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

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 3 February 1978, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

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Principal documents of the special session (continued)

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consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the
session.
The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

PRINCIPAL DOCUMENTS OF THE SPECIAL SESSION (continued)

1. Mr. VELLODT (India)* said that his Government attached great importance to the forthcoming special session. Everyone had a great responsibility to ensure that the special session would not be a wasted effort, a repetition of the work of the First Committee, a mere forum for expressing pious hopes and high-sounding platitudes, but would succeed in providing clear directives for what must be done in the field of disarmament. The decision to hold the special session had been very widely welcomed, and the peoples of the world expected the participants to produce at least some answers to the issues and situations which appeared to have overtaken them through no fault of their own. The participants could not, and should not, fail them.

2. The Government of India regarded the special session as important and hoped that it would prove a turning-point in the sad and frustrating history of the consideration of disarmament issues in the United Nations. It believed that the special session provided an excellent and timely opportunity to revive the momentum which had been clearly apparent in the late 1950s and early 1960s, leading up to the September 1961 United States-USSR joint statement of agreed principles. Unfortunately, that momentum had not been followed up with the vigour and determination the issues warranted. But Member States should not brood over past mistakes and the numerous opportunities they had missed; they should jointly resolve not to waste the present opportunity, when conditions appeared to be favourable for a significant break-through.

3. The purpose of the special session was not only to awaken and encourage world interest and mobilize public opinion, but also to produce a clear and precise indication of goals and priorities, a well-defined, time-bound and realistic programme of action, and to set up adequate and appropriate machinery for implementing both short- and long-term objectives.

4. Along with other non-aligned countries, India had submitted its views and suggestions. Several other delegations had done the same, either individually or jointly. He did not wish to single out any one of them, but his delegation had been particularly happy to hear the statement made by the representative of France the day before in which he had referred to his Government’s conclusion that the time had come to seek a new and positive approach. It warmly welcomed that development and hoped that China would take a similar decision and join the Committee in its future disarmament deliberations so as to strengthen its efforts and make them more meaningful.

5. His delegation had no doubt that on the basis of, and with the help of, the many valuable ideas and suggestions contained in the documents before it, the Committee would succeed, in the coming days, in finalizing a document that would do justice to the efforts required for its preparation.

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* This statement has been given full coverage in the summary record in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee during the meeting.
6. The most important part of that document was the one concerning the machinery for future disarmament deliberations. Whatever the goals and short- or long-term programme of action that might be agreed upon, the success of future work would depend on the provision of the appropriate and adequate machinery for dealing with the problems at hand. While not denying that the political will of the nations of the world to achieve meaningful progress in disarmament was the most important prerequisite, his delegation was convinced that effective mechanisms were of great importance not only in making progress in disarmament negotiations but also in helping to generate that political will.

7. His delegation whole-heartedly agreed with the statement contained in the paper submitted by the delegation of Mexico that "the experience gained since the establishment of the United Nations shows that, for maximum effectiveness, two kinds of bodies are required - deliberative and negotiating" (A/AC.187/69, IV, para. 1). The deliberative body must necessarily be a comparatively large one and the negotiating body a comparatively small one. In effect, the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament was the only such body available. The First Committee of the General Assembly was neither a negotiating nor a deliberative body. Its function, like that of the other Committees of the General Assembly, was really to review and to evaluate progress, or lack of it, during the previous 12 months and to provide appropriate directions for further action.

8. Much had been said about the inadequacies and short-comings of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament as a negotiating body. It had even been said that the Conference had failed as a negotiating body. His delegation did not subscribe to such outright condemnation of the Conference. It felt that that body, with all its inadequacies and imperfections, had been a useful forum and that it could continue to function even more effectively with some essential changes in its structure and working procedures. During the past two years, much effort had gone into improving those procedures. The reports of the Conference to the General Assembly were, compared to the early years, far more substantive and meaningful. The records of the discussions in the Conference were now available to all the Members of the United Nations and to the public at large, and its work programme followed a set calendar, which ensured the orderly conduct of business. Those were all positive elements and should be duly noted.

9. Much had been said about the practice of having co-chairmen at the Conference and it had been contended that practice should be changed. His delegation agreed, not because it felt that that in itself would make it easier for China and France to participate in the work of the Conference - it did not believe that to be the case, much as it would welcome such development - but because it felt that all the members of the Conference, or indeed of any international forum, should have the same rights and responsibilities. It was precisely for that reason that it saw no reason for denying the nuclear-weapon States the chairmanship of the Conference. It preferred the monthly rotation of that office among all the members.

