The Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to the latter's Note No. 69421/6(3) of 28 January 1977 regarding the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly to be devoted to disarmament.
In reply, the Permanent Representative has the honour to furnish the following views of the Government of Ireland in accordance with paragraph 3 of resolution 31/109 B adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 1976:

The Government of Ireland have sought over the years, within the United Nations, to encourage and promote efforts towards arms control and disarmament. They recognize that there are no easy solutions to the problems involved. Progress in disarmament is intimately linked to the climate of international relations. The degree of international mistrust, the nature and level of the perceived threat, the need felt to guarantee against any diminution of security, the military options and dilemmas made possible by technological advances and competition, all serve to constrain both the pace and scope of concrete disarmament negotiations. Moreover, the very complexity of the issues to be resolved makes it essential that negotiation be both painstaking and exhaustive.

Nevertheless, the limited progress in resolving issues which have been under study, debate or negotiation for almost a decade is rightly a cause of grave international concern. The arms race in both nuclear and conventional armaments has continued unabated throughout the present disarmament decade. New technologies have created new problems and new rivalries, and the growing and uncontrolled international trade in conventional arms risks exacerbating regional tensions.

Within the United Nations, the varying emphasis and approaches of the Member States and the range of issues currently arising have led to a lack of precision as to where the priority objectives in arms control and disarmament
lie. There is, therefore, a need for the international community to take stock of the over-all situation with a view to defining the priority objectives and identifying ways and means of progressing towards them. It was from this perspective that Ireland welcomed and supported the proposal made at the thirty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly to convene a special session devoted to questions of disarmament.

The special session should not entail either generalized rhetoric or detailed technical negotiations. Clearly, it cannot be called on to duplicate the activities of existing forums for the concrete negotiation of arms limitation and disarmament agreements. However, the session must have a practical outcome if it is to focus international attention on the main issues in disarmament and encourage progress towards their resolution. Careful and thorough preparation is therefore important.

The preparatory meetings should aim to elaborate a precise and realistic agenda; committees could be envisaged to facilitate detailed discussion of the agenda and the general debate could be kept reasonably short. The rule of consensus should prevail in the decisions of the session so as to ensure that its conclusions are shared by all the participating States and to obviate the risk that they might emerge as a source of controversy and division in the future. Moreover, if the session is to succeed, it is important that all major powers participate actively and at all levels in its deliberations. The association of non-governmental organizations active in the field of disarmament with the work of the session could help to ensure that public opinion remains closely informed of the issues involved.

Although the special session will necessarily need to engage in a general review of the progress achieved to date in the field of arms control and disarmament and of the current state of negotiations in this field, it is to be hoped that its main emphasis will be prospective rather than retrospective. In this connexion, a fundamental objective should be the elaboration of a future programme of disarmament measures within which would be clearly identified the priority goals.

If such a programme is to remain at the centre of the disarmament negotiating process in the future, it must be based on realistic assessment of both the possibilities and limitations of that process. In particular, it will be necessary to take account of the fact that States are limited in the range of measures on which they can negotiate simultaneously and are unlikely to subject what they see as vital security interests to the pressure of rigid time constraints. Accordingly, in formulating, in particular, the short-term objectives, it seems important to opt for what is realistically attainable and reasonable to expect rather than what one would wish ideally to see achieved. It will also be necessary to distinguish between measures appropriate for realization at the broad multilateral level and those which lend themselves to implementation at the regional or bilateral level.

Within the programme, the Irish Government would hope that high priority will be assigned to the following issues:
(1) Nuclear armaments: the continuing problems of proliferation, the need for a comprehensive test ban treaty and, as an interim measure, an agreed moratorium by the two major nuclear Powers on all nuclear weapons tests: the need for early progress towards the reduction of nuclear weapons systems and progress on agreed systems of control and verification.

(2) Other weapons of mass destruction: in particular the question of a chemical weapons treaty already under discussion in the CCD.

(3) Conventional weapons: regulation of trade in conventional armaments: control of such armaments at the regional level.

In conjunction with the elaboration of a programme of disarmament measures, the session should also seek to formulate the broad principles which will guide future efforts towards disarmament. In this respect, it will be desirable and useful to draw on the experience gained from past negotiations and on the relevant international documents, understandings and agreements.

The decision to convene the special session serves in itself to emphasize the important role which the United Nations has in the disarmament process and in turn the decisions of the session should enhance that role. In this connexion, resolution 31/90 (XXXI) of the General Assembly and the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee which met in 1976, offer a useful basis for further follow-up discussion of the United Nations role at the session. The regular sessions of the General Assembly will, of course, allow for a continuing review of progress made in implementing the decisions of the special session. The special session should also examine ways and means of strengthening the role of the CCD as the principle existing forum for detailed multilateral negotiation of arms control and disarmament questions, including the desirability of all nuclear Powers associating themselves with its important work.

The Irish Government believe that disarmament can be a vital factor in the restructuring of the world order, politically, economically and socially. If, therefore, the special session can encourage progress towards arms control and disarmament, it will have helped to stem the massive and increasing diversion of scarce resources to programmes of military expenditure and thus make possible their redirection to the urgent tasks of economic construction and development. Not least for this reason, it is important that the special session should succeed.