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

Second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 19 May 1977, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. HARRY (Australia)

CONTENTS

General debate (continued)
Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. SCALABRE (France) said that his Government's criticisms of disarmament efforts, as currently conceived and conducted, were well known. However, criticism was not sufficient. That was why his Government - which, as the French Minister for Foreign Affairs had stated in the General Assembly, was prepared to support any proposal aimed at genuine disarmament, i.e. the effective destruction of all types of weapons, both nuclear and conventional, at a reasonable rate of speed and under effective international control - welcomed the convening of a special session devoted to disarmament.

2. His Government had made known its views on the work of the special session and the Preparatory Committee in the communication it had addressed to the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 31/189 B, in which it had emphasized in particular that participation in the special session should be universal, with no privileges for any State, regardless of its size and regardless of the responsibilities devolving on it because of the size of its arsenal. It had been stated in the communication that no aspect of disarmament should be excluded from the competence of the special session, which should freely discuss all problems relating to that complicated undertaking without, however, interfering in ongoing negotiations or departing from a subject which must be constantly borne in mind.

3. The text of the draft provisional agenda submitted by the non-aligned countries (A/AC.187/54), which had been adopted with minor changes at the previous meeting, reflected the concern of its sponsors to establish a broad framework, open to all opinions and in no sense prejudging those views which, in the course of the special session, would form the consensuses hoped for by all.

4. At its September session, the Preparatory Committee would examine the question of a declaration of principles and a programme of action. His delegation would participate actively in that work, and it wished to emphasize now that one of the main objectives of the special session should be a thorough study of disarmament procedures and structures leading to the establishment of an effective negotiating body which would work in close co-operation with the United Nations. Secondly, although there was obviously a need for nuclear disarmament - and it should be emphasized that that was a problem separate from the cessation of nuclear tests - the fact that nuclear disarmament could not be achieved without parallel progress in conventional disarmament should not be overlooked. Only if there was parallelism between the two spheres would it be possible to avoid the disruption of the strategic balance and the insecurity which might arise during the gradual development of the stages which should characterize such a delicate undertaking.

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5. Mr. OGISO (Japan) said that if the special session was to achieve its objective - general and complete disarmament - all participating States must remember that political confrontations were counterproductive and that the special session represented a constructive opportunity for deliberations which would lead to concrete disarmament measures.

6. His delegation commended the non-aligned members of the Committee for their efforts to achieve a balanced formulation of the agenda which had been adopted at the previous meeting (A/AC.187/54) and believed that in all deliberations due consideration should be given to the interests of nuclear-weapon States which were not members of the Preparatory Committee. It hoped that that policy would continue to be followed at all stages of the Committee's work so that all nuclear-weapon States would participate in the special session.

7. His delegation felt that in future the Preparatory Committee should concentrate its attention on the formulation of the final documents, namely a declaration of principles and guidelines and a programme of action. The declaration should be adopted by consensus, with the support of all nuclear-weapon States. The programme of action should be comprehensive and integrated and should provide a broad and flexible framework for future work. It should be broad enough to ensure that account was taken of the concerns of all countries and flexible enough to permit the adoption of realistic and concrete measures in the immediate future and in the medium and long term, according to priorities. The programme should aim at giving world public opinion a broad, organic picture of concrete tasks in the field of disarmament, to be executed in successive stages but without a rigid time-table.

8. Although a number of significant agreements on arms control and disarmament had been concluded in the past two decades, mainly as a result of the efforts of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, the measures adopted thus far did not seem to have produced sufficient progress. That was due to the fact that, in the past, disarmament negotiations had tended to give priority to preventive and peripheral measures. Accordingly, his Government earnestly hoped that the special session would devote itself to deliberations on crucial and central issues which would lead to the final goal of general and complete disarmament. Hence, in its reply to the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 31/189 B, his Government had stated that at the special session high priority should be given to such issues as cessation of the nuclear arms race and the reduction of nuclear armaments, a comprehensive nuclear test ban, the prohibition of chemical weapons, regulation of the international transfer of conventional weapons and the reduction of military budgets.

