INTERNATIONAL MACHINERY FOR DISARMAMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS THEREOF

Working paper: Italy

The second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will provide a timely opportunity to consider in depth the present status of the United Nations machinery and institutional arrangements related to the disarmament process (item 12 of the provisional agenda).

In its deliberations the General Assembly will be greatly helped by the study (A/36/392) conducted on the subject by the Ad Hoc Group of Experts established under the auspices of the Secretary-General. That study provides a very useful basis for discussion and emphasizes a number of important points. However, following a decision taken by the Group itself, the experts did not discuss the deliberative and negotiating bodies and left to the Member States the finalization of any possible conclusion on ways and means to enhance the role of the United Nations in the disarmament field, including the Secretariat's structures and competences.

The aim of the exercise to be carried out in the framework of the special session on disarmament should be, in the first instance, that of reviewing the implementation of the decisions and recommendations contained in section IV of the Final Document as well as the present functioning of the machinery. Moreover, the session should assess the extent to which disarmament mechanisms and institutional arrangements can effectively cope with constantly increasing activities and identify the sectors in which it might wish to develop new functions and increase the United Nations role.

The time-frame to be referred to by the special session during its deliberations on the disarmament machinery is the 1980s - the Second Disarmament
Decade. Within that period regular appraisals of the machinery enacted by the second special session on disarmament may be made either at ordinary or special sessions of the General Assembly.

While ultimately progress on disarmament depends on the political will of States and the international climate, the enhancement of the role of the United Nations and the improvement of its machinery are elements which can adequately support the endeavours of Member States.

Against this general background, Italy believes that the second special session of the General Assembly should focus its attention on the following main components of the international disarmament machinery:

I. UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly provides the natural and most appropriate forum for the over-all consideration, with the participation of all Member States, of the multilateral activities in the field of disarmament.

The present practice of allocation of agenda items to the First Committee is based upon the recommendation contained in paragraph 117 of the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which states that "the First Committee of the General Assembly should deal in the future only with questions of disarmament and related international security questions".

This recommendation maintains its full validity and should be reconfirmed as a consequence of the ever-increasing amount of work in the disarmament area. Specifically, the special session should stress that the competence of the First Committee is strictly disarmament-oriented and could suggest that other issues which do not have a direct bearing on arms control be appropriately reallocated.

Experience in recent years has shown that a number of measures concerning the rationalizing of the work of the Committee and the effectiveness of its decision-making process may be needed. As a first practical measure, the allotment of time between the general debate and the consideration of draft resolutions might be reviewed in order to maximize the opportunities of discussion of, and consultations on, the latter.

The additional meetings needed for the thorough consideration of draft resolutions could be obtained through the shortening of the duration of the general debate. This would in no way affect the possibilities given to delegations to express their general views but would simply be instrumental in concentrating them into a shorter period of intense exchange of views. Such a procedure would also comply with the recommendations of the General Assembly itself, to make full use of all meetings scheduled on a given item.

Furthermore, in accordance with the specific aim of this suggestion - to give the maximum possible time to the consideration of the draft resolutions submitted to the Committee for adoption - the closing date for the presentation of draft resolutions to the Secretariat should be appropriately advanced. This would give delegations an ample period of time and sufficient number of meetings before the

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beginning of the voting procedures and would, therefore, contribute to achieve the broadest basis of agreement and enhance the possibilities to reach consensus.

The special session could further recommend, as a general measure, that the beginning of the First Committee’s work at ordinary General Assembly sessions be advanced to the first Monday of October. That practice has already been adopted, and is being enforced, by other bodies of the United Nations General Assembly.

Finally, Member States might consider reaching an informal understanding to limit the draft resolutions’ output of the First Committee, thus concentrating the delegations’ attention on the most relevant and urgent matters. Whenever no sensible development has been witnessed from previous sessions, a "cooling period" could be devised for topics with no priority character and on which the General Assembly has already pronounced itself. At the end of that period draft resolutions on the item could again be submitted to the Committee. If necessary, the same procedure could be applied at regular intervals.

II. DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

1. The establishment of the Disarmament Commission by the General Assembly at its tenth special session (Final Document, para. 118) has supplemented the disarmament machinery with an important deliberative organ. The Commission should find its proper place at an intermediate level between the Committee on Disarmament and the main organ of the United Nations, the General Assembly, to which the ultimate responsibility on disarmament matters is entrusted.

While the principle of the very existence of the Commission cannot be put into question – first and foremost because of its universal representative character – a thorough consideration should be given to the Commission’s role and competences.

The progressive enlargement of the Commission’s agenda with items whose nature and characteristics demand a different approach and consideration, as well as the relatively compressed amount of time given to it (further reduced by the need to allocate a significant number of meetings to the preparation of the report to the General Assembly) have not contributed to giving the Commission a precise profile nor allotting time to do so. Indeed, during the period from 1979 to 1982 the Commission has fluctuated between opposite trends and has shown at times both the characteristics of a negotiating body and that of a deliberative organ similar to the First Committee.

In Italy’s view, the special session should put the Disarmament Commission in a position to make an effective and original contribution to the disarmament process.

The Commission should be given primary responsibility to examine, discuss and make recommendations on a number of important questions which still need clarification and elaboration at the multilateral level. Those functions should be of a general relevance and, therefore, should not concern specific disarmament measures within the competence of the Committee on Disarmament. They should be selected between those whose importance and inherent complexities make it unlikely to be adequately discussed and solved during ordinary sessions of the General Assembly.

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For example, the Commission could be requested to deal with items of particular importance for the disarmament progress, like verification, reduction of military budgets, nuclear-weapon-free zones, confidence-building measures, etc.

The Commission could also be given competence in the follow-up of a number of disarmament studies, as for instance those concerning "disarmament and development" and "disarmament and international security".

In order to give the Commission the possibility of thoroughly accomplishing its work, the agenda should be as precise and reduced as possible, while the consideration of the substantive items could extend over a number of sessions without the need of formal confirmation by the General Assembly. In this period the Disarmament Commission would prepare only factual reports on the work accomplished to date.

While a "closed agenda" might prove itself impracticable and should therefore be avoided, it is none the less extremely important for the Commission's effectiveness not to be overburdened with new additional items every year.

In conclusion, it is Italy's view that it would be a most important task for the special session to provide the Disarmament Commission with the indication of a set of specific items whose broad importance could not but further enhance the role and the functions of the Commission and substantially contribute to the over-all progress in disarmament.

III. UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT

The present conception of the structure and of the main competences of the United Nations Centre for Disarmament are the result of an evolution begun in the early seventies and consolidated through the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament and the tenth special session on disarmament (Final Document, para. 123).

The questions which may be raised about the Centre for Disarmament do not regard its performances - which are highly satisfactory, as the study on the institutional arrangements recognized - but rather its projected pattern and functions up to the end of the Disarmament Decade. The assessment to be made in this regard is strictly linked to the more general question of the role of the Organization in the disarmament field.

In Italy's view the structure of the Centre should be developed with the view both to meet its already increased activities and to assume a number of new functions and competences.

In particular, for a long time, Italy has maintained that the Organization should play a larger technical role in the implementation of disarmament agreements, particularly of such activities which are of common concern to Member States. Among these, the question of verification of multilateral disarmament agreements is of particular importance.
In Italy's view, the Secretariat unit dealing with disarmament should take the responsibility of some initial functions in the field of monitoring, such as gathering of information, dissemination of data, technical and specialized assistance to the work of disarmament bodies in this field, the development of insight and expertise on verification options, etc. In subsequent and future phases the initial structure to be set up within the Centre for Disarmament should be expanded and its competences increased so as to finally establish an international centralized structure on verification.

Finally, the special session on disarmament should consider the option of transforming the Centre for Disarmament into a department so as to enable it to carry out its ever-increasing activity and its co-ordinating role in the United Nations system with the necessary independence and efficiency. That would also constitute an appropriate recognition of the importance that the Organization and its Member States attribute to the disarmament process.

IV. DISARMAMENT STUDIES AND ADVISORY BOARD

The studies on matters related to disarmament should be considered an important part of the over-all disarmament process and regarded as an instrumental contribution to achieve swift progress and results in this field. They should therefore be co-ordinated with and complementary to a coherent, conceptual framework and more particularly linked to the priorities and concrete elements contained therein. Furthermore, and as much as possible, studies should be undertaken when the General Assembly has considered a matter ripe for a thorough consideration with a view to promote concrete deliberation or negotiation in the appropriate forums.

A preliminary evaluation of the importance and/or the urgency of a particular study, or the relative priorities to be assigned to a set of proposals, should be entrusted to the Advisory Board. Indeed, paragraph 124 of the Final Document of the first special session on disarmament already states that this organ may advise the Secretary-General on the definition of a programme of studies; this provision implies a need both for a rationalization of the activities in that field and their orderly progress.

In Italy's view, the Advisory Board should be placed in a position to discuss effectively the proposals for studies - to be referred to the Board through agreed procedures - and to report on its conclusions to the Secretary-General and, through him, to the General Assembly. That body should in turn submit to thorough discussion the views expressed or the recommendations made by the Advisory Board.

A procedure along these lines, which is fully compatible with section IV of the Final Document of the first special session on disarmament would give the Board the possibility of playing the role for which it has been indeed established and, as a consequence, organize the whole matter of studies in a structured and programmed way.

The Advisory Board could also be entrusted with some functions in the field of public information, as for instance that of the preliminary evaluation and consideration of programmes envisaged by the United Nations Secretariat.