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

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 1 February 1978, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

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78-55116
The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK OF THE SPECIAL SESSION (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN said it had been decided that the special session would begin item 8, general debate, on the afternoon of 24 May and would complete the item at the afternoon meeting on 9 June.

PRINCIPAL DOCUMENTS OF THE SPECIAL SESSION (continued)

2. Mr. ASHE (United Kingdom) said that he had noted with satisfaction the importance attached by delegations to the enhancement of public awareness of disarmament issues. In that connexion, the Secretary-General, in his statement to the Preparatory Committee at its 1st meeting, had emphasized the role which both governmental and non-governmental organizations could play in mobilizing public opinion.

3. His Government had a high opinion of the valuable work done by non-governmental organizations in connexion with disarmament and had supported the Committee's decision to provide facilities for such organizations and for institutions concerned with disarmament to send observers to its meetings and to submit papers to it. His delegation had also proposed that the same facilities should be extended to non-governmental organizations at the special session itself. Those arrangements, however, did not go far enough, and his delegation believed that provision should be made for a more direct relationship between the special session and non-governmental organizations, both in recognition of the value of their work and as a means of promoting wider enlightenment about disarmament issues among the peoples of the world. Means should also be found to enable prominent experts from non-governmental organizations to give testimony before the special session. Such a direct relationship would be most clearly manifested if arrangements could be made for a day to be set aside during the special session for non-governmental organizations to address it; the most appropriate day might be the one immediately following the general debate. Should that proposal not commend itself to the Committee, he would suggest that the day before the special session opened, namely, Monday, 22 May, should be reserved for a meeting of the special session, outside its plenary programme, for hearing testimony from non-governmental organizations. A precedent for that procedure had been set on the occasion of the World Disarmament Conference in 1932. If the Committee decided that a day should be set aside for non-governmental organizations, it might perhaps be divided into two parts. During the morning, representatives of non-governmental organizations, perhaps limited to five speakers, would address the delegations assembled for the special session, and the afternoon might be devoted to hearing expert evidence from senior representatives of institutions concerned with disarmament, such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the International Institute of Strategic Studies and the appropriate Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union.

4. The choice of speakers to represent the very large number of non-governmental organizations which had a deep interest in disarmament must be left to the organizations themselves; the conference which such organizations were about to hold in Geneva, in preparation for the special session, could perhaps provide the opportunity for selecting speakers. The number of research institutes concerned
with disarmament was relatively small, and it might be sufficient to let it be known that the Preparatory Committee would be prepared to consider applications for an invitation to speak; the Committee could then, when it met in April, decide which, if any, invitations should be issued.

5. In conclusion, he wished to stress that his delegation's proposal was guided by the desire to promote the enlightenment of the peoples of the world about disarmament and by recognition of the valuable role which non-governmental organizations could play in that work.

6. The CHAIRMAN said that the role of non-governmental organizations would be discussed as part of the programme of work for the special session.

7. He wished to draw the attention of the Preparatory Committee to two additional working papers, namely the "Draft programme of action" submitted by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom (A/AC.187/96) and the "Suggestions for a disarmament programme" submitted by Italy (A/AC.187/97).

8. Mr. OGISO (Japan) said that his delegation shared the desire to promote the enlightenment of the peoples of the world on the question of disarmament and fully acknowledged the valuable part which non-governmental organizations had played in peace movements and could play in mobilizing world opinion for the attainment of disarmament. He therefore welcomed the United Kingdom proposal, and hoped that the necessary consultations would be undertaken with a view to implementing those proposals, including the selection of a day for hearing testimony from non-governmental organizations.

9. Ms. LOPEZ (Venezuela) said that her delegation's working paper, entitled "Dissemination of information on the question of the armaments race and disarmament" (A/AC.187/94), contained elements which might be considered for inclusion in the Preamble, the Declaration and the Programme of Action. Both in the Preparatory Committee and in the First Committee of the General Assembly, the delegation of Venezuela had repeatedly stressed the need for mobilizing international public opinion in condemnation of the arms race. The steady improvement of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, was taking place at such a rapid pace that only technical experts could understand the implications and risks, while world public opinion was not aware of what such scientific progress meant in terms of the very survival of humanity. Notwithstanding the efforts of the United Nations to end the arms race, practical results had been minimal, and it had therefore become essential to find alternative means of reaching the goal of disarmament. Little could be accomplished without the necessary political will, particularly on the part of the nuclear Powers. In that connexion, she believed that an informed international public opinion could prove to be a valuable ally in the campaign against armaments. The United Nations should, by means of a systematic publicity campaign, stress not only the arms race but also the efforts which were being undertaken to put an end to it. What was needed was a continuing flow of information describing the steady improvement of the increasingly complex systems and means of destruction. Non-governmental organizations interested in disarmament could lend valuable support to such a campaign, and it was therefore