9. Nuclear disarmament was unquestionably the crux of the disarmament problem. As a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Japan was convinced that if the Treaty was to be effectively implemented universal accession to it was essential; at the same time, however, no effort should be spared to rectify the inequality inherent in the fact that the Treaty granted a special status to nuclear-weapon States. The special session would be an appropriate
time for the nuclear-weapon States to acknowledge their grave responsibility for nuclear disarmament and to adopt measures aimed at halting the nuclear arms race and reducing nuclear stockpiles; otherwise, the régime of the Non-Proliferation Treaty could not be maintained permanently. As a first step, it was urgently necessary to conclude a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty which would pave the way for prohibition of the development and improvement of nuclear weapons.

10. The special importance of nuclear disarmament should not divert attention from the struggle for conventional disarmament, for the recent acceleration in international transfers of conventional weapons would not only intensify existing conflicts but also increase the danger that new disputes would arise in many parts of the world. A great many countries had expressed the view that that matter should be carefully examined at the special session, and his delegation felt that a common stand in favour of giving more attention to the question of conventional disarmament had developed. The special session should therefore place the utmost emphasis on measures to move forward in stages towards the elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and towards the reduction of conventional weapons and armed forces.

11. Mr. RIOS (Panama) recalled that on many occasions in the course of the history of mankind attempts had been made to abandon the possession and use of arms. With the increasing sophistication of weapons, the situation had become more alarming and, since the middle of the previous century, efforts to limit and control weapons had multiplied. In that connexion, mention should be made of the three Hague Conferences, the references to the question contained in Wilson’s 14 Points and in the Treaty of Versailles, and the initiatives taken by the League of Nations. Both the League’s Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments and other subsequent attempts had failed dismally.

12. Since its earliest days, the United Nations had been preoccupied with the question, and the determination of the peoples of the United Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war had found expression in the preamble to the Charter. Although since then much had been said and written about the subject in the Organization, the results were frankly disappointing. It was unquestionably an almost impossible task, given the number of political and economic interests involved. Nevertheless, despite the frustrations and the deceit of those who spoke of disarmament while secretly manufacturing weapons, despite the fact that the arms trade was excellent business, and despite the lack of trust and the fear that lay at the heart of the situation, general and complete disarmament would ultimately have to come about.

13. The day was not far distant when third world Governments, aware of the global threat of the arms race and of the fact that the astronomical amounts being spent on the production of, trade in and purchase of weapons could otherwise be used to meet the most basic needs of their peoples, would rebel against that state of affairs and impose an international boycott on arms suppliers.
14. His delegation reiterated its support for the proposal of the Colombo Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries calling for the convening of a world disarmament conference or a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament; it supported, in general, all measures favouring the holding of the special session, which should make an important contribution to the achievement of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. At the special session, the General Assembly would have to take decisions on such concrete steps as convening a world disarmament conference and demanding that the great Powers destroy their nuclear arsenals under safe and responsible international control.

15. The arms race was repugnant to the conscience of the world because, in addition to threatening the very existence of mankind, it enabled certain powerfully armed States to establish military bases in other countries and to maintain troops in their territory in violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter. It kept non-weapons-producing countries in a state of humiliating dependence. In many parts of the world, colonial enclaves and racist régimes maintained themselves by force and the use of arms against the will of indigenous majorities, and the same could perhaps be said with regard to the 14 military bases maintained by one great Power in the Panama Canal Zone. The arms race was often promoted by those who manufactured and traded in arms for profit or by Governments desirous of expanding their sphere of influence or pursuing neo-colonialist interests. Nor should it be forgotten that the manufacture, stockpiling and transport of certain types of arms had an adverse effect on the environment.

16. He suggested that it might be advisable to have the great Powers provide films on the weapons currently included in their stockpiles for projection during the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Such a "document" would be more convincing than many speeches, studies and statistics.

17. His delegation wished to express its appreciation to those delegations which year after year had worked for the cause of disarmament and, particularly, to the Mexican delegation for its untiring efforts and concrete contributions to that cause.

18. Mr. ALARCON (Cuba) said that the great majority of mankind had always yearned eagerly for general and complete disarmament. The growth of the arms race, which drained away huge resources that should be used to improve the living conditions of all peoples, was arousing justified alarm throughout the world. Never before had arms had such destructive power nor had the risk of the destruction of the human race been so real, for the currently existing nuclear stockpiles had the potential to destroy the planet earth several times over.

