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

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 15 February 1978, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

CONTENTS

Organization of work

Programme of work for the special session: role of non-governmental organizations
(continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages, preferably in the same language as the text to which they refer. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also, if possible, incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, Room A-3550.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

78-55208
The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The CHAIRMAN said that he had had contacts with the delegations and consultations with the Secretariat which indicated that it would be advisable for the Secretariat to prepare as soon as possible a tabulation of proposals regarding machinery for disarmament negotiations analogous to the tabulations in documents A/AC.187/93/Rev.1 and A/AC.187/100, to be distributed to the drafting group in order to expedite completion of work on all four sections of the final document. Since some of the working papers relating to the Declaration and the Programme of Action also related to machinery for disarmament negotiations, he suggested that the relevant portions should be included in the tabulation on machinery so as to avoid cross-referencing and repetition. He further suggested that the most logical sequence for that tabulation would be an introduction, followed by sections on the role of the United Nations in disarmament and on the work of the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission, the Secretariat and the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. Further contributions by delegations which had not yet submitted their views could, of course, be incorporated in a revised text, but it would facilitate the work of the drafting group if they would submit their views as soon as possible.

2. It was so decided.

PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION: ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (continued)

3. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the General Assembly had already approved a Preparatory Committee recommendation that non-governmental organizations should be accorded the same facilities at the special session as they had in the Preparatory Committee itself. He then drew attention to the proposals regarding the role of non-governmental organizations which had been made by the United Kingdom representative at the 25th meeting and noted that, according to the Secretariat, there was no precedent for non-governmental organizations either to address or participate in plenary meetings. The decision already taken by the General Assembly did not, of course, bar the Committee from making other recommendations to the special session. Furthermore, the Committee could do no more than recommend that a special day should be set aside during the special session for non-governmental organizations to address it; the Assembly itself would have to approve such a recommendation. On the other hand, the proposal that the day before the special session opened should be reserved for a meeting of the special session outside its plenary programme (A/AC.187/SR.25, para. 3) presented complications of an administrative and legal nature, since the Preparatory Committee had no authority to convene a meeting one day before the General Assembly. Such a proposal also involved financial implications, and arrangements would have to be made to admit the representatives of the non-governmental organizations to the building. There would, of course, be no summary records of such a meeting, which would have to be considered by the Committee on Conferences as well as by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

/...
4. Mr. BETTENCOURT BUENO (Brazil) said that his delegation had certain reservations regarding the United Kingdom proposals, which would imply reversing formal decisions previously taken by the Preparatory Committee and the General Assembly itself. In that connexion, he drew attention to paragraphs 9, 16 and 29 of the report of the Preparatory Committee to the thirty-second session of the General Assembly (A/32/11) regarding the role of non-governmental organizations at the Preparatory Committee and at the special session. Furthermore, the recommendation that non-governmental organizations should be accorded the same facilities at the special session as they had received at the Preparatory Committee had been adopted by consensus in paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 32/88 B, endorsing the report. The Preparatory Committee was a body with limited participation and as such could not very well overrule a decision of the General Assembly. Also, it was hard to see what authority the Committee might have to issue invitations to non-governmental organizations; that would also leave unanswered the question as to how such invitations and meetings would be funded, since the existing financial provisions for the special session had been made on the basis of General Assembly resolution 32/88 B. Furthermore, Governments alone were responsible for the success or failure of the disarmament process and a true commitment to nuclear disarmament by the international community must obviously be governmental in nature.

5. He also felt that it would be extremely unwise to resurrect a precedent for the participation of non-governmental organizations in intergovernmental negotiations on disarmament which dated back to the World Disarmament Conference of 1932. It should be borne in mind that many other matters apart from disarmament would be on the agendas of the General Assembly at its future sessions which would also inevitably be of interest to certain non-governmental organizations. The interest of non-governmental organizations in the special session was justified and welcome, but the decisions already taken in that connexion were adequate and reasonable.

6. Mrs. THORSSON (Sweden) recalled that she had previously expressed regret at the limited facilities accorded at the meetings of the Preparatory Committee to non-governmental organizations and research institutes such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and said that she supported the United Kingdom proposal (A/AC.187/BR.25, para. 3) that provision should be made for a more direct relationship between the special session and non-governmental organizations. The United Kingdom's reasons for making those proposals had been the desire to promote the enlightenment of the peoples of the world about disarmament and recognition of the valuable role which they could play. Such organizations as SIPRI in her own country were highly competent and experienced in the substance of disarmament questions and did excellent work in informing public opinion and enlisting public support for disarmament. Their experience and contribution should be welcomed. The Committee should not be unduly formalistic but should remain open to new approaches because it could learn a great deal from such bodies. If the Preparatory Committee could not reach a consensus on the United Kingdom proposals, it should at the very least accept the Australian suggestion (A/AC.187/BR.25, para. 16) which would allow such organizations as SIPRI to present their views to the Committee of the Whole.

