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

Organizational session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 28 March 1977, at 11 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: The Secretary-General

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The ACTING CHAIRMAN declared open the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

2. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that disarmament was a vital aspect of the primary function of the Organization, the maintenance of international peace and security. Since preparations were now beginning for the special session, which would, in all probability, be the largest, most representative gathering ever convened to consider the question of disarmament in all its aspects, he wished to take the opportunity to make some comments on the tasks ahead and on the role of the United Nations.

3. In order to tackle the question of disarmament in all its ramifications, the underlying problems of international order must be examined. During the three decades which had elapsed since the Second World War, vast transformations had occurred, and that development was continuing. The process of decolonization was nearly completed and had transformed the geopolitical map of the world. All States, regardless of their size and their economic or military potential, were increasingly active in the discussion and solution of major issues.

4. While the important role and responsibilities of the great Powers with respect to peace and security must be fully recognized, the small and medium sized States, the developing countries and the non-aligned countries were all parties which must be involved in a time and age when the process of scientific and technological advance and democratization was producing a new form of world society. The holding of a special session on disarmament might, therefore, be an important element in the search for a more just and equitable world order. The positive results of that search were, however, constantly threatened by the continuing arms race. In an international environment dominated by the arms race, military and strategic considerations tended to shape the over-all relations between States, affecting all other relations and transactions as well. Unless the arms race was brought to an end and unless a vigorous process of disarmament and, particularly, nuclear disarmament was initiated, there could be no guarantee that relations among States would, in fact, be based on the principles of national independence and sovereignty, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other States, full equality of rights, non-resort to force or to the threat of force, and the right of every people to decide its own destiny.

5. It was, therefore, evident that the United Nations could not be expected to function on the basis of the Charter and international law unless it succeeded in making major progress in the field of disarmament. Only then would it be possible to create a system of world order based on collective responsibility and a climate of international confidence. The vast arsenals already accumulated and the ongoing...
race to produce new arms made the peace and security of the world less rather than more stable. Stocks of nuclear weapons in the possession of the nuclear Powers had for many years been sufficient to destroy the world many times over. Still, the number of nuclear warheads had increased fivefold in the past eight years. In addition, those weapons were constantly being diversified and their performance characteristics improved. The development by the major Powers of new generations and types of nuclear weapons smaller in power but more accurate in finding their intended targets could already be observed. That could lead to a gradual erosion of the dividing line between the use of nuclear and conventional weapons. The danger of a further spread of nuclear weapons increased with every year as the art of nuclear technology became more widely known. The so-called conventional weapons were becoming increasingly sophisticated and deadly.

6. At the same time, scientists were discussing the possibilities of developing new, even more dangerous weapons of mass destruction, which would face mankind with additional innumerable hazards. In that situation there was only one road available that led the world towards a peaceful and prosperous future, and that road was towards disarmament.

7. Progress in disarmament was 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 capabilities. There was a greater awareness that the world was facing a series of urgent and important problems which would require mobilization of all the world's energies and resources for their solution. Chief among them was the problem of development and the associated task of establishing a new international economic order. There were, consequently, large claims on investment, research and other resources in direct competition with the military demands. The arms race with its economic costs and social and political effects constituted the single most massive obstacle to effective progress in those respects.

8. For a number of years, world military expenditure had been around $300 billion per year. Every year, the military absorbed resources equivalent to about two-thirds of the aggregate gross national product of the countries which together comprised the poorest half of the world's population.

9. The vast benefits which could result from even trifling reductions in arms expenditures were evident in many fields. For example, the World Health Organization had spent about $33 million over 10 years to eradicate smallpox in the world. That amount would not even suffice to buy a single modern supersonic bomber. The world health programme, which was seeking to eradicate malaria in the world at an estimated cost of some $450 million, was dragging because of a lack of funds. Yet, its total cost over the years was only half of what was spent every day for military purposes.

10. In the area of nutrition, half a billion people were severely malnourished. A large proportion of young children in developing countries were blocked in their physical and mental development because of diet deficiencies, with incalculable consequences for the next generation. In recent years, famine had struck entire regions of the world.

