PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEVOTED TO DISARMAMENT

Note verbale dated 2 May 1977 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 31/189 B, has the honour to convey the views of the Government of Israel on the proposed special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.

Israel supported resolution 31/189 B and welcomes the convening of the special session as it has consistently, throughout the years, supported international initiatives aimed at achieving a reduction of armaments on a global scale. In so doing, Israel has been acting in accordance with the age-old yearning of the Jewish people for universal peace, first proclaimed by its prophets. Isaiah's vision of peace and disarmament is inscribed in stone facing the Headquarters of the United Nations. Peace and disarmament are for every Israeli not an abstract notion but an urgent need, a tangible necessity for Israelis of all political persuasions.

Israel's approach to the question of disarmament has been defined at the United Nations more than once. In the general debate at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yigal Allon, said:

"In my speech last year I drew attention to a problem of particular gravity for the prospects of peace as well as for the economic and social well-being of the countries of the Middle East. I refer to the seemingly limitless flow of weapons of war into the region, resulting in a frantic arms race. In the past three years the value of arms supplies delivered by both east and west to the Arab countries in the vicinity of Israel is estimated at 7.5 billion dollars. A further approximately 22 billion dollars-worth is contracted for delivery from the end of 1976 onwards, making a total of nearly 30 billion dollars invested in weaponry. This is an utterly staggering sum which is difficult for the human mind to take in. If, instead of being spent on means of destruction, most of this sum was
invested in the economic and social development of the area, the Middle East would be transformed and restored to its ancient glory".

The Minister went on to say:

'We repeat emphatically that we are prepared now, even before peace is made, to negotiate with our neighbours for a balanced limitation in the inflow of arms into the area in such a manner that the burden will be lightened for all, without adversely affecting the security and the defence capacity of any" (A/31/PV.22, p. 62).

It will be convenient to summarize here some of the principal points of Israel's position on the subject:

(a) The role of the United Nations is essentially one of creating an atmosphere in which disarmament negotiations can be advanced, it being understood and accepted that concrete measures cannot be taken except by agreements resulting from detailed negotiations between Governments;

(b) The importance of educating world public opinion, particularly among the rising generation, about the dangers inherent in the armament race and the efforts made by the international community to achieve general disarmament;

(c) Disarmament and arms control measure are not only of concern to major Powers on a global level, but are also of vital interest to small countries in the regional context. Constant endeavours should, therefore, be made to promote local and regional agreements between Governments so as to lighten the burden of armaments and to lessen the danger of local conflicts.

From these principles flow the proposals listed briefly in the following paragraphs which might usefully be incorporated in the agenda of the special session.

(1) The principle of regular rotation should be applied in the composition of all United Nations bodies dealing with questions of disarmament, so as to ensure that all Member States are given the opportunity of serving on them. The purpose of the system of rotation would be to emphasize that disarmament is the concern of all States and that every Member of the United Nations should be enabled to contribute to the collective effort on an equal footing.

(2) In line with the above approach, and in order further to strengthen the sense of common responsibility for advancing disarmament the Government of Israel proposes that it be generally accepted that resolutions of the General Assembly on questions of disarmament be adopted by consensus. Resolutions adopted by a majority are of little practical value and only undermine public confidence in the ability of the United Nations to further the cause of disarmament.

In this context, it is to be deplored that a Member State in its letter (A/AC.187/3) to the Secretary-General in response to resolution 31/189 B has found
it necessary to introduce suggestions for consideration by the special session which are extraneous to the subject of disarmament and at the outset introduce a discordant element of hostility against a Member State into a United Nations effort to reduce world tension. Attempts of this nature do not augur well for the successful treatment of the subject of disarmament by a special session of the General Assembly.

(3) In the same spirit, it is suggested that the United Nations undertake a world-wide programme of instruction, principally in educational institutions, reflecting the vision of the prophet Isaiah:

"... And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more."

The emphasis in this programme should be on the realization that disarmament represents a deeply rooted hope of mankind. And the educational thrust in this enterprise should be to expose the fact that so little has yet been achieved in realizing that hope.

(4) With a view to promoting progress wherever possible on local and regional levels, it is suggested that the United Nations establish regional disarmament commissions, composed of all Member States in the region, the task of which would be to review ideas and proposals for intergovernmental regional agreements on arms reduction and control.