7. Miss BEAGLE (Observer for New Zealand) said that non-governmental organizations and research institutes could make a distinctive contribution in the...
form of research on disarmament and in increasing public awareness, promoting international activities and formulating disarmament proposals. She agreed whole-heartedly with the representative of Sweden that many valuable studies had come from such organizations, especially SIPRI. In her own country, for example, the National Consultative Committee on Disarmament provided an important and useful informal link between Governments and non-governmental organizations concerned with disarmament and facilitated an exchange of views between the two. Her delegation therefore favoured the United Kingdom proposal for setting aside a day during the special session to allow such organizations to present their views. It hoped that the special session would stimulate public awareness of the problems of disarmament and felt that such a day would be helpful in that connexion.

8. Mr. MORENO (Italy) said that his delegation had noted with interest the proposals made with respect to the role of non-governmental organizations. Greater awareness of progress on disarmament on the part of world public opinion was needed, and non-governmental organizations could contribute at both the national and international levels to enlightening it. They also provided useful expertise for carrying out studies on specific disarmament problems. His own country's organizations were prepared to contribute actively in that connexion. His delegation had welcomed the decision on the participation of non-governmental organizations and national research institutes in the Preparatory Committee, as well as the recommendation that the same facilities should be accorded them at the special session. Setting aside a special day outside the plenary programme was a possibility. Alternatively, the day immediately following the general debate might be the appropriate time. His delegation would welcome any other proposal, however, which was consistent with United Nations procedure and practice.

9. Mr. HOVEYDA (Iran) said that non-governmental organizations and research institutes undoubtedly made a very important contribution to disarmament efforts. On the other hand, their participation in the special session raised a delicate political problem. They should not be granted a hearing by way of rewarding them, as it were, for their work; rather, the United Nations should consider how it could benefit from what they had to offer.

10. Under those conditions, and having regard to the need to avoid setting a precedent or infringing the rules of procedure, he felt that they should be given the opportunity to express their views. In that respect the Australian proposal was more acceptable than the United Kingdom proposal. The Committee should therefore discuss what practical recommendations it could make to that end.

11. Mr. WELKER (United States of America) noted that, by providing information and ideas, non-governmental organizations supplemented the role of Governments and helped to mobilize the public support on which political will, so essential to progress in disarmament, depended. In his view, there should be an interchange between non-governmental organizations and Governments, both before and after the special session. Yet, despite the useful suggestions made for increasing public awareness, few ideas had been put forward as to the way in which the participation of non-governmental organizations in disarmament efforts after the special session could be enhanced.

/...
12. As to the question of selection, he felt that perhaps there should be more communication between the Committees on Non-Governmental Organizations in New York and Geneva respectively so that specific arrangements could be made. The selection of research institutes were particularly difficult: in the United States alone, he knew of at least five major centres concerned with disarmament studies. He suggested that there should be further discussion and that a decision should be deferred until the Committee's fifth session.

13. Mr. JAY (Canada) said he was gratified at the broad recognition given by delegations to the contribution of an enlightened public opinion, and welcomed the reception given to the Venezuelan and United Kingdom proposals.

14. The non-governmental organizations and peace research institutes made an invaluable contribution to the work of the United Nations. He agreed with the Iranian representative that the United Nations should not seek to reward them, but rather to derive further advantage from their work. It needed all the help it could get in its disarmament efforts. By participating in the special session, the non-governmental organizations would gain a political audience, and their prestige and persuasiveness after the special session had ended would be enhanced.

15. The Committee should not be put off by the difficulties which enabling non-governmental organizations to present their views would entail; he felt sure it could find an appropriate way without setting a precedent. In his view the Australian proposal was the minimum position that the Committee could take.

16. Mr. VAERNØ (Norway) associated his delegation with the views of the previous speaker. The Norwegian authorities thought very highly of the United Kingdom initiative and hoped that it would receive broad support, given the important role played by public opinion in disarmament matters.