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imperative that links between them and the United Nations Centre for Disarmament should be strengthened. She had listened with interest to the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom and hoped that others would stress the same theme. The working paper submitted by her delegation proposed certain concrete measures which might contribute to a better-informed world public opinion, which in turn might thus be encouraged to play an active and successful role in the field of disarmament. She hoped that the points mentioned in her delegation's working paper would be incorporated into the various drafts on which the Preparatory Committee was working.

10. Mr. BERG (Sweden) said that his delegation had supported the proposal made by the United Kingdom in September 1977 that facilities should be provided for non-governmental organizations to send special observers to the special session. His delegation would therefore take a very favourable attitude towards the proposal now made by the representative of the United Kingdom that a day should be set aside for non-governmental organizations at the special session.

11. His delegation welcomed the Venezuelan working paper on the dissemination of information (A/AC.187/94) and believed that it represented an excellent basis for discussions on the question.

12. Mr. WEILLER (United States of America) said that serious consideration should be given to the United Kingdom proposal. Non-governmental organizations could play a very important role in helping the special session to achieve its purposes, in particular by contributing to the thinking of their own Governments on the question. The United States Government had convened a conference of non-governmental organizations in Washington, to be held on 11 March 1978, for the purpose of submitting suggestions regarding points which might be considered during the special session and regarding ways in which non-governmental organizations could stimulate support for the goals of the special session. He believed that other Governments might wish to consider taking similar action with a view to encouraging a dialogue with public opinion on the issues involved.

13. He also welcomed the Venezuelan working paper on the dissemination of information.

14. Mr. COROIANU (Romania) said that his delegation fully agreed with the representative of Venezuela that it was the duty of Governments to reveal the dangers of the arms race to the peoples of the world. Security was diminished as the arms race escalated. The prime duty of the present generation was to spare no effort to institute resolute measures for disarmament through a treaty on general disarmament and a treaty for the elimination of the use of force in international relations. It was essential that all States should participate in disarmament negotiations and in the drafting of necessary measures. World public opinion must be kept fully informed on the question and periodic reports must be issued for that purpose.

15. He fully shared the view of the representative of Venezuela that elements of document A/AC.187/94 should be included in the Preamble and the Declaration on Disarmament.
16. Mr. HARRY (Australia) said that, while he was in basic agreement with the United Kingdom proposal, he did not feel that it would be appropriate for non-governmental organizations and research institutes to participate in the general debate on the same basis as Member States. They should, however, be given an opportunity to present their views, for example to the Committee of the Whole of the special session or on an even more informal basis. Non-governmental organizations should be asked to select enough speakers to fill not more than one day.

17. Mr. GARCIA ROBLES (Mexico) said he agreed with the representative of Venezuela that elements from the Venezuelan working paper on dissemination of information (A/AC.187/94) could well be incorporated into the Preamble, the Declaration and the Programme of Action as well as into the Three-year Plan and Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament which his own delegation had proposed in document A/AC.187/89.

18. He was also in strong agreement with the representative of the United Kingdom that non-governmental organizations could contribute to the special session. The United Kingdom representative had suggested alternative means whereby non-governmental organizations could be accommodated at the special session. It was his understanding that the Preparatory Committee would consider those alternatives at a later stage. He thought it would be useful if the United Kingdom representative would consider distributing the text of his statement to members.

19. Mr. UPADHYAY (Nepal) said that he agreed fully with those who believed that non-governmental organizations should be given the opportunity to participate actively in the special session. His delegation would have no difficulty in supporting any of the alternatives which had been suggested in that connexion, including the one proposed by the representative of Australia.

20. He welcomed the Venezuelan working paper and felt that the ideas which it set forth could be incorporated into the draft final document which the Committee was preparing.

