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

Fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 31st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 17 February 1978, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

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78-55229 /...
The meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.

PRINCIPAL DOCUMENTS OF THE SPECIAL SESSION (continued)

1. Mr. VAERHO (Norway), introducing the working paper on international machinery for disarmament (A/AC.107/103) prepared by his delegation and those of Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, observed that, as stated in the first paragraph, a large number of countries favoured increased involvement on the part of the United Nations in the work on disarmament and all countries had a role to play in the disarmament process. The special session would provide an opportunity for greater participation in that process.

2. Although there was little doubt that political will on the part of Governments was the major prerequisite for achieving progress in the field of disarmament, the need for appropriate machinery for the conduct of disarmament negotiations had also been clearly demonstrated. The existing disarmament machinery, both within and outside the United Nations, had certain short-comings; hence the decision to review that subject at the special session.

3. The working paper had been drawn up against that background. It made no attempt to outline a comprehensive solution, but recommended some steps which the sponsors were convinced would facilitate the disarmament process.

4. Section II underlined the importance of having one deliberative body comprising all United Nations Member States meeting annually to consider the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments and suggested that that might involve a restructuring of the First Committee to deal exclusively with disarmament and related questions in future. It called for the prompt implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament and for follow-up to the programme of action. It also recommended that the question of convening a further special session devoted to disarmament should be dealt with at the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

5. Under section III, concerning the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD), the sponsors sought, firstly, to facilitate the participation of all nuclear-weapon States in the work of that body and, secondly, to encourage further participation of non-nuclear-weapon States by a limited increase in its size and by arrangements for non-CCD member States to attend plenary meetings as observers and to participate fully in other meetings when their particular concerns were under discussion. However, there would be no change in CCD's consensus procedures or in its function as the principal multilateral negotiating body. The sponsors believed that the link between CCD and the United Nations should be strengthened and that a greater role should be considered for the Secretary-General's representative. Another important step was the improvement of opportunities for the public to follow CCD activities.

6. Section IV suggested that the Disarmament Centre should be strengthened so as to enable it to implement the decisions taken at the special session and should be
provided with sufficient capacity to enable it to prepare reports and expert studies, produce information material and increase its contacts with Member States, non-governmental organizations and research institutions.

7. Mr. VINCI (Italy) said that although his delegation had not been in a position to sponsor the document, it found some of the basic ideas contained in it to be of considerable interest. It supported the demand for wider and more active participation of all States Members of the United Nations in the study of the general principles governing disarmament and arms control, in some appropriate forum such as the General Assembly. The principle of the special responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States and other militarily significant States must be stressed. Furthermore, it was essential that disarmament negotiations should be conducted in a forum which would be of a size conducive to the effectiveness of its deliberations, would have the requisite expertise at its disposal, would be geographically and politically balanced and would take decisions by consensus.

8. The Italian Government had accordingly reacted very favourably to the recent remarks made by the President of the French Republic and to the statement and documents submitted by the representative of France to the Preparatory Committee, all of which were evidence of that country's will to continue contributing to the activities of the international community in the field of disarmament. His Government would be paying close attention to those and any other proposals submitted to the Committee, particularly by certain non-aligned countries.

9. The effectiveness of the machinery for disarmament was no less important than the content of the declaration and the programme of action and his delegation intended to take an active role in the preparation of the draft document on that subject.

10. Mr. de LAIGLESIA (Spain) expressed the view that machinery for disarmament negotiations was one of the most important items to be discussed by the special session. He believed it was generally agreed that the role of the United Nations should be considerably strengthened; the establishment of a deliberative body comprising all Member States was one way of achieving that purpose. He did not think it would be helpful, however, for the First Committee to deal exclusively with disarmament.

11. It was important that the achievements of the special session should be followed up in the future; the inclusion of the programme of action on the agenda of the thirty-third session of the General Assembly would be a step in that direction. The possibility of holding further special sessions devoted to disarmament should not be excluded. The question of negotiations raised serious problems. So far, the major responsibility had rested with CCD. Although that body had been enlarged over the years, its modus operandi still did not take due account of the desires of a large sector of the international community. In recent years steps had been taken to enable United Nations Member States to keep abreast of CCD activities and the points of view of non-CCD members had been taken into account on various occasions. However, a way had to be found to permit all States which could contribute to its work to join CCD. Only by involving all interested States in its negotiations could progress be made.
12. Mr. HARRY (Australia), speaking on behalf of his own delegation and the delegations of Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, drew attention to the communiqué issued by the Commonwealth Heads of Government of the Asian and Pacific Region meeting in Sydney from 13 to 16 February 1976, in which they had welcomed the forthcoming special session as a positive step towards world peace and security, expressed their deep appreciation of the initiative taken by the non-aligned movement and other countries to secure the convening of the special session, and voiced the hope that it would lead to concrete action promoting the objective of genuine and complete disarmament and the application of the resources thus released to ensure a better life for the peoples of the world.

