Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament

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

The Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, in response to the latter’s note dated 28 January 1977 requesting the views of the Government of the Netherlands on the agenda and all other relevant questions relating to the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, has the honour to transmit herewith the views of the Government of the Netherlands.

Introduction

Since the Second World War a virtually uninterrupted arms race has resulted in large quantities of both conventional and nuclear weapons which are still increasing and with which mankind could destroy itself and all other life on earth several times over. Reflecting on this situation, one is led to the conclusion that the unabated accumulation of arms can only reduce world security rather than fulfil the original intention of enhancing it. The Netherlands Government considers that one of the most important ways of reducing the likelihood of war, and therefore of total destruction, is to slow down the arms race and to reduce armaments to the levels required for the purposes of national defence.

From the point of view of world security there is every reason to strive for disarmament and arms control; economic considerations simply reinforce this. Military expenditure, which currently runs at $300 thousand million per annum, consumes a considerable proportion of the human and material resources available to mankind. Reduction in military expenditure as a result of disarmament measures or, under certain conditions, as an independent step would increase the chances of finding solutions to the social and economic problems facing the world, particularly the developing countries.
The Netherlands Government views disarmament and development as two quite separate aims and contributes as much as possible to the realization of both but nevertheless considers that substantial progress in the field of disarmament would considerably enhance in particular the prospects of creating a New International Economic Order. In the light of the above, the eighth special session could support the results of the sixth and seventh special sessions. Solutions to both problems will form the basis of efforts to bring about a safer and more just world.

In the view of the Netherlands Government, international security can ultimately only be guaranteed in a world legal order based on justice in which the issues of international politics will have been transformed into issues of global domestic politics. This will only be possible in a world order which differs considerably from the present one. As long as the world is divided into national sovereign States, attempts to bring about general and complete disarmament will require the active involvement and co-operation of all countries: each and every one of them will bear individual responsibility for bringing this about.

Against this background, the Netherlands Government welcomes the decision of the thirty-first session of the General Assembly to convene a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in May/June 1978. This decision comes at a time when the dangers of the arms race and particularly of the nuclear arms race, the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons and the increase in the trade in conventional weapons are posing a greater threat to humanity than ever. These dangers have become all the more pronounced as the results of disarmament negotiations of recent years have largely been outpaced by developments in the armaments field.

**Aim of the special session**

The Netherlands Government sees the special session as providing the world community with an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved in the past in the field of disarmament and on the reasons why certain measures have not yet been achieved; to recognize the dangers of the present arms race; and to consider steps to be taken to reduce these dangers.

It cannot be denied that since the early sixties, important agreements with the aim of increasing world security and slowing down the arms race have been concluded. However, none of these are genuine disarmament measures, except for the biological weapons convention. In general, they are more concerned with preventing the arms race from developing in specific directions which could be anticipated. In recent years the actual arms race has received more attention. Current efforts to halt the arms race and subsequently to reduce existing armaments stocks create a new situation in which factors such as the balanced reduction of armaments and the verification problem receive greater emphasis. These circumstances will undoubtedly complicate future negotiations which can be expected to take up more time than in the past.
In view of the above, the Netherlands Government considers that the special session must avoid drawing up a time-table of specific target dates for achieving certain measures. Such a time-table would only frustrate future negotiations as the parties would harden their positions to avoid giving the impression that they were operating under the pressure of time. Ultimately, however, it is the political will of States and the realization that world security can only be increased by reducing the dangers attached to the arms race which will be crucial in determining whether agreement can be reached.

Debate and decision making

In view of the responsibility which all States share for disarmament, the Netherlands Government assumes that the debates in the special session will take place in a constructive atmosphere, that the failure of disarmament negotiations in the past will be examined in a businesslike and impassionate manner and that united efforts will be made to create options for future actions on disarmament. This does not alter the fact that certain countries are in a position to contribute more to disarmament than others; obviously, only the nuclear-weapon States can halt the nuclear arms race (vertical proliferation) and can take nuclear disarmament measures and they alone can bear responsibility for this.

