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

Reply from the Government of Costa Rica to the letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations OR 431/6 (3) concerning the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

1. The Government of Costa Rica firmly supported the idea of holding a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and welcomes the decision to hold the session in 1978.

2. As a country with a deep-rooted civilian tradition and no military institutions Costa Rica opted for disarmament of its own accord and cannot but be sympathetic to any effort to achieve that goal at the international level.

3. Although items on disarmament have been discussed at all past sessions of the General Assembly, it must in all honesty be admitted that little has been achieved so far and that in most cases the results have been disappointing.

4. An enlightened approach to the international arms race, which could halt that race and bring about substantial reductions in military arsenals, has been lacking.

5. The special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament will offer an unprecedented opportunity to raise and discuss in depth, and from a new standpoint, a whole series of issues of universal concern, in particular the alarming trend towards huge increases in nuclear weapon arsenals and their proliferation, as well as the various issues raised by the arms race in all its implications.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

6. The greatest concern of the world today is to reduce nuclear weapon arsenals, to halt the dangerous trend towards the proliferation of those weapons and to prevent the most advanced technologies from producing new types of nuclear weapons.
7. The international community's efforts to block the nuclear arms race have been very limited, because the nuclear Powers have always been wary of any discussion, within an international organization like the United Nations, of matters which affect their security. Those Powers have generally preferred to conduct nuclear disarmament negotiations among themselves through bilateral contacts.

8. There would be nothing wrong with this were it not that the nuclear threat hangs over not only the Powers which manufacture nuclear weapons but also the rest of the world, for nuclear war threatens the entire human race and the physical environment of the world.

9. Although its achievements have been limited, the international community has strongly condemned within the United Nations any trend which encourages vertical or horizontal nuclear proliferation and has repeatedly testified to its concern that nuclear arsenals should be reduced in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a total ban on the use of nuclear weapons.

10. Although the world Organization has failed in its attempts to limit the production of nuclear weapons, it has scored major successes by backing all regional efforts to prohibit the use, transfer and stockpiling of nuclear weapons in certain parts of the world.

11. Together with most of the countries of Latin America, Costa Rica is participating in the pioneering effort of the Tlatelolco Treaty, which declared Latin America a nuclear-weapon-free region.

THE PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

12. Mutual distrust among nations is perhaps the most powerful influence on and stimulus to the world arms race. This lack of trust, which seems to be linked inevitably with considerations of prestige and power, engenders tensions and constant fears which most countries think can be dispelled by the arms race.

13. Some of the factors which apparently prompt countries to increase their arsenals are the desire to defend their sovereignty, to keep national pride unblemished and to avoid the risk of appearing weak.

14. No one denies the legitimate right of every nation to look to its own security. It is an apparently undisputed fact that each country carries on the arms race in the name of that security, the validity of which no one dares to question.

15. If the truth be known, behind the arms race there lies a security problem which, unfortunately, the international community has so far been unable to deal with through machinery which would take over, or at least lighten, each State's inescapable obligation to guarantee its own security.

16. Thus, the question of world disarmament cannot be separated from the problem of collective security. Despite major international efforts to promote collective security - and it can be stated as a fact that the United Nations was brought into
being to meet precisely that need - the machinery devised for ensuring collective
security has so far been unable to achieve the cherished goal of general and
complete disarmament.

17. Costa Rica may be said to be an exception in that it has sought to demonstrate
its faith in the agreements on collective, regional and international security to
which it is a party and which it recognizes as useful in safeguarding its security
interests.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISARMAMENT

18. Confronted with a generally adverse international situation, the struggle
to ensure the effective enjoyment of human rights throughout the world is a
crusade which is gathering momentum daily, for it is being waged in the name of
the highest moral values.

19. Some régimes violate human rights on the pretext of maintaining internal order
and security. It is these despotic and unpopular Governments which ceaselessly
stockpile weapons, for they can only impose their will by force.

20. There is no way of preventing the arms escalation of a Government which
justifies that escalation on security grounds when it has been the victim of or
is threatened with external aggression. It is quite a different matter, however,
when a dictator has recourse to an arms build-up in order to counteract his
internal weakness and oppress his people.

21. This distinction is an important one, for the international community cannot
remain indifferent in the face of a despotic, oppressive régime. The cause of
human rights fully justifies all attempts to prevent weapons from falling into the
hands of tyrants who torture, persecute and cut short human lives, just as they
must not fall into the hands of colonial régimes which prevent entire peoples
from exercising their national rights.

DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

22. The General Assembly has repeatedly emphasized the link between disarmament
and development and has denounced as one of the most repugnant paradoxes of our
times the squandering of human, financial and technological resources caused by the
runaway arms race in the midst of a world oppressed by poverty and need.

23. As the Secretary-General rightly observed in his statement opening the
session of the Preparatory Committee on 28 March 1977: "... progress in
disarmament is also needed in order to end the present trend of a massive diversion
to military ends of financial resources, manpower, raw materials, technical skills
and research and development capability. There is at the present time a greater
awareness that the world is facing a series of urgent and important problems which
will require the mobilization of all the world's energies and resources for their
solution. Chief among these questions is the problem of development and the
associated task of establishing a new international economic order".

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24. Costa Rica is confident that the special session of the General Assembly will generate a new impetus which will ultimately achieve the cherished goal of halting the dangerous escalation of nuclear weapons until their use is prohibited and until the international trade in conventional weapons is curbed, so that sufficient trust can be restored in the world to guarantee peace among all nations and free the resources which mankind so urgently needs for the purposes of economic and social development.

New York, 26 August 1977