19. In 1973, the international community had spent $30 million an hour on armies and weapons, i.e. more than $300 billion a year. The funds thus wasted in four days could have fed, for a whole year, 200 million children who were the victims of poverty in various parts of the world. Nevertheless, the arms race continued while hundreds of millions of human beings lacked the bare essentials of life. That apparent paradox was inexplicable if one forgot that war and the threat of war had
been and were a fabulous business for powerful imperialist monopolies. The latter were the worst enemies of world peace; they had introduced gross distortions into the economies of a number of capitalist countries, which could apparently find no outlet but in promoting international tension and conflict. Accordingly, universal disarmament could not be achieved without establishing a system of international relations that was based on equality and respect for the rights of all peoples, that excluded all manifestations of a policy of aggression, domination and interference, and that enabled all States, large and small, to develop peacefully, independently and safely.

20. The present situation called for prompt action. The process of détente should be extended to the military field. In that connexion, Cuba reiterated its support for the proposals contained in the memorandum of 28 September 1976 addressed to the Secretary-General by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the USSR.

21. The members of the Preparatory Committee could make an important contributions to the cause of disarmament by ensuring that the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly did not become just another exercise in rhetoric but rather a framework for promoting practical results. To that end, it was essential to observe the principle of consensus in the adoption of decisions and to ensure the equitable participation of all ideologies and groups of States in the preparatory process for the special session. In that connexion, his delegation supported an increase in the representation of the socialist States in the Preparatory Committee and trusted that the General Assembly would take the necessary decisions to put an end to the existing imbalance, which was unfair to that group of States.

22. His Government attached the greatest importance to the prompt convening of the world disarmament conference, which had been consistently advocated by the non-aligned countries since their first summit conference held in 1961 in Belgrade. The conference, with the participation of all States, could examine the agenda in proper perspective, giving due attention to all the factors involved. His delegation therefore felt that the world disarmament conference should be given high priority as a separate item on the agenda of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. However, the special session should not be regarded as a substitute for the world conference but should rather be a gateway leading to its early convocation.

23. The international community could thus advance towards general and complete disarmament in conditions which guaranteed the independence, territorial integrity and legitimate rights of all countries and which strengthened the process of international détente, making it irreversible and world-wide.

24. Mr. ROSSIDES (Cyprus) recalled that there was a close relationship between disarmament and international security. However, for many years the disarmament effort had been kept isolated, with no parallel effort for international security. That isolation had deprived negotiations of the necessary background of international security and of the resulting climate of confidence. The United Nations Charter, particularly Articles 11, 26 and 47, showed the close relationship
between disarmament and security. Furthermore, the first resolution adopted by the United Nations in 1946 had been devoted to disarmament and linked to the question of security. In another early resolution (41 (I)), the General Assembly had asserted that the problem of security was closely connected with that of disarmament. However, subsequent General Assembly resolutions on disarmament in the 1950s had made no mention of international security. The many rounds of negotiations that had followed had yielded no results. High hopes had been raised in 1961 by the McCloy-Zorin joint statement of agreed principles on general and complete disarmament. In the long disarmament negotiations over many years, attention had been focused on the mechanics of disarmament proposals without any parallel effort towards international security. Yet, the joint statement of agreed principles, in article 7, had clearly provided that progress in disarmament should be accompanied by necessary measures to maintain international peace and security, including the obligation of States to place at the disposal of the United Nations agreed manpower necessary for an international peace force to be equipped with agreed types of armaments.

25. At the current stage of disarmament discussions, it must be accepted the progress on disarmament could not be achieved outside the political context of the world. Effective progress on the problem of the arms race and disarmament would continue to be hampered so long as there was no means of ensuring the security of nations other than dependence on armaments. The functions of the United Nations, and more particularly of the Security Council, for the maintenance of international peace and security would have to come into play.

26. Co-operative efforts in a climate of confidence were pre-eminently needed in the disarmament endeavour. Such a climate required a framework less antagonistic than that of the outworn concept of balance of power, which was but the extreme of mistrust - short of war. Regrettably, during all those years of disarmament efforts, there had been no diminution of the arms race. The stockpiling of nuclear megatonnage had gone from 6,000 in 1960 to 320,000 in 1968, and it continued to escalate. According to expert opinion, no more than 12,000 megatons in terms of radio-activity alone would be enough to destroy all human life on the American continent and beyond. Thus, the existing stockpiles of hundreds of thousands of megatons could destroy not only all life on the planet but the atmospheric environment that made life possible.

