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

Fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 14 April 1978, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina)

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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 11.10 a.m.

FINAL REPORT OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE TO THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that a decision had yet to be taken on the proposal of the representative of Mexico (A/AC.187/SR.8) that all documents submitted to the Committee should appear as annexes to the Committee's final report to the special session of the Assembly. With regard to the financial implications of the decision, the Secretariat had reported that many of the documents in question were out of stock and would have to be reprinted. The cost of producing the documents and compiling them into several volumes would be greater if translation into Arabic was included; there was also the possibility that the Arabic version would not be ready in time for the opening of the special session.

2. Mr. DURANT (Office of Financial Services) said that the existing documentation in five languages (approximately 1,000 pages) would now have to be reproduced in six languages, including Arabic. The Department of Conference Services had indicated that, in view of the present workload, it would probably be necessary to use an outside printer. The cost of translation into Arabic, revision, typing and preparation for external printing would be $98,000; if an outside printer was employed to produce all the documents, including the series in Arabic, that would bring the amount to $144,700; Lastly, when the cost of distributing the documents was added, the total figure would be $222,000.

3. It would not be known until the end of the current biennium whether those costs could be absorbed under existing budget appropriations, or whether a supplementary appropriation would have to be requested of the General Assembly. If such a request proved necessary, it would have to be made when the budget performance report was submitted.

4. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq) pointed out that Arabic was an official language of the General Assembly and that the necessary action should therefore be taken to provide translation into Arabic. As it was quite some time since the decision to hold a special session devoted to disarmament had been adopted, the necessary action should already have been taken to cover the cost of translation into Arabic with funds from the regular budget.

5. Mr. LENNUYEUX-COMMENE (France) said that the financial obstacles were not insurmountable, particularly if, as seemed likely, the costs of production could be absorbed within the regular budget for the biennium. He therefore supported the Mexican proposal that the report should contain as annexes all the documents prepared as a result of the Committee's work.

6. Mr. BARTON (Canada) said that the provisions of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly applied to the question under discussion, and all existing documentation should therefore be available in all the official languages at the beginning of the special session.

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7. If there was a time problem, the matter could be dealt with in two stages by concentrating first on the preparation of basic documents (contributions by the Secretariat, conclusions of the Committee, etc.) and leaving until later the publication of a separate annex which could contain earlier documentation of historical value.

8. Mr. WEILER (United States of America) said that he agreed in principle with the Mexican delegation's proposal, but requested that a decision should be postponed until the next meeting to allow time for consideration of the financial information presented by the Secretariat.

9. Replying to a question put by Mr. WEILER (United States of America), the CHAIRMAN said that the Committee was competent to take such a decision, which would be a recommendation that would then have to pass through the competent financial organs of the Secretariat.

10. He urged the Committee to take an affirmative decision as soon as possible. Speaking personally, he pointed out that world expenditure on armaments amounted to $40 million an hour.

11. Mr. GARCIA ROBLES (Mexico) said that any delegation which had voted in favour of convening, for the first time, a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament had ipso facto voted to incur whatever costs might be necessary to meet "customary" obligations. The list of documents prepared by the Secretariat (Conference Room Paper 16) was not too lengthy, and the whole of the documentation could probably be issued in four volumes, which was not much in comparison with the six volumes that had been issued for the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. In the view of his delegation, there was an inescapable obligation to provide the General Assembly with all the documents referred to in Conference Room Paper 16; the fact that one or another of them was not available in one of the official languages was no reason for failing in that obligation. Moreover, as the representative of the Office of Financial Services and the Chairman had noted, some of the documents were out of stock and would have to be reprinted. Although it was not possible at the moment to determine whether the cost of reproducing those documents would be partly or wholly absorbed within the approved budget, the additional costs would at worst amount to $222,000, a sum only slightly larger than what the world spent on armaments in 18 seconds.

12. Mr. PFEIFFER (Federal