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11. At the World Food Conference in 1974, it had been estimated that development assistance to agriculture needed to be stepped up to $5-6 billion annually for the remainder of the decade. While fund commitments for that purpose had risen substantially since then, they were still off the target by $2-3 billion. A reduction of the military budgets of industrialized countries by a mere 1 per cent would be sufficient to close that gap.

12. In the field of scientific and technological capability, the diversion of resources to military ends was most massive of all. It was estimated that 25 per cent of the world’s scientific manpower was engaged in military-related pursuits and that 40 per cent of all research and development spending in the world was devoted to military purposes.

13. It was estimated that, for the world as a whole, a total of 60 million people were engaged in military-related occupations, uniformed or civilian, public or private. That corresponded to the entire labour force in manufacturing in Europe outside the Soviet Union, or to 70 per cent of the total employed in the United States in all branches of activity. The arms race and military expenditures thus created a burden on all peoples and interfered with the economic development of all States. At a time when the international community had accepted the objectives of a new international economic order, that burden should no longer be tolerated.

14. Effective disarmament was therefore needed to release resources for the peaceful development of all, and especially of the developing countries. Disarmament must be a vital part of attempts to restructure the world order politically, economically and socially. The need was today greater than ever.

15. It was obvious that relieving the cold war atmosphere had had an important effect in relaxing the international climate, thus diminishing the risk that peripheral conflicts would escalate into nuclear war. Improvement of international co-operation, as recognized in the Helsinki Declaration on Security and Co-operation in Europe, was a prerequisite for a lessening of tensions. However, détente had not extended to all areas of the world and it had not yet led to a real breakthrough in the process of disarmament.

16. Looking back over the disarmament efforts since World War II, it would be noted that some achievements had been made, albeit modest ones. With the exception of the Convention prohibiting biological weapons, the results had been in the nature of arms limitation rather than disarmament. The emphasis had been on regulating competition in armaments and proscribing certain developments deemed to be particularly destabilizing, costly or otherwise unacceptable, rather than on attempting substantially to reduce important weapons systems.

17. There was a growing realization that in the context of a rapidly innovating arms race such an approach was bound to fail. Technological inventions tended to outstrip the pace of negotiations. The momentum of the arms race made it hurdle the weak barriers that had been built to stop it.
5. Partial and collateral measures could play a role in the cessation and subsequent reversal of the arms race only if they were conceived as part of a broader programme aimed at substantial disarmament in areas of weaponry of central military significance ultimately leading to general and complete disarmament and, in particular, nuclear disarmament under effective international control.

19. What was needed, then, was a comprehensive approach aimed at real disarmament and one that was realistic concerning both the possibilities of disarmament and the dangers of a continued lack of decisive progress.

20. Realizing the need for a new approach, the General Assembly had taken the decisive step of calling for a special session devoted to disarmament. He hoped that that initiative would prove to be a turning point in the search for disarmament and thus move the United Nations closer to attaining the broad objectives for which it had been created. However, there must be a willingness on the part of all to participate actively in what might be a very difficult and long-drawn-out process.

21. There was a need to make the most careful preparations for the special session so that, when it was convened, States would come to it with a readiness to overcome their political differences, to discuss openly and to negotiate in good faith. There should also be an involvement by world public opinion and by the organizations, governmental and non-governmental, that were active in mobilizing that opinion. The General Assembly had repeatedly stressed that absolute priority should be assigned to nuclear disarmament. At that very moment, important negotiations had just resumed in Moscow in an effort to overcome the present difficulties in the strategic talks between the Soviet Union and the United States. He earnestly hoped that the parties would reach agreement on important qualitative limitations and substantial reductions of their strategic nuclear weapons systems. Proposals had also been made, some agreements had been reached and further negotiations were under way on such measures as the discontinuance of nuclear-weapons tests, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, the prevention of an arms race on the sea-bed and the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons. It was his firm belief that only by halting the production of nuclear weapons and liquidating the existing stocks could the danger of their further horizontal proliferation be ultimately eliminated and a nuclear holocaust prevented.

22. Importance should also be attached to the adoption of measures in the field of chemical and biological weapons and incendiary and other conventional weapons, as well as to partial measures of disarmament, the reduction of military expenditures, and other means of military disengagement, leading eventually to general and complete disarmament, which had been proclaimed as the main goal of the United Nations more than a decade earlier.

23. Under the circumstances, it was essential to give the United Nations an enhanced role in the field of disarmament. It had been in that spirit that he had proposed, two years earlier, that the General Assembly should consider a
basic review of the role of the United Nations in disarmament. He had asked what could be done, in practical and realistic terms, to strengthen the role of the United Nations in such a way that the necessary progress could be achieved in that field. He had made some concrete proposals at the time concerning information and study on disarmament, the conduct of relevant discussions and negotiations and also for the follow-up of whatever disarmament agreements were reached. He was pleased with the response of the General Assembly to those proposals. The measures adopted constituted a beginning and should be continued with determination.

24. The special session should be a turning point in the efforts to promote real and substantial measures aimed at achieving the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. He assured the Committee that the Secretariat would spare no effort to contribute to the successful preparations for and conclusion of the special session.

25. The international community was at a crossroads. People expected the United Nations to put an end to the arms race. The task was immense and complex. He urged the Committee to try, through mutual co-operation and understanding, to fulfill the world's high expectations.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

26. The provisional agenda (A/AC.187/1) was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

27. Mr. ALZAHORA (Peru) nominated Mr. Carlos Ortiz de Rozas (Argentina) for the office of Chairman.

28. Mr. FLORIN (German Democratic Republic) and Mr. VAERMOE (Norway) seconded the nomination on behalf of the socialist countries and the Western European and other countries respectively.

29. Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

30. Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina) took the Chair.

31. The Chairman said that his election was both a token of recognition of Argentina's efforts to promote the cause of disarmament and an honour for him personally, for which he thanked the Committee. He thanked, in particular, the representatives of Peru, the German Democratic Republic and Norway for nominating him and seconding the nomination.

32. On behalf of the Committee, he extended warm thanks to the Secretary-General for opening the session in person, thus sharply emphasizing the importance of the Committee's task and the co-operation which the Secretariat would extend to it. Moreover, the Secretary-General's opening comments would serve to orient the Committee's debates.
33. Without going over the events that had led up to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 31/189 B, he recalled that since that resolution had been unanimously adopted, all Member States shared responsibility for the special session devoted to disarmament. Clearly, since disarmament affected the security and sovereignty of all States, no one could refuse to contribute his views in the search for generally acceptable compromise formulas. In view of the limited time available and the difficulties that lay ahead, he stressed the need for goodwill and determined participation on the part of all delegations. The reward was well worth the effort, for it had been estimated that during the course of 1977 $350 billion would be spent on armaments.

34. The special session would be the most representative meeting organized specifically for the purpose of moving towards real disarmament. The success of that venture would depend to a large extent upon the intelligence, enthusiasm and determination with which the Committee tackled its programme.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

35. The CHAIRMAN announced that it had been agreed that the Committee should have a total of 10 officers - 1 Chairman, 8 Vice-Chairmen and 1 Rapporteur - with two representatives for each regional group. Since consultations were still going on concerning the representatives of one regional group, the election of the remaining officers would be postponed until the following day.

36. Turning to the procedure for adoption decisions, he said that the Committee would be governed by the relevant parts of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. Notwithstanding that fact, it had been generally agreed during the consultations that every effort should be made to ensure that, in so far as possible, decisions on matters of substance were adopted by consensus. He assured the Committee that, whenever it proved necessary, he would make every effort as Chairman to secure such a consensus. He would do so not only to respond to the wishes of the Committee but also because he felt that, in matters as important as those relating to disarmament, decisions adopted by consensus were much more likely to be implemented. Nevertheless, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, he stated that should his efforts to secure a consensus fail, he would duly inform the Committee so that decisions could then be adopted in accordance with the provisions of the rules of procedure. He trusted that that procedure would not be questioned and pointed out that strict adherence to it would be beneficial to all.

37. He announced that the members of the Committee had also agreed to permit representatives of countries that were not members to participate in plenary meetings without voting rights.

38. The general consensus of opinion was that the Committee’s meetings at the present session should be devoted entirely to organizational matters and that questions of substance could be discussed at the following session, which was scheduled to start on 9 May.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.