27. As reported in 1961, world military spending had stood at $120 billion annually. By 1970 it had risen to $200 billion - an increase of $80 billion in 10 years. In 1975-1976, it had risen to $300 billion. Expenditure at the present time was estimated at $400 billion, representing a sudden increase of almost $100 billion in one year. Such a tremendous waste of valuable resources, which were needed for the preservation and development of human life but which instead were diverted towards its destruction, in itself represented an economic problem of vast dimensions and linked development directly with disarmament. The arms race and military spending were formidable obstacles to solving development problems. Disarmament, development and international security must be examined together in a highly interdependent world. His delegation therefore proposed formally that the Secretary-General, with the help of consultant experts, should undertake a study on the interrelationship between those three factors.

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28. So that generally acceptable solutions could be reached, all States must participate in consultations which would take into account their views and suggestions. It was therefore essential that formal and informal consultations on the content and drafting of the documents to be adopted by the special session should be conducted on the basis of studies and papers concerning a new approach.

29. What was needed above all was a return to a modicum of legal order, which ironically had never before fallen to such a low point as at present, in the United Nations era. The road to world legal order lay through international security, which would become a reality only when decisions of the Security Council were effectively enforced. The interest of Cyprus in legal order and international security was not related only to the present situation in that country. In its first statement in the general debate, in 1960, when Cyprus had become a Member of the United Nations as a newly independent country, his delegation had stressed the need for international security, as stipulated in the Charter, through the establishment of a United Nations force to maintain world peace and security. It was a tragic irony of fate that subsequently Cyprus had become a living example of the lack of international security, even when Security Council decisions had been unanimous. In 1968, Cyprus had submitted a draft resolution proposing a study of the link between disarmament, development and international security. He was gratified to note that the concept of international security as a pre-condition progress disarmament had received support in some of the replies from Member States to the Secretary-General on the subject of the special session.

30. Mr. BENSIAIL (Algeria) expressed the satisfaction of his delegation at the success of the Preparatory Committee in drawing up a draft agenda for the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, with the approval of all members of the Committee. He was particularly gratified that the draft reflected the views of the Algerian Government, as transmitted to the Secretary-General in its reply (A/AC.187/28), on the lack of adequate progress in disarmament, on the continuation of the arms race and on the need to create conditions favourable to disarmament. In that connexion, his Government attached great importance to the need to establish a climate of confidence between States, through the final resolution of local conflicts, the elimination of the last remnants of colonialism and racism, and the ending of policies of spheres of influence, of interference in the internal affairs of States, and of denial of the right to self-determination of peoples under foreign domination.

31. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Committee had decided to include in the agenda a review of the role of the United Nations in disarmament and of the international machinery for negotiations on disarmament. It considered that the United Nations should assume its natural role of providing leadership and guidance in the field of disarmament and should participate more actively in the disarmament process. It continued to support the convening of a World Disarmament Conference in which all nuclear-weapon States would participate.

32. The second phase of the Committee's preparatory work involved the preparation of a declaration of principles on disarmament and of a programme of action. The
non-aligned members of the Committee had prepared a working paper which, he hoped, would form the basis for informal talks as a prelude to negotiations. His delegation agreed that the talks should be informal during the period between the end of the current session and 31 August, when the third session was due to start. He regretted that he did not share the views of those delegations which had suggested that the third session should take place after the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament had finished its work. It had to be remembered that the dates of the third session had been set by the Committee at the beginning of its first session and that the majority of the Committee members were not members of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament; most delegations would also be busy with the ad hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference, which was scheduled to meet between 12 and 15 September next. Furthermore, he could not accept the idea of the Preparatory Committee becoming a kind of subsidiary organ of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and having to modify its programme of work accordingly. It should also be remembered that the documentation approved by the General Assembly on the basis of the work done by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament included a recommendation that the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament should submit an annual report to the General Assembly in sufficient time to enable Member States to examine it. He therefore considered that the dates originally set for the third session of the Preparatory Committee should be maintained.

33. He also considered that, during that session, the Preparatory Committee should concentrate on preparing its provisional report for submission to the General Assembly at its next session.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

34. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that decisions had still to be taken regarding informal intersessional consultations and talks, as well as on whether informal meetings should be held before the Committee's next official meeting. The Committee would also have to reach a decision regarding the documentation to be requested from the Secretariat.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.