Positive results will depend on thorough preparation as well as on a non-controversial approach to the work of the special session. The Netherlands Government hopes that the preparations will be such that it will prove possible to take decisions by consensus at the special session. It attaches all the more significance to this as the decisions of the special session will have a considerable impact on the progress of disarmament negotiations in subsequent years. If the special session were to show a divided front, the problem of disarmament, which is difficult enough as it is, would be made even more difficult. Furthermore, the Netherlands Government considers that in addition to the actual preparations, it will be equally important for the current disarmament negotiations to show progress in the course of this year. The question of halting all nuclear tests and the problem of prohibiting chemical weapons are particularly important in this connexion.

The Netherlands Government welcomes recent statements of both the United States and the Soviet Union on the possibility of halting nuclear tests. Equally developments in the CCD in respect of chemical disarmament justify some optimism.

Agenda and organization

In the view of the Netherlands Government the special session is not a suitable forum for conducting concrete disarmament negotiations or for concluding agreements. It could however, endorse agreements which have previously been reached. The work of the special session should result in a declaration which could include an evaluation of disarmament results so far and an analysis of the current world security situation, but which should concentrate on the following points:

/...
(a) The principles which should form the points of departure for conducting and concluding disarmament negotiations;

(b) An outline of the measures which should be taken in the future bearing in mind the proviso in paragraph 7;

(c) Recommendations for the organization of future disarmament negotiations.

It would probably be best if the work of the special session were arranged to reflect this suggested classification and committees be set up for each of the separate topics. These committees should deal with the subjects under each heading and engage in drafting the relevant passages of the final declaration.

With regard to the principles of disarmament negotiations the joint statement of 19 September 1961 by the United States and the Soviet Union could be used as a starting point for the discussions of the special session. The principles of this statement (the Zorin-McCloy agreement) could be adapted and/or supplemented in the light of the experience gained since 1961 in negotiations on disarmament.

Without wishing to go into too great detail in this reply, the Netherlands Government does feel that the measures to be adopted in the coming years should give high priority to de-emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons in today's armaments. An important contribution to this would be halting all tests of nuclear weapons by all nuclear-weapon States, followed by a reduction of nuclear weapons and delivery systems for such weapons. If all nuclear-weapon States are not prepared to accept this from the outset, the United States and the Soviet Union should in the view of the Netherlands Government agree to a temporary cessation of nuclear tests.

High priority should also be accorded to strengthening the non-proliferation régime. Rules must be drawn up in joint consultation to minimize the dangers of a proliferation of nuclear weapons without imposing undue restrictions on the development of the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Netherlands Government supports strengthening the security of non-nuclear-weapon States by having the nuclear-weapon States grant to them - subject to certain conditions - so-called negative security guarantees.

The Netherlands Government considers that the special session should give particular attention to the problem of the considerable expansion in the conventional arms trade. Its concern about this problem is all the greater since in recent years increasing quantities of conventional weapons have found their way to developing countries, possibly bought with foreign currency which could have contributed to development of these countries. Taking into account the legitimate desire of sovereign States to take security measures for their own defence, efforts must be made to devise regulations to counter an excessive increase in conventional armaments. There are various ways of approaching this problem, such as through negotiations between the exporting nations, between the importing nations or between countries in particular regions of the world.
In addition a more general approach could be adopted in which, for instance, within the framework of the United Nations rules governing the trade in conventional weapons could be drawn up in which the United Nations could play a supervisory role. The Netherlands Government hopes that countries will give proper consideration to the dangers attached to the conventional arms race and to ways of coping with these dangers and that the special session will be able to reach conclusions in this area, that will make a solution to this problem a feasible prospect within the foreseeable future.

As regards consideration of the organization of multilateral disarmament consultations by the special session, the Netherlands Government considers that the complicated and often very technical negotiations will have to continue to be held in fora of limited size and composition in which a quiet atmosphere of consultation and the absence of publicity will create the most favourable conditions for reaching agreement. Countries not directly involved in such consultations will have to be given the opportunity to make their views known and to express their opinions on the result of such consultations. This means that the participants in such consultations should be prepared to take the views of non-participants into account. The special session should furthermore try to bring about a gradual strengthening of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. In this connexion, the Netherlands supports setting up an international disarmament organization to promote the practical implementation of disarmament treaties.