Twenty-seventh session
Item 24 of the provisional agenda*

WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

Letter dated 14 August 1972 from the Acting Permanent Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In connexion with United Nations General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI) concerning a world disarmament conference, I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 14 August 1972 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR on questions relating to the preparations for, and the holding of, such a conference.

I would ask you, Sir, to arrange for this letter to be circulated as an official document of the United Nations General Assembly.

(Signed) V. ISSRAELYAN
Acting Permanent Representative of the USSR to the United Nations

* A/8760.
Sir,

In connexion with United Nations General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI) concerning a world disarmament conference, the Soviet Government would like to state its views on questions relating to the practical preparations for, and the holding of, such a conference.

When submitting the proposal to convene a world disarmament conference for consideration by the United Nations General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session, the Soviet Union was guided by a desire to help to co-ordinate and intensify the efforts of all States to bring about a successful settlement of disarmament questions, which are of vital importance to all peoples. General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI), which approved the fundamental idea behind the proposal and set out the first steps towards its implementation, was convincing confirmation of the current importance and popularity of the idea of holding such a conference.

The Soviet Government attaches great importance to the resolution adopted by the Assembly. It is convinced that conditions have recently become ripe for the convening of a world disarmament conference. All peoples recognize more fully than ever before the need to adopt new decisive measures to halt the pernicious arms race. Disarmament is indeed becoming a universal demand.

Over the last decade a considerable body of experience in international disarmament negotiations has been built up, showing that a halt to the arms race, and disarmament, although difficult, are attainable aims. Evidence of this is provided by the series of international agreements to limit the arms race which have already been concluded, agreements which at one time seemed impossible, but which are now being successfully implemented. These are the Treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water; the Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons; the Treaties prohibiting the emplacement of nuclear weapons in outer space and on the sea-bed; the Convention on the prohibition and destruction of bacteriological weapons, and other useful agreements. It is universally recognized that among such agreements a special place is held by the Agreement limiting anti-missile defence systems and the Interim agreement on measures to limit strategic offensive weapons, recently signed in Moscow as a result of the Soviet-American negotiations.

On the basis of accumulated experience and of the agreements that have already been reached and which are a stimulus to a continued fight for disarmament, it is possible to bring about a fundamental change with regard to curbing the arms race. In order to achieve a radical settlement of disarmament questions, it is essential that all countries, whatever the size of their territory and population or the level of their military and economic potential, should participate in the discussion of these questions and the search for the most rational ways of limiting and curtailing the arms race, and then of destroying armaments. Disarmament concerns everybody, and for that reason all States, regardless of differences in their socio-economic systems, must play their part in solving these problems. It is precisely this that
they are called upon to do by the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session concerning the convening of a world disarmament conference, open to all States.

It is also clear that all the nuclear Powers must participate in any agreement concerning nuclear disarmament. It was for precisely that reason that the USSR also put forward a proposal to hold a meeting of the five nuclear Powers to consider thoroughly nuclear disarmament questions. Such a meeting could do the important ground work necessary for the success of a world disarmament conference. However, the Soviet Union does not make the holding of a meeting of the five nuclear Powers and the convening of a world disarmament conference in any way dependent on each other.

The Soviet Government feels that the favourable opportunity which has developed for the convening of a world disarmament conference must not be missed. For its part, the Government is prepared to do everything within its power to promote the holding and success of such a conference.

The Soviet Government feels it necessary to make the following comments on specific points raised in the resolution concerning a world disarmament conference adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session. These suggestions have been prompted by a desire to lay the practical foundations for the holding of the conference and to define clearly its objectives and tasks.

A. Main objectives of the conference

In the opinion of the Soviet Government, the world disarmament conference must be a forum in which all countries of the world, without exception and on an equal basis, could state and compare their views on the whole range of disarmament problems, both those relating to weapons of mass destruction and those relating to conventional armaments and armed forces. A comprehensive exchange of views at the conference would not only make it possible to clarify the positions of all States on various aspects of the problem of disarmament, but also to determine by joint efforts the most effective ways and means to solve that problem. There is no doubt that the work of the Conference would promote more purposeful action by States to reach agreement on measures relating to disarmament.

B. Provisional agenda for the conference

The Soviet Government believes that a world disarmament conference could consider a broad range of disarmament questions.

An important place in the work of the conference should be reserved for the consideration of ways and means of achieving the main goal of all efforts in the field of disarmament, namely, general and complete disarmament, for in current conditions it is only on that basis that the threat of war can be fully excluded from the life of the human community and lasting international peace and security be guaranteed. General and complete disarmament would contribute to an outstanding degree to the economic and social progress of all mankind.
The conference should also devote due attention to the preparation of individual, partial measures to limit and halt the arms race and bring about disarmament.

C. Site for the conference

In the opinion of the Soviet Government, the conference could be held in a place where conditions are such that all States in the world are able to participate.

D. Date and contemplated duration of the conference

The Soviet Government considers that a world disarmament conference could be held, within the one or two years after the completion of the necessary preparatory work.

In our opinion, the approximate duration of the conference could be set at one to one and a half months.

The conference could become a permanent body. It could be convened at regular intervals, for example, once every two to three years. If that were the case, the conference would regularly draw the attention of all States to disarmament matters and would issue recommendations concerning problems requiring immediate consideration. It could give instructions to smaller working groups concerning discussions of disarmament matters.

E. Procedures for carrying out the preparatory work

In the opinion of the Soviet Government, a preparatory body comprising 30-35 members, including all the nuclear Powers, all the members of the Committee on Disarmament, and some additional States selected with due regard for the principle of balanced political and equitable geographical representation, could be established to carry out the preparatory work leading to the convening of the conference. Such a body could take up its duties immediately following the end of the twenty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, at which the practical problems of convening the conference would be finally settled.

Naturally, the preparations for and the holding of the conference must not in any way diminish the importance of those forms and channels for disarmament negotiations which are in use at the present time.

F. Relationship to the United Nations

With respect to the relationship between the United Nations and a world disarmament conference, the United Nations could, on the basis of the first preambular paragraph of General Assembly resolution 2833 (XXVI), which reads: "Conscious of the responsibility of the United Nations under the Charter for
disarmament and the consolidation of peace", actively promote the organization and holding of the conference. It could, in particular, assume responsibility for the organizational and financial questions connected with the holding of the conference.

In expressing its views on the practical matters connected with the preparations for and the convening of a world disarmament conference, the Soviet Government expresses the hope that they will be carefully studied by other States and borne in mind when measures are evolved to give practical expression to the proposal to convene such a conference. For its part, the Soviet Government is prepared to consider constructively and in a spirit of goodwill the views of other States on this important question, a positive solution to which would contribute to the further improvement of the international situation and to the strengthening of the peace and security of all States.

Yours truly,

A. GROMYKO
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the USSR