17. He felt that the special session would provide an excellent opportunity to recognize the work of the non-governmental organizations and that the forthcoming meeting of non-governmental organizations on disarmament to be held at Geneva should be invited to endorse the idea. He also agreed with the United States representative that the Committees on Non-Governmental Organizations in New York and Geneva should be asked to consider the problem and to work out some arrangement with the Secretariat.

18. He also welcomed the United Kingdom suggestion that representatives of the research institutes should likewise be given the opportunity to address the special session. Over the years they had contributed significantly to knowledge of arms control and disarmament, giving fresh impetus to governmental action and mobilizing public opinion. He felt that the International Peace Research Association, which was their own non-governmental organization, could be asked to help solve the problem of their representation.

19. In conclusion, he agreed that the Committee should avoid being too formalistic. Like the New Zealand representative, he felt that in considering the participation of the non-governmental organizations, the Committee would not be overruling its parent body.

/...
20. Mr. MUTUKWA (Zambia) said that the non-governmental organizations made a positive contribution to the understanding of disarmament issues and that their role at the special session should be regarded as complementary to that of Member States. They had been particularly instrumental in disseminating information across national boundaries. However, he expressed some concern about the selection of non-governmental organizations: it was important not to overlook those in the third world about which less might be known.

21. As to the question of setting a precedent, his delegation maintained that the special session was itself a precedent and that there was room for creating precedents in the way in which the deliberations were conducted. An open-minded approach was needed: Member States should feel free to solicit as much information as possible.

22. Mr. ENTERLEIM (German Democratic Republic) said that his country believed it was of great importance to support the social organizations and great international movements, including the world peace movement, which actively contributed to maintaining and securing peace and achieving disarmament. It looked forward with interest to the Geneva meeting of non-governmental organizations on disarmament and believed that the Committee should welcome and support any wish that might be expressed by that meeting to submit a report on its deliberations to the special session. As to the manner of transmission of such a report, his delegation considered that more time was required for consultations and consideration. It therefore favoured the deferment of a decision until the April session.

23. The possible participation of representatives of scientific institutes in the special session was quite another matter. Regardless of the prestige they might enjoy, his delegation had doubts as to whether it was advisable for them to be heard at the special session. It believed that some other way should be found for their submissions and expertise to be made available.

24. Mr. UPADHYAY (Nepal) said that he welcomed the United Kingdom proposal, in view of the important role played by such institutes as SIPRI and the USSR Academy of Sciences in mobilizing public opinion in favour of disarmament. He observed that, in earlier years when communications had been less developed, the role of non-governmental organizations in disseminating information had been particularly important in isolated countries such as Nepal.

25. If the Committee felt that the participation of the non-governmental organizations would be useful, it should not be afraid to set a precedent. Indeed, their role in such bodies as the Special Committee against Apartheid was taken for granted. While he agreed that they should not be accorded the same status as Governments, he felt confident that a way could be found to ensure their participation. It was not a question of rewarding them; rather, the information which they could provide would be of great benefit, especially to smaller delegations. It was also to be hoped that they would act as a catalyst, since they could be more objective than Governments.

26. Miss LOPEZ (Venezuela), noting that her delegation had already stressed the role of the non-governmental organizations in helping to disseminate information
about disarmament, said that their contribution to the special session would be very valuable. Although it was not in a position to make any specific proposal on how those organizations might participate, it was ready to work with other delegations to find a formula acceptable to the majority.

27. Mr. ERNEMANN (Belgium) said that the United Kingdom delegation had rightly stressed the role of public opinion and its relationship to the work of the special session. His delegation took a positive attitude towards the participation of non-governmental organizations, not least because the Association of International Non-Governmental Organizations was based in Brussels and headed by a Belgian.

28. There were, however, two provisos regarding the participation of non-governmental organizations. First, the principles of the Charter and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should not be violated. The special session, like a regular session of the General Assembly, was restricted to participation by representatives of Member States. There was no precedent for the participation of non-governmental organizations and the special session should not create one. He supported the view expressed by a number of delegations that the non-governmental organizations should be heard at committee meetings or meetings of the Committee of the Whole, but not at plenary meetings.

29. Secondly, there was the problem of selection. It was obvious that not all non-governmental organizations concerned with disarmament would be able to speak. There had been a suggestion that non-governmental organizations should agree among themselves on their representatives. There might be some difficulties in that regard if they had to await the endorsement of the special session before holding such consultations. Some unofficial consultations with the non-governmental organizations during the forthcoming Geneva conference might help obviate those difficulties.