10. It supported the suggestion that the Conference should establish a standing sub-committee of the whole which would essentially be the negotiating forum in the Conference.

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11. It also supported the suggestion that States which were not members of the Conference should have the right to submit to it proposals or views they might have on disarmament measures that were the subject of negotiations in the Conference and to attend its meetings whenever such proposals were examined.

12. It felt that, as a rule, the plenary meetings of the Conference should not be closed but should be open to the press and to others who wished to attend them. There was absolutely no reason why the meetings should be closed. Statements made at the plenary meetings of the Conference were no different from those made in the First Committee. In any case, the verbatim records of the meetings were made available to all Member States and were also available to the public, as they should be. Where, then, was the need for closed meetings and the cryptic communiqués issued at the end of those meetings?

13. His delegation agreed with the suggestion that in addition to the report the Conference submitted to the General Assembly at the beginning of the General Assembly sessions, it should also submit periodic reports. In the light of the foregoing remarks it was obvious that his delegation did not share the view that the Conference should be replaced by some other negotiating body.

14. Returning to the premise that there was a need for a comparatively large deliberative forum and a comparatively small negotiating body, he said that the Conference, with appropriate modifications in its structure and working procedures, could function effectively as the negotiating body. At the same time, there was a strong case for a deliberative body to outline broad policies and, as had been suggested in the paper submitted by the non-aligned countries (A/AC.187/55/Add.1), for the elaboration of the comprehensive programme of disarmament measures. That programme had been correctly defined as a middle road between the current step-by-step approach and the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament. General Assembly resolution 2602 E (XXIV), which declared the decade of the 1970s as a Disarmament Decade, requested the Conference to work out "a comprehensive programme, dealing with all aspects of the problem of the cessation of the arms race and general and complete disarmament under effective international control, which would provide the Conference with a guideline to chart the course of its further work and its negotiations". That resolution had been adopted more than eight years previously. The Disarmament Decade was now in its last two years, and although very useful suggestions in regard to the comprehensive programme had been submitted a long time before, there had been very little, if any, progress in that direction. The time had come to consider specifically the establishment of a body entrusted with the task of elaborating the comprehensive programme of disarmament measures. The non-aligned paper (A/AC.187/55/Add.1) suggested that a special committee of the United Nations should be established to perform that limited task within a specified time.

15. Some delegations had reservations regarding the establishment of a United Nations committee to deal with disarmament matters. Several arguments had been advanced against it, but none of them were very valid.

16. It had been said — and perhaps that was the argument most often made — that
such a committee would seriously undermine the importance and functions of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. His delegation totally disagreed with that view. The Conference and the United Nations committee would have different functions. It was not proposed that that committee should sit in judgement on the Conference or oversee its functions. The two bodies would report separately to the General Assembly on their progress in carrying out their mandates.

17. It had been said that the committee would have to operate under the rules of procedure applicable to United Nations bodies. That was bound to be so, but he did not see any reason why the committee could not operate the way the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had succeeded in doing over the years, namely as far as possible on the basis of consensus.

18. It had also been said that if two separate bodies were to function independently, many Governments would have serious difficulty in providing the necessary expertise to both bodies. In his delegation's view, however, the proposed committee would not meet throughout the year but would probably have about two sessions. It should be possible to schedule its sessions so as not to conflict with those of the Conference.

19. Apart from the practical considerations already dealt with, there was also the fact that standing organs had been established for important issues in the economic and social fields, and world public opinion could not understand why on an issue such as disarmament, which affected the lives and destiny of all mankind, there should be reluctance to establish a similar body at the United Nations. His delegation sincerely hoped that that suggestion to set up a United Nations committee on disarmament would receive the endorsement of the Preparatory Committee.

20. Many speakers had stressed the need to keep world public opinion properly informed on matters relating to the arms race and disarmament. As had rightly been said, an aroused public opinion could become a global constituency for disarmament and no effort should be spared in alerting public opinion to the dangers of the arms race and the benefits that could accrue from disarmament. The suggestion that the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament should hold open meetings had been made in that context. His delegation was most grateful to the delegation of Venezuela for the very constructive and timely initiative it had taken in that regard and for the valuable and practical suggestions contained in the paper submitted to the Committee earlier that week. It supported them wholeheartedly and hoped they would be fully reflected in the Declaration and Programme of Action, and possibly even in the Preamble to the final document.

