disarmament for the prevention of an arms race on the sea-bed and the ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof; and

(c) The ban on underground nuclear-weapon tests.

B. Other measures of disarmament

1. Prevention and limitation of armaments

The possibilities of giving effect as soon as possible to measures specified below should be the object of persistent scrutiny and negotiation.

(a) Nuclear weapons

(i) A moratorium or cessation of testing and deploying new strategic nuclear-weapon systems;

(ii) The cessation of production of fissionable material for military purposes and the transfer of existing stocks to civilian uses;

(iii) A freeze or limitation on the deployment of all types of nuclear weapons;

(iv) The conclusion of regional agreements for the establishment of additional nuclear-weapon-free zones;


g/ General Assembly resolution 2373 (XXII), annex.

/...
(v) A solution of the problem concerning the prohibition of the use of, or the threat to use, nuclear weapons.

(b) Conventional armaments and armed forces

(i) Further prohibitions of the use for military purposes of the sea-bed and the ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof;

(ii) The establishment of ceilings on the level and types of conventional armaments and the number of armed forces;

(iii) Restrictions on the creation of foreign military bases and the stationing of troops and military equipment in foreign territories;

(iv) Convening of regional conferences at the initiative of the States of the region for the prevention and limitation of armaments.

2. Reduction of all armaments, armed forces and military expenditures

At the appropriate stage in the disarmament negotiations, ways and means of carrying out the following measures should be thoroughly explored and actively negotiated:

(a) Gradual reductions in nuclear armaments;

(b) Gradual reductions in conventional armaments and armed forces;

(c) The conclusion of regional and non-aggression, security and disarmament treaties at the initiative of the States concerned;

(d) Gradual withdrawal of troops and bases from foreign territories;

(e) Reduction in military expenditures.

3. Elimination of armaments

In accordance with the joint statement of agreed principles for disarmament negotiations, the final stage of the comprehensive programme should be the conclusion of a treaty on general and complete disarmament under effective international control, providing for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and the reduction of conventional armaments and armed forces to levels required for the maintenance of internal order and for international peace-keeping.

IV. PEACE-KEEPING AND SECURITY

1. It is recognized that there is a close interrelationship between disarmament, international security, the peaceful settlement of disputes and a climate of confidence.
2. During the period of the negotiations for the disarmament measures listed above, there should be parallel negotiations in the appropriate forums for the establishment or development of United Nations peace-making and peace-keeping machinery and procedures in order to increase and ensure the maintenance of international peace and security.

3. Agreement on such measures will facilitate the success of disarmament efforts, just as the adoption of disarmament measures will create favourable conditions for the strengthening of international security. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out above, progress in one of these categories of measures should not be made dependent on progress in the other.

V. PROCEDURE

1. The General Assembly should consider annually the progress made in the implementation of the comprehensive programme. Every three years, the General Assembly should review the comprehensive programme and revise it as warranted. This will entail an evaluation of the over-all situation in the field of disarmament and a comparison between the development in regard to armaments and disarmament. The Disarmament Commission might be reactivated and entrusted with a part of this task.

2. The practice of requesting the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of expert consultants, authoritative studies on concrete questions relating to the arms race and disarmament should be continued.

3. The advisability of carrying out studies by qualified groups of experts on specific problems of disarmament, which warrant it, should be carefully explored in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament.

4. There should be more conferences and scientific exchanges among scientists and experts from various countries on the problem of the arms race and disarmament.

5. Universities and academic institutes should be encouraged to establish continuing courses and seminars to study problems of the arms race, military expenditures and disarmament.

6. The increased exchanges and publications of relevant information and data should lead to greater openness, to the establishment of greater confidence among States and increased knowledge and interest in these matters among the public.

7. The feasibility of convening, in due time and after appropriate preparatory work, a world disarmament conference of all States should be thoroughly studied.