30. Non-governmental organizations in his own country were showing great interest in the special session. A press conference had already been held and a demonstration was planned for 7 May. There were plans afoot to organize an international demonstration outside United Nations Headquarters later that month.

31. Mr. MIHALJOVIC (Yugoslavia) observed that there was obviously no disagreement about the value and the importance of non-governmental organizations presenting their views at the special session. Their valuable work in the field of disarmament was recognized. The research institutes too, particularly SIPRI at Stockholm, were providing many countries with extremely useful information on disarmament. A way must be found to give non-governmental organizations the opportunity to address the special session, without infringing the Charter and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

32. Mr. RIOS (Panama) said it was only fitting that non-governmental organizations devoted to the promotion of disarmament should participate more directly in the special session. The achievement of disarmament was a difficult matter. It was logical that any stimulus non-governmental organizations could give in attaining that goal should be welcomed and could be expected to bear fruit.
33. One of the obstacles to efforts in favour of disarmament was scepticism in the world at large. Unfortunately, such scepticism was justified to some extent, but if the non-governmental organizations were convinced that their proposals would be given due attention they might have greater motivation to enlarge their field of action, especially by disseminating information on disarmament, which was, after all, an issue crucial to mankind's survival.

34. I agree with the representative of Iran that it was not a matter of distributing prizes to non-governmental organizations. The idea was to open the door to their wider participation in the special session, not so that they could compete with Member States or arrogate rights to which they were not entitled, but so that they could bring to the special session the best of their talents and their devotion to peace. No subject dealt with by the United Nations merited the participation of non-governmental organizations more than disarmament.

35. My delegation believed that the Committee was authorized to take decisions to enable non-governmental organizations to play a greater role in the special session. He did not doubt that there would be a good response from such organizations.

36. Mrs. NOWOTNY (Austria) stated that the merits of non-governmental organizations were not in question and there was no doubt that their contribution to the work of the special session would be extremely valuable and important. There was much benefit to be drawn from their knowledge and experience and she supported the proposal made by Australia with regard to their participation in the special session.

37. Mr. HARRY (Australia) explained that his delegation's wish to see facilities for non-governmental organizations slightly extended was based on the experience of the past year and the response from such organizations during the preparations for the special session. No doubt all delegations had been receiving the useful documents prepared by them, especially by SIPRI. There was great merit in the United Kingdom proposal that non-governmental organizations and peace research institutes should be able to make oral presentations at the special session, provided they could agree among themselves on a panel.

38. The Preparatory Committee obviously had no mandate, nor the organizational or financial resources necessary, to organize a non-governmental organizations day. However, there could be no objection if those organizations themselves decided to organize such an event.

39. It would be inappropriate under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly for non-governmental organizations to be heard during the general debate, but they should be allowed to speak in the Committee of the Whole. Since their submissions could be useful in drawing up the final documents, it would be appropriate if they spoke after the general debate but before the Committee of the Whole began its final negotiations. Rather than making lengthy statements, it should be suggested that they submit documents, merely summarizing their views in their oral submissions.
40. The CHAIRMAN, summing up the debate, said that it was clear that everyone agreed on the importance of the role of non-governmental organizations and the valuable contribution they could make to the special session. There appeared to be certain reservations, however, with regard to the manner or extent of their participation. Many delegations had supported the idea of selecting a day on which non-governmental organizations could be heard, while it had also been felt that a suitable formula should be sought, without infringing the rules of procedure, to enable them to appear before the Committee of the Whole. Some delegations had sounded a note of warning against setting a precedent in that respect.

41. A good number of delegations had expressed the view that it was somewhat premature to take a decision immediately and that consultations should be pursued. At that stage the best procedure would appear to be to defer a decision and entrust him with the task of consulting the officers and the various delegations and groups, with a view to arriving at a consensus which would take account of all the views that had been expressed.

42. In his opinion, the second alternative proposed by the United Kingdom, namely, to set aside the day prior to the opening of the special session, would create financial, organizational and other difficulties and he proposed that consultations should focus on the first alternative. He would also hold consultations to see if a consensus could be reached on the selection of non-governmental organizations and on the participation of peace research institutes, including the possibility of adding some of the institutes that had been mentioned by various delegations.

43. He hoped that it would be possible to reach a satisfactory solution and would report to the Committee on the results of his consultations in due course. If agreement could not be reached by the conclusion of the current session, the decision could be taken at the fifth session in April. He pointed out that whatever formula was agreed upon would be in the nature of a recommendation to be considered by the special session when it convened.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.