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

Note verbale dated 2 June 1977 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of Portugal to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit herewith the views of the Government of Portugal in response to His Excellency's note OR 421/G(3) dated 28 January 1977 regarding the convocation of a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.
Suggestions of the Portuguese Government regarding the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

The Portuguese Government supports the convocation of a special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament, as proposed in paragraph 1 of resolution 31/189 B of the thirty-first session of the General Assembly. Such initiative meets the concerns repeatedly expressed by the Portuguese Government regarding the increasing armaments race that has been taking place since the Second World War and that has led to the waste of non-renewable resources and technical knowledge extremely necessary for the progress of mankind.

However, the changes that have been taking place in international relations during past years create renewed hopes in the results of a wide discussion of disarmament problems.

The Soviet-American talks on the limitation of strategic weapons and the balanced reduction of armaments should be considered in this context.

In the understanding of the Portuguese Government, the principal objective of the special session must be to arouse international public opinion regarding the gravity of the problems represented by the unrestrained accumulation of armaments and to encourage the creation of a new spirit that will generate a decisive impetus in the disarmament negotiations.

In its opinion, the work of the Assembly should be oriented as follows:

I. States should be represented on a high level.

II. The general debate should avoid confrontations of a political character and, without being a mere repetition of the usual discussions, should lead to the approval of a declaration of principles, accepted by all States, which would express the new approach in the disarmament negotiations.

III. In specialized committees there should be debated and approved:

(a) Concrete measures for disarmament or arms limitation, prepared by specialized bodies.

(b) A programme of medium and long-term action in which would be indicated the problems needing priority treatment. Among those, the Portuguese Government suggests:

(1) Nuclear disarmament.

(2) Prohibition of the manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction, and reduction, under international control, of existing nuclear arsenals, with a view towards their complete extinction.

/...
(3) Prohibition of chemical, bacteriological (biological) and incendiary weapons.

(4) Control and reduction of the manufacture and transfer of conventional weapons.

The Portuguese Government is fully conscious of the difficulties involved in solving the above-mentioned problems; responsibility for this should be given to organs of a necessarily specialized nature within which opinions of all interested States should be heard. The Portuguese Government, however, does not believe that strict timing can be fixed for the fulfilment of these measures.

IV. One of the matters that must be carefully studied by the special session of the General Assembly is that of revision of the role of the United Nations, particularly its Centre for Disarmament, in the negotiations and studies to be undertaken. Also, should be reviewed the activities, composition and work methods of other bodies charged with this type of negotiations.

As was stated earlier, special attention must be taken to inform public opinion of the problems and measures related to disarmament.

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal stated in the general debate of the thirty-first session of the General Assembly:

"Portugal is concerned about the intensification of the arms race, so often camouflaged behind pacifistic declarations, and would like to see consecrated international détente and the existence of zones where there would be no risk of violent confrontations ..."

"... Portugal does not refrain from an intense intervention in this domain and believes that the small nations can now play a decisive role in the defense of the conditions of their security, so often different from those intended by the great powers."

Finally, the Portuguese Government must yet emphasize that, in a spirit of conciliation, the resolutions of the Assembly must be adopted, whenever possible, by consensus, the only way of ensuring their universal applicability.

The Portuguese Government would like to declare once again its intention to co-operate most actively in the work of the special session devoted to disarmament.