13. Mr. BERG (Belgium) said that his delegation supported the working paper (A/AC.187/103) as a useful starting-point for discussions on the negotiating machinery. The reference to CCD was most welcome but the document did not seem to deal adequately with the concerns of some States whose participation in the work of CCD would seem to be desirable. His Government would consider any proposals for changes in CCD likely to improve its efficiency.

14. Mr. GARCIA ROBLES (Mexico) said that the working paper included many valuable and highly constructive ideas, a number of which were identical with those set forth in his own delegation's working paper (A/AC.187/99).

15. It was not clear from section II whether the sponsors intended the First Committee to become the deliberative body on disarmament or whether, like his own delegation, they favoured the establishment of a new body. If a new body was intended, further details would be required. The working paper spoke of participation of all nuclear-weapon States in CCD, (sect. III, para. 1). He sought clarification from the sponsors as to whether they considered such participation possible and whether their proposal involved retaining the present co-chairmanship of CCD.

16. Mrs. THORSSON (Sweden) said that the working paper included a number of excellent ideas which could provide a useful basis for the work of the drafting group. While she fully endorsed the Introduction as a whole, she could not agree with its last two sentences. Sweden was one of many States which had stressed that disarmament negotiations were the concern of all States and that therefore all States should have an opportunity to participate in them. She was particularly disturbed by the sentence "Some important questions can better be handled on a bilateral or regional basis." Much depended on the definition of "some important questions". The comprehensive test-ban treaty under discussion in Geneva, for example, must be made multilateral as soon as possible.

17. The guidelines proposed in the working paper included many useful ideas which she hoped would be accepted by consensus in the drafting group. However, she could not agree with paragraph 4 of section II. The question of convening a further special session must be decided at the special session itself. It should under no circumstances be left until the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The aim should be an action-oriented programme of work to begin immediately after the special session. Furthermore, it was important that the guidelines should reflect the request made by her country, Mexico and others that the system of
co-chairmanship of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament should be changed. That request should be taken up at the special session, where she hoped it would obtain wide support.

18. Mr. SOKALSKI (Poland) said that his delegation's statement before the Preparatory Committee and document A/AC.187/82 submitted by the socialist States had made his country's position clear. States should make effective use of all channels for the conduct of negotiations in order to achieve disarmament. The question of machinery, which came under agenda item 12 of the special session, was also referred to in paragraph 18 of the Preparatory Committee's report to the General Assembly (A/32/41), which the Assembly had endorsed in its resolution 32/88 B. The Preparatory Committee was somewhat handicapped as long as it did not have the two important reports - those of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and of the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference - referred to in that paragraph. Under the circumstances, the Preparatory Committee's work and its deliberations on machinery for disarmament would not fully reflect the existing situation, and that might present some difficulty, which he hoped could be solved through co-operation.

19. Mr. DATCU (Romania) said that equal attention should not be paid to all the documents to be adopted by the special session. Priority should be given to stressing the integrated nature of the decisions to be taken. An over-all view of the tasks and problems should emerge from the session. He agreed with the view that the drafting group must discuss structural problems, and, with respect to principles, he expressed the conviction that in view of the close link between disarmament and the national security of all States, all States must participate in negotiations on the basis of complete equality. There were no major and minor interests. All States had an equal interest in security and therefore all should participate as a matter of principle.

20. Mr. MULT (India) recalled that the non-aligned States had previously called for the establishment of a special committee of the United Nations for the elaboration of a comprehensive programme of disarmament measures to be submitted to the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly at the latest. His delegation would, nevertheless, give careful consideration to the proposals in working paper A/AC.187/103.

21. Mr. FALASE (Nigeria) said that his delegation agreed with the spirit of the proposal in working paper A/AC.187/103. The Conference of the Committee on Disarmament seemed to be the principal multinational negotiating body on disarmament, but as such it must undergo fundamental reform. The drafting group must address the fundamental aspects of that reform, i.e., that of structure and procedures, including specifically the institution of co-chairmen, so as to make it a more effective body. The Conference should establish a permanent working group to ensure that all Members could take effective part in negotiations.

22. His delegation also favoured any procedures which might be devised to strengthen the link between the Conference and the General Assembly. The Assembly
had requested the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament to submit a draft comprehensive negotiating programme to the special session, but the Committee did not yet know whether it would succeed in doing so. It would be the task of the special session to consider, on the basis of the report submitted by the Conference, whether it would be worth while to ask the Conference, through its standing committee, to continue preparation of a programme if it had not yet completed one, or whether the General Assembly itself should proceed to appoint a committee to look into that matter. It was important to keep an open mind on the issue because much depended on the kind of report received from the Conference.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.