Note verbale dated 26 April 1977 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations ... has the honour to refer to the note of the Secretary-General of 28 January 1977 concerning the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, to be held in New York in May/June 1978. In reply to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 31/189 B, I have the honour to communicate the following views and suggestions on behalf of the Norwegian Government.

1. Norway considers the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament to offer a particularly valuable opportunity for focusing global attention on a complex of problems which urgently requires action and re-evaluation. The international arms race does not only represent a threat to the security of all nations, but also involves an unacceptable waste of resources in a world of poverty and distress. Norway is concerned that the arms control and disarmament issues to an increasing extent are becoming complicated technical questions only fully understood by experts. The special session will hopefully contribute to a greater understanding and general awareness of these vital questions.

2. Disarmament has always been one of the paramount objectives of the United Nations. In spite of the fact that in 1959 the General Assembly declared the question of general and complete disarmament to be the most important issue facing the world, and in spite of the 1970s having been decreed as a Disarmament Decade, this objective does not seem to have come closer to realization.

Norway therefore proposes that the special session undertake a full review and evaluation of the working methods adopted in this field and of the results achieved. It will be of particular importance to study the transition in the beginning of the 1960s, from the work on comprehensive disarmament proposals to more limited measures of arms control. Even if arms control efforts undoubtedly have had an important political and confidence-building effect and have achieved certain limited, concrete results, it is, however, obvious that this approach has not fulfilled the hopes and expectations of the early 1960s.
In this context we consider it appropriate to refer to the opening statement of the Secretary-General at the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee on 28 March 1977, where he called attention to the fact that there was now "a growing realization that in the context of a rapidly innovating arms race such an approach is bound to fail. Technological inventions tend to outstrip the pace of negotiations. The momentum of the arms race makes it circumvent the too weak barriers that have been built to stop it ... what is needed then, is a comprehensive approach to disarmament that is aimed at real disarmament and which is realistic concerning both the possibilities of disarmament and the dangers of a continued lack of decisive progress".

3. The agenda of the special session should also include an assessment of the existing international negotiating machinery in relation to arms control and disarmament questions. Measures for strengthening and increasing its efficiency should be seriously considered.

Since the General Assembly has previously adopted resolutions regretting the lack of progress in the work of the CCD in recent years, it would seem appropriate to devote particular attention to this question. In this connexion Norway would like to reiterate the particular importance of the participation of all nuclear Powers in the work on international disarmament.

Norway has given positive consideration to the question of convening a world disarmament conference. In such a conference, however, all States of military importance, and especially all the nuclear Powers, must participate. This does not seem to be a realistic possibility at present. Our common efforts should therefore be devoted to making the special session of the General Assembly a success.

Having thus drawn up status in regard to the international work for arms control and disarmament, the special session should aim at preparing a General Declaration of Principles. Considering the limited time available at the session, the work on this declaration should be initiated as soon as possible.

Norway is of the opinion that such a Declaration of Principles should view the issues of arms control and disarmament in a broad political context. It would be particularly important to regard these questions from a resource and development perspective. In this connexion it should be recalled that the General Assembly on previous occasions has stressed that a continuing arms race is incompatible with the efforts to establish a new international economic order.

At this point we think it is appropriate once again to refer to the opening statement of the Secretary-General in the Preparatory Committee on 28 March this year, where these problems were dealt with in a particularly illustrating manner.

Norway would regard the preparation of a United Nations expert study on the relationship between disarmament and economic and social development, including a new international economic order, as a valuable contribution in this connexion.

In this connexion, international measures for the reduction of the use of resources for military purposes with a view to the releasing of such resources, for development purposes, should be considered.
5. Regarding specific arms control and disarmament questions, the special session should prepare a realistic programme of action. Efforts should be made toward achieving measures that individually or in concert would establish effective arms limitation measures and prevent the weapons development from being channelled along other lines. Generally, one should aim at the drawing up of a comprehensive and, as far as possible, integrated Programme of Action on the basis of guiding principles of disarmament, and with consideration to agreements achieved as well as to current negotiations.

Norway finds the following items to be of particular importance:

- preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- conclusion of a comprehensive Test Ban Treaty;
- limitation of nuclear and conventional weapons;
- restrictions on conventional arms transfers;
- ban on chemical weapons and on the development of new types of weapons of mass destruction;
- restrictions on the development of weapons technology.

6. It would seem appropriate that the agenda of the special session include the question of strengthening the work of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.

Once again, Norway considers it necessary to emphasize that the work for general and complete disarmament under effective international control constitutes one of the paramount objectives of the United Nations, and that the world Organization, both in view of its universality as well as the open debates taking place in this forum, may play a decisive role with regard to influencing public opinion.

In pursuance of this item of the agenda, it would seem natural, as a first step, to base the further procedure on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, adopted by the thirty-first General Assembly. Norway considers the following measures to be of particular importance:

- improving the methods of work of the First Committee of the General Assembly in disarmament matters;
- improving existing United Nations facilities for collection, compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament issues;
- increased use of in-depth studies of the arms race, disarmament and related matters;
- strengthening of the resources of the United Nations Secretariat.

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7. With regard to other relevant questions in connexion with the special session, Norway would also like to submit certain points of view of an organizational nature:

(a) The question on the level of representation should, to a certain degree, be regarded in the light of developments and anticipated results. It must, however, be assumed that representation at Foreign Minister level would be appropriate and in accordance with standard procedure at the General Assembly sessions of the United Nations;

(b) In order to obtain results of any significance which may be complied with by all parties, one should, to the greatest extent possible, aim at consensus decisions. It would, however, seem practical to adopt the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

(c) The right to take the floor and to submit proposals, should be limited to Governments.

A great number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have for many years made a substantial contribution to the disarmament efforts. These organizations should therefore be permitted to attend meetings, submit documents and to receive documentation. Such a presence by the NGOs may also be of value in fostering public understanding and interest regarding the special session.