21. His delegation wished to place on record its profound gratitude and admiration for the continuing and dedicated efforts of the non-governmental organizations in the field of disarmament where they had a special contribution to make because world public opinion constituted a global constituency in that regard. They had an important and continuing role to perform in that connexion, and his delegation warmly welcomed the proposal made by the representative of the United Kingdom to set aside one day of the special session for selected representatives of non-governmental organizations to present their views to the special session.

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22. In conclusion, he wished to say a few words about the United Nations Centre for Disarmament, which had been established following the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in Disarmament (A/31/36). Proposal No. 9 in paragraph 18 of the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee listed the functions to be entrusted to the Centre. They included committee and conference services, studies on disarmament matters, compilation and dissemination of information and the follow-up of disarmament resolutions and agreements - a heavy but essential mandate, the implementation of which would require adequate staff. His delegation had no doubt that the Secretary-General, whose interest in and dedication to the cause of disarmament was well known, would take the necessary action in that regard. The Yearbook produced by the Centre was an excellent reference book. His delegation understood that the Centre was planning to bring out a quarterly newsletter. It welcomed that development and hoped that the first issue would appear before the special session.

23. Mr. ASHE (United Kingdom), introducing document A/AC.187/96 on behalf of the sponsors, said that it took into account the views of other regional groups and focused on practical considerations, such as national security requirements, with a view to achieving a consensus. In drafting the proposals, the sponsors had had a limited time-frame in mind and had envisaged the possibility of convening a second special session on disarmament within a few years to review the progress already achieved and to draw up a further programme of action for the subsequent years. High priority was assigned to the conclusion of a second SALT agreement and a comprehensive test-ban treaty, the greatest importance was attached to control of horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the link between the need for such control and the need for control of vertical proliferation was recognized. The sponsors agreed on the need to control the increase of nuclear armaments and to prohibit other weapons of mass destruction, and strongly believed that those aims could not be achieved unless accompanied by progress towards a balanced programme of disarmament involving restraining the world-wide build-up of conventional weapons through regional agreements to reduce forces.

24. Although the confidence-building measures set forth in the document were derived in part from those applied in Europe under the Helsinki Agreement, the sponsors hoped that it would be generally agreed that the specific measures suggested would, if applied on the basis of regionally established criteria, significantly help to decrease regional tensions everywhere. The document also mentioned hot lines, which provided very important links between nuclear Powers, and could also link other countries in areas of tension. He drew particular attention to the proposals calling on States to publish detailed information on their armed forces and the total annual value of their arms production and their transfer of arms to other countries, as well as the appeal for a standard method for the reporting of military budgets.

25. The purpose of the proposals for new United Nations studies on disarmament was to explore and clarify problems which, although of great importance, might not yet be ripe for immediate negotiations. A further advantage of such studies was that they would help the United Nations Disarmament Centre to develop its expertise and thereby increase its ability to help and advise the United Nations. His own
Government regarded that as a particularly important aim in itself. One of the most important studies suggested was the one on limiting the build-up of conventional weapons throughout the world, which was a sensitive but crucial issue. A better understanding of the issues involved in the relationship between disarmament and development was also necessary, and that was also reflected in the programme. The programme recommended a study on the strengthening of the security role of the United Nations in peace-keeping and the peaceful settlement of disputes because there was an important relationship between disarmament and the security role of the United Nations; the sponsors therefore felt that the special session should give impetus to studies in that area. The proposed study on the possible contribution to confidence-building among States of certain technical measures was prompted by the experience of the United Nations and United States observer missions in Sinai, and the idea that what those missions had learned and the techniques that they had developed might be applicable in other areas of tension.

26. In conclusion, the sponsors had attempted to produce a programme of action which was comprehensive and which, while containing new ideas, was also balanced and practicable. It not only established priorities among existing negotiations but also called for specific new moves to promote disarmament, and its implementation could provide the initial momentum towards the goal of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control to which all were committed.

27. Mr. MUZEZINOVIC (Yugoslavia) proposed that the statement made by the representative of India should be reported in extenso in the summary record.

28. It was so decided.

29. Mr. WEILER (United States of America) welcomed the United Kingdom representative's introduction of the draft programme of action as a constructive contribution to the Committee's work. His delegation would want to study the Indian statement carefully.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.