Note verbale dated 30 April 1977 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations ... has the honour to transmit herewith the views of the Italian Government on the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament as contained in a letter dated 16 April 1977 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy, His Excellency Dr. Arnaldo Forlani.
Views of the Italian Government on the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

1. Italy supports the decision to convene a special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament. It intends to make a strong and constructive contribution to the session, beginning with the work of the Preparatory Committee. It was in this spirit that Italy co-sponsored resolution 189/B adopted by the General Assembly.

It is in fact Italy's opinion that the continuation of the conventional and nuclear arms race can only contribute to a spiralling increase in international tension, and as such it is a source of deep concern for the future of world peace.

Only the progressive adoption and implementation of disarmament measures - envisaged as steps in a process aimed at general and complete disarmament - can truly strengthen international security, stability and peace.

The present world situation, however, is characterized by a general state of precariousness, the manifestations of which are innumerable, and which engenders in all countries a need for security, resulting in the strengthening of their military forces. Disarmament thus depends primarily on the capacity to gradually overcome this state of affairs, and it is in this respect that the desire for peace of all members of the international community is to be measured in the first place. This de facto situation, moreover, makes it imperative above all to outline, in a responsible and positive way, a serious programme for disarmament, complete in its definition of both steps and goals.

Italy hopes, therefore, that all States will positively commit themselves in a joint effort to this end. Such an effort need not necessarily involve the launching of a new disarmament strategy; it might perhaps prove sufficient to update, in the light of past experience, the content of those relevant documents which still retain their validity. Italy believes, for instance, that the ideas and guidelines contained in the Joint Statement of Agreed Principles for Disarmament Negotiations issued by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1961, and the draft treaties on general and complete disarmament prepared by both the Soviet Union and the United States in 1962, may serve as a useful and valuable point of departure. Italy, however, is ready to consider with interest any other constructive proposal which may be introduced on this subject.

2. The convening of a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on disarmament does indeed fit into this framework, for two reasons: on the one hand, because the principal objective of the United Nations is to promote co-operation among States, and hence peace; and on the other, because disarmament is one of the main instruments for the achievement of these goals.

The work of the special session - which, in Italy's view, is due to take place at a particularly momentous time in world politics - should therefore be based on a factual agenda and organized so as to ensure a brisk pace for its debates. These are, in fact, the fundamental premises for the search and the subsequent adoption of agreed positive conclusions.
In this connexion, Italy feels obliged to insist upon the need for the special session to concentrate on the substance of the issues. The session, in fact, will not have enough time at its disposal to allow for a waste of efforts on sterile debates and arguments. It will be necessary, rather, to examine in depth and in a constructive spirit all proposals on which agreement may be possible.

The work of the Preparatory Committee - of which Italy is a member - will be especially important in this regard, and the outcome of the special session will indeed depend, in large part, on that work. The various issues of disarmament will have to be carefully reviewed in order to ascertain on which of them there is an opportunity to reconcile the various views; to select the most important from among these problems; and to concentrate on the search for generally acceptable solutions to them.

Italy would like to make known its willingness to actively participate in the elaboration of a common basic position on the issues which will have been thus selected.

3. Italy maintains that the halting of the nuclear arms race and the subsequent reduction of nuclear stockpiles, under effective international controls capable of guaranteeing the security of all States, is one of the major issues among those to be dealt with by the special session.

In this regard, it is not possible to ignore the special responsibility incumbent upon the nuclear-weapon States. These States are, in fact, in a position to make a decisive contribution to the cause of both disarmament and non-proliferation. In the field of disarmament, they must make the greatest possible efforts to reach agreements satisfying not only their own mutual security requirements, but also and above all, those for the security and peace of all the world's peoples. In regard to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, Italy believes that the Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of the system, and therefore the main point of reference for defining the rights of the nuclear-weapon States, as well as their duties, which must not be overlooked; for instance, the possibility of utilizing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be guaranteed to all States.

4. As for conventional weapons, whose progressive reduction should parallel that of nuclear armaments - and, in particular, their transfer and trade - it may be appropriate to recall a proposal introduced by Ambassador Vinci at the Conference on Human Survival in 1970.

That proposal, which was to be a part of a comprehensive programme for general and complete disarmament and which was meant as a plan of action to parallel that aimed at nuclear disarmament, provided for the establishment, under the guidance and control of the Security Council, of a Committee composed of representatives of the countries which are the major manufacturers and suppliers of conventional weapons. Sub-committees, each with a competence for a specific geographical area, were, according to the proposal, to have been entrusted with the task of maintaining the level of conventional weaponry at the lowest possible point. Moreover, negotiations were to have been initiated for the establishment...
of a system of collective security, under which a permanent military force would be assigned to the United Nations – namely, to the Security Council – and would be used to prevent outbreaks of hostilities and, in general, to carry out all the decisions of the Council regarding the maintenance of peace and international security.

5. The persistent lack of a disarmament treaty on chemical and biological weapons is another source of concern. The intrinsic, proven capacity of these weapons for mass destruction and their easy storage; the continuous progress being made in the field of chemical research; and the subsequent potential applications of such research to the military sector all show that a ban on these weapons cannot be further postponed. Italy considers that the special session should play a major role in promoting an agreement on this issue. It would, of course, be preferable if the session itself could finalize such an agreement, the draft of which might be prepared, in the meantime, by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD).

6. Nor should subjects of a more general nature be ignored; such as, for example, the strengthening on the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament, and the role of the CCD.

Italy took part in and made its own specific contribution to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Strengthening of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, and subsequently co-sponsored the pertinent resolution. The Italian Government, however, does not feel that the General Assembly can act as a substitute for the existing specialized negotiating fora, because its present structure, even if reinforced, does not seem suited to such a purpose. An exception may perhaps be the case of ad hoc special sessions devoted to very broad issues, but such sessions are certainly not easy to convene and to organize. The United Nations, however, has the knowledge and expertise needed to play a primary role in the creation of a general framework for debates, in the elaboration of broad political options, and in promoting a favourable climate for negotiations. Such a role would constitute a major political factor in the negotiations which would follow in the appropriate fora. In this context, the possibility for the special session to issue a general policy statement might be taken into consideration.

The Conference of the Committee on Disarmament is still a highly useful negotiating body: in several respects, it is indispensable. In the course of its sessions the CCD accomplishes an impressive amount of work which, for its technical complexity and political implications, can hardly be performed elsewhere. This does not mean, of course, that there is not some margin for improvement in the current structure, procedures, and organization of that body.

7. Among the goals of the special session, that of mobilizing world public opinion should not be overlooked. This is an end, as well as a means: it is an end, because public opinion must be made aware of the problems, and at the same time of the prospects, which disarmament can provide; it is a means, since the impact of public opinion may help to overcome certain obstacles which have so far been...
considered insurmountable. It might therefore prove advisable to allow non-governmental organizations and research institutes to make their contribution to the work of the special session, through the Secretariat and the Preparatory Committee.

8. In conclusion, Italy maintains that the special session should undertake, first of all, a comprehensive review of the numerous problems of a general nature which the United Nations, as such, is prepared to face in the field of disarmament; it will be necessary, in this regard, to reach a decision on the nature of the role to be played by the United Nations and on the instruments required for strengthening that role, also in connexion with concrete initiatives aimed at halting the arms race. Secondly, the special session should concentrate on those specific issues related to disarmament, previously singled out by the Preparatory Committee as requiring priority attention in view of their acknowledged political relevance and urgency.