21. Mr. SOKALSKI (Poland) said that, as the Venezuelan initiative made clear, there was growing public interest in questions of disarmament and a need for the dissemination of objective information on that subject. The General Assembly had recognized that need in its resolution 32/154 on the implementation of the Declaration on the Strengthening of International Security, which was a subject closely related to that of disarmament.

22. Non-governmental organizations had an important role to play at the special session and in the disarmament process, and his delegation had always attached great importance to their work. The World Peace Council had recently met in his country in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly, and Poland had sent representatives to the special meeting of European youth and students held in Budapest to discuss the same issue. Other organizations, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the Women's International Democratic Federation, were also actively involved in making public opinion aware of the issues on the eve of the special session. If and when the
Committee proceeded to discuss the United Kingdom proposal, it should bear in mind that agreement had already been reached on the facilities to be accorded to non-governmental organizations, as indicated in the report of the Preparatory Committee (A/32/41, para. 29), which had been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/88 B.

23. The CHAIRMAN said that one meeting of the Committee would be allotted to discussion of the United Kingdom proposal on non-governmental organizations and that delegations would be advised of the date in good time.

24. Replying to questions from the representatives of Brazil and Turkey, he said that he had had discussions with the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs with regard to the procedure for entering names on the speakers' list for the special session. In order to avoid the problems that had arisen at the thirty-second session of the General Assembly, the Secretariat would advise Member States, through the Journal, of the opening of the list. In the meantime, delegations should contact their Governments so that they would be in a position to inform the Secretariat of their preferences. Each delegation would be asked to give its first choice of a date and two alternatives. The Secretariat had given every assurance that it would be able to satisfy all requests as long as delegations gave three alternative dates. In accordance with tradition, priority would be given to Heads of State and Government to speak on whatever date they chose. The Secretariat would probably make the relevant announcement through the Journal during the next week. In his opinion, the system was fair and would enable all those who wanted to speak to do so.

25. Mr. GAJDA (Hungary) said that his delegation supported the idea that representatives of non-governmental organizations and of public opinion should be permitted to take part in the special session. Recent activities, such as the meeting of European youth and students mentioned by the representative of Poland, the conference of non-governmental organizations to be held shortly in Geneva and the efforts of the World Federation of United Nations Associations to bring disarmament issues to the attention of public opinion, were evidence of the keen interest of such organizations in the issues of the special session, and a way had to be found to give them direct access to it.

26. He noted that the statement made by the representative of the Soviet Union at the first meeting of the current session had contained a number of very interesting points concerning the Programme of Action which, in the opinion of his delegation, merited further study. He suggested that, if possible, the Secretariat should be requested to reproduce that statement as a document of the Committee.

27. The CHAIRMAN said that if the Soviet delegation desired to have its statement, or extracts thereof, issued as an official working paper, it would be distributed and discussed with the others.
28. Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway) said that public opinion was undoubtedly very concerned about matters of disarmament and that further objective information was required. The special session could make an important contribution in that regard, and non-governmental organizations and other institutions dealing with disarmament could play their part. His delegation therefore associated itself with the views expressed by the representative of the United Kingdom and felt that some way should be found for such organizations to participate more directly at the special session than they had done at the preparatory stage. It was open to suggestions on how such participation could be arranged, either along the lines suggested by the United Kingdom and Australia or in accordance with some other suitable formula. The Committee would have to discuss the matter in detail at a later stage.

29. The CHAIRMAN reported on the consultations he had held concerning the organization of work. He suggested that a drafting group should be set up to prepare documents on the basis of the ideas that had been submitted. The group would be open-ended and would consist of the authors of the working papers and any others interested in participating. To speed up the work, he urged that groups of delegations that had presented documents should be represented by a limited number of people and that, where possible, a single spokesman should be appointed for each group. That would not, of course, prevent others from speaking if they wished. That system had been adopted with great success at the seventh special session. He suggested that the Committee's Rapporteur should chair the drafting group. Document A/AC.187/93/Rev.1 would be available the next day, and the drafting group would be able to proceed immediately. It should first draft texts on those points on which agreement already existed, then endeavour to resolve any difficulties. Where that proved impossible, it should submit texts with one or more alternative wordings in brackets in order not to paralyse the work. The Committee would meet three times a week in plenary session or in an informal working group, on Monday and Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings, and the drafting group would hold at least seven meetings a week.

