Note verbale dated 3 May 1977 from the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, in accordance with the Secretary-General's note OR 421/6(3) of 28 January 1977, has the honour to transmit the views of the Government of New Zealand on the agenda and other relevant questions relating to the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.
New Zealand views on special session on disarmament

1. The New Zealand delegation welcomed and co-sponsored resolution 31/189B, which convenes a special session on disarmament in May/June 1978 and submits these comments on the special session's agenda and other related matters, in response to the request of the Secretary-General.

2. The vast expenditure on arms and armaments of recent years and the ever-mounting stockpile of nuclear weapons threaten our civilization with nothing less than extinction. To set limits to the arms build-up and if possible to embark on disarmament to control the spread and growth of nuclear weaponry and diminish the fear of global and regional war is a supreme challenge to mankind. New Zealand fully shared the widespread frustration of members of the United Nations over the inadequate progress made since the Organization was founded and particularly in recent years towards international agreement on measures of arms control and disarmament. The special session offers an important, and perhaps unique, opportunity for Governments to correct the deficiencies that have caused this situation by consideration both of institutional means of dealing with disarmament issues and of the principles and attitudes with which Governments have traditionally approached them. The special session will not prove to be the panacea to all problems, and Governments must be careful to avoid creating unrealistic expectations to this effect. However, equal care must be given to ensure that full use is made of the occasion of the special session, for failure to do so may have a profoundly detrimental effect on arms control efforts thereafter. New Zealand hopes that the special session will be able to note that substantive progress in certain areas of disarmament has been made in the year before it meets and, further, that it will be able to establish a realistic framework that will facilitate negotiations in the years ahead.

3. While it is undesirable for the special session to become too preoccupied with past failures, Governments should be cognizant of the causes of short-comings in this respect in order that due attention can be given to their amelioration. Opinion has generally focused on a lack of political will of Governments to make the necessary sacrifices or take the necessary risks in order to conclude disarmament agreements. In New Zealand's view, the "lack of political will" is less a lack of intent than an absence of an adequate framework within which nations can proceed towards disarmament measures with equal security clearly guaranteed to all. There has also been a lack of general agreement within the United Nations over the priority areas of disarmament, with a consequent loss of focus in the debating and negotiating forums on central issues and a dispersion of effort. Finally, the lack of progress in the past has been to some extent due to the imperfections of the existing negotiating machinery, which has been compounded by the very real difficulty of following complex technical issues. Each of these areas should be addressed in turn at the special session and means sought of making improvements in each category with a view to facilitating progress in arms control.

4. New Zealand hopes that recent indications of a positive approach to disarmament by the United States and the USSR, reflected in the recent Conference
of the Committee on Disarmament session, will be translated into substantive achievements over specific disarmament measures in the months leading up to the special session and the forthcoming attitudes at the session itself. The success of the special session is also dependent upon constructive participation by all nuclear weapon States, an avoidance of extreme demands, and a seeking of consensus at the highest possible common factor of security interests.

Priority areas for attention of the special session

5. In New Zealand's view, the overwhelming priority of the special session must be nuclear disarmament. The most important areas of concern here are the levels of strategic nuclear arms possessed by nuclear weapon States, the danger of proliferation of nuclear arms for other States, the need to cease nuclear weapon testing and the establishment of a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Attention should be given to each of these areas. The preparation of a comprehensive test-ban treaty is, however, of particular concern to New Zealand and it is to be hoped that a generally acceptable comprehensive test-ban treaty will have been drafted by the time the special session commences. Such a development would improve the prospect for a successful session. It would also generate maximum pressure for early ratification of the treaty.

6. The second area of priority should be chemical and biological weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, and the transfer of conventional armaments. In New Zealand's view, however, none of these areas should be given attention at the special session to the detriment of nuclear arms control.

Structure of the special session

7. New Zealand believes that the structure of the special session could reflect the need for a new declaration of principles, for a programme of action and for a review of all United Nations disarmament machinery and that there should be a committee responsible for each of these areas of work. A plenary debate could continue simultaneously with the work of at least two of the committees.

Declaration of principles

8. The New Zealand Government suggests that we use the principles already agreed upon (using the United Nations Charter as the basic document, and subsequent important documents such as the 1961 joint US/USSR Statement of Principles) as a starting point for a new declaration of principles. Experience since these documents were concluded, both in the area of security and disarmament, will no doubt affect the shape and content of a declaration at the session.

9. The principles could perhaps relate to different areas that are relevant to disarmament objectives and problems; for example, they could be grouped under the headings, inter alia: (a) principles of national and international security; (b) principles of arms control and disarmament; (c) principles of nuclear non-proliferation. New Zealand intends to examine these areas further and may wish to submit comments to the Preparatory Committee at a later stage.

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Programme of action

10. The first task of the special session in formulating a programme of action should be to establish agreement on the areas of priority for disarmament negotiations in the future. New Zealand's views on this are recorded above. It believes, moreover, that a broad programme of action is desirable, since a recognition of the problems that could delay the achievement of parts of an action programme should be accompanied by an appreciation of the compelling responsibility of major military Powers and other States to make progress with these problems. A general action programme could include procedural arrangements for reporting progress, and explaining reasons for any delays, on a regular basis, to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

11. New Zealand believes that the special session must ensure a close relationship between the declaration of principles and the programme of action. If the principles prove too broad, they will lend insufficient direction and acceleration to the action programme. If the action programme is too detailed or too ambitious, it will drain the agreed principles of practical meaning.

Review of United Nations disarmament machinery

12. New Zealand considers that a review of the United Nations disarmament machinery should form an essential part of the special session's deliberations. Widespread dissatisfaction has been expressed with the record of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and the General Assembly has demonstrated a need to handle more effectively the burdensome range of disarmament items raised for debate and to improve the existing machinery. There exists also a need for better liaison between the Assembly and the existing negotiating body that will allow non-members of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament to follow its deliberations more thoroughly, to be allowed a proper input of their views for its consideration and to be accorded a more appropriate opportunity to examine its proposals and recommendations than has recently been the case. New Zealand recognizes the need for a relatively small negotiating body in the field of disarmament, and notes the high level of expertise and mutual confidence which the present body has developed.

13. New Zealand welcomes recent signs by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament that it is returning to the central issues of disarmament and is showing a greater consciousness of the need to keep non-members informed of the progress of its deliberations. The special session will provide the opportunity to judge whether this concentration on issues of greater importance has been translated into substantive agreements. Failure to reach agreement will inevitably raise the prospect of consideration, in which New Zealand would join, of devising new methods of negotiation, including, if necessary, the establishment of a new, or altered, negotiating forum.