Letter dated 12 April 1977 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In paragraph 3 of resolution 31/189 B, adopted at the recent session of the General Assembly, Member States are invited to communicate to you their views on the agenda and all other relevant questions relating to the proposed special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.

The comments of Belgium are given below.

1. At this special session the General Assembly should first endeavour to take stock of the efforts made and results attained so far in the sphere of disarmament and arms control.

Belgium is well aware of the merits of the negotiations which have been undertaken or are under way in this field. It has no wish to ignore favourable developments that have occurred in international life - the signing of a treaty, a conference producing encouraging results or the reduction of tension in a given region. Our country is, however, disturbed by the scant results achieved and by the slow pace of the work and negotiations on disarmament.

The international community is right to inquire into the reasons for the limited nature of these results (limited both in participation and in substance).

2. Belgium is convinced that the special session comes just at the right time.

There is growing concern within the international community about the danger that the ever-growing arms race may constitute for both the security and the economy of States.

The Belgian authorities venture to hope that 1977 will witness the start of an active period of work and negotiations on arms control at the world, regional and bilateral levels. Should these efforts not bear fruit and should the distrust and fear that are still all too common in relations among States not be overcome in time, the international community may yet be drawn into the toils of war.
3. The dissatisfaction and concern of the Belgian authorities are the product of their analysis of a number of disturbing factors. These include the all too frequent doctrinaire positions maintained by many States on the topics discussed and on priorities among the measures needed. In a climate often marked by distrust, States tend to waver about the best way of designing their own security and sometimes begin to doubt that their security can emerge strengthened from agreements on arms control.

Doctrinaire confrontations do not serve the cause of disarmament. Belgium has always preferred a specific approach to well-defined subjects to doctrinaire theoretical proposals.

4. One of the chief reasons for the lack of movement in international disarmament efforts lies in the absence of dialogue between the major military States and, indeed, between all the nuclear Powers.

Belgium believes that the States have to shoulder a special responsibility at the international level.

Although not accepting that nuclear disarmament must precede conventional disarmament, Belgium does recognize the difficulty of planning disarmament measures at the world level unless nuclear States set an example, especially in this field, in which they have acquired a definite monopoly and a privilege sanctioned, in the case of some of them, by international treaty.

In the case of nuclear States which are parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Belgium wants them:

- to commit themselves more deeply to the goal of nuclear disarmament;
- to strive to eliminate the possible discriminatory repercussions of certain provisions of the Treaty concerning the control of civilian activities or free access to nuclear technology;
- to show greater flexibility concerning the institutional situation in multilateral disarmament work.

Belgium considers that the special session of the General Assembly cannot produce fruitful results unless all nuclear Powers take an active part in its deliberations.

5. On the subject of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, it is Belgium's view that the existing international machinery for negotiating treaties must be preserved.

The CCD has repeatedly proved that it can successfully carry out the negotiation process.

The Belgian authorities believe, however, that its structures are no longer
suited to present circumstances. The co-chairmanship system should be changed. Again, parity of representation among States allied to the two Co-Chairmen should have no place in an organ which operates on the basis of consensus.

Every effort should be made to induce France and China to reconsider their attitude to participation in international negotiation machinery.

6. The Assembly should at the special session avoid any confrontation in debate and try to devote itself to general consideration of the future programme of work and of disarmament negotiations. That programme should serve to support the efforts already under way in various forums. The work of the Assembly should not be a mere reflection of the traditional debates at regular sessions of the General Assembly.

Belgium is prepared to consider the framing of a general declaration and the adoption of a short- and long-term disarmament programme. Those documents will possess real credibility only if they are acceptable to most member States, particularly the major nuclear States.

Belgium recommends that, both within the Preparatory Committee and at the special session of the Assembly, the pursuit of consensus should be the basic working hypothesis.

7. With regard to the subjects to be discussed, Belgium wishes to make the following preliminary observations:

(a) Equal importance should be given to banning weapons of mass destruction and controlling conventional weapons;

(b) In the case of nuclear questions, Belgium wishes the SALT negotiations to be pursued vigorously with a view to arriving at reduction measures as soon as possible. That, in its view, is the only way to get the negotiations extended to other nuclear States;

(c) The Belgian authorities are still wedded to the goal of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. They are prepared to make further efforts in this sphere on condition that:

The NPT remains the basic instrument of any system. The obligations imposed by that Treaty on nuclear Powers must not be overlooked,

The freedom to trade of States, as it affects the peaceful use of nuclear energy, should be preserved;

(d) Complete halt to nuclear tests. Belgium will support any proposal that might lead to progress in the discussions between the nuclear Powers. That not all nuclear States participate in agreements already concluded or to be concluded may not, however, be invoked as a reason for refusing to consider further partial bilateral progress between the most powerful States;

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(e) Belgium has consistently supported, in principle, a world disarmament conference, on condition that the major military States, particularly the nuclear States, agree to participate in it. It would be premature to express views on whether the special session of the Assembly should set up such a conference. It is Belgium's hope that a favourable climate and the beginnings of a dialogue will develop during the special session;

(f) Control of international armaments transfers. In this field no progress is possible without the co-operation of both recipient and exporting countries. Belgium expresses the hope that consultation on this subject will develop during the preparation and proceedings of the special session;

(g) Regional aspects of development. Belgium has expressed its views on this subject at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly (see Belgian memorandum, document A/C.1/31/10 of 26 November 1976). It has the growing conviction that, particularly in the sphere of conventional weapons, the United Nations should make an over-all review of the possibilities for negotiations and for measures of disarmament and arms control available to the regions. It hopes to explain these ideas once again and possibly to submit a proposal;

(h) Role of the United Nations in disarmament. Belgium, which during 1976 actively participated in the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, still favours practical measures to strengthen that role, provided that such measures:

fall within the competence of organs of the United Nations, as laid down in the Charter,

do not have the effect of entrusting to the United Nations in the negotiations powers exceeding those desired (or asked for) by the States participating in the talks.

(Signed) André ERMANN
Permanent Representative of Belgium

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