30. The Rapporteur would make a progress report to the Committee on Mondays and Wednesdays and would submit any texts on which a consensus had been reached. The Chairman's good offices would be made available whenever necessary in an effort to resolve any difficulties, and he would keep in constant touch with the drafting group. It was proposed that the drafting group should work on the Preamble, Introduction and Declaration from 2 to 13 February and on the sections dealing with the Programme of Action and Machinery governing disarmament negotiations from 14 to 23 February.

31. To obviate the need for a revised tabulation for the sections dealing with the Programme of Action and the Machinery, he would suggest various draft subtitles which would be distributed the following day. He stressed that those suggestions were merely intended to facilitate the work and could, of course, be rejected or amended if the Committee saw fit. He believed that, if agreement could be reached on the subtitles, the Secretariat would be able to submit the tabulation of proposals the following Monday. He urged any delegation that intended to submit a document to do so without delay.
32. Replying to a question from the representative of India, he said that, as soon as the drafting group reached agreement in principle on the wording of a particular text, it would transmit the text to the Committee at its next meeting. In that way it was hoped that the work would proceed smoothly with a view to completing the draft final document by the end of the current session. He suggested, however, that a pragmatic approach should be taken to the tentative programme of work which he had outlined, so that it could be revised if that proved necessary.

33. Mr. HARRY (Australia), speaking on behalf of the Western States that had submitted the proposals contained in document A/AC.187/87, said that they agreed with the suggestion to establish an open-ended drafting group under the chairmanship of the Rapporteur. They would respond to the Chairman's appeal to co-operate by restricting their participation in the drafting group to particularly interested delegations and would from time to time arrange for one or two spokesmen to present their views, on the understanding that individual Governments would be free to make statements when they so wished.

34. The Western States also agreed that the procedure should be flexible. For example, they felt that the full Committee should meet only when the text of a particular section was ready for its consideration.

35. The CHAIRMAN agreed that in other cases the time could be better employed by the drafting group.

36. Mr. FONSEKA (Sri Lanka), speaking on behalf of the group of non-aligned States, assured the Committee that they would co-operate in expediting the work of the drafting group by expressing their views through one or more spokesmen, except where individual Governments wished to express a particular viewpoint.

37. With regard to the use of subtitles for the purpose of facilitating the drafting work, he hoped that they would not have the effect of restricting the scope of the various sections.

38. Lastly, he hoped that the final draft text, when ready, would be made available to all Member States so as to enable them to formulate their views.

39. The CHAIRMAN gave his assurance regarding those two points.

40. As to the draft Programme of Action, he hoped that when the Committee took up the matter it would be able to reach agreement on a number of subtitles for the purpose of tabulating proposals along the lines of document A/AC.187/93/Rev.1.

41. Mr. MISTRAL (France) welcomed the proposed programme of work. He pointed out, however, that his Government had particular positions - as outlined in document A/AC.187/90 - which did not entirely correspond with the views expressed by the various geographical groups. His delegation therefore intended to participate in the open-ended drafting group.

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42. Mr. GARCÍA ROBLES (Mexico) said that his delegation fully agreed with the proposed programme of work.

43. With regard to the format of the final document, he drew attention to the fifth paragraph of the Mexican working paper (A/AC.187/89) concerning the need to keep the introductory draft resolution very short since all the relevant ideas, principles, purposes and rules must be included in the final document, which should be a complete and self-sufficient instrument. The draft resolution itself might consist of an amalgamation of the first two preambular paragraphs in document A/AC.187/93, followed by the second preambular paragraph in the outline proposed in the Mexican working paper. He intended to amplify his proposals at the first meeting of the drafting group.

44. Mr. SOKALSKI (Poland), speaking on behalf of the socialist States that had submitted documents A/AC.187/61 and A/AC.187/62, assured the Chairman of their full support for the proposed programme of work.

45. Mr. WEILER (United States of America) said that his delegation, too, supported the proposed programme of work.

46. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should decide to set up the drafting group, under the chairmanship of the Rapporteur, and to adopt the remaining points of the programme of work which he had put forward.

47. It was so decided.

48. The CHAIRMAN, replying to a request from the representative of Colombia, agreed to have the programme of work circulated as an informal paper for the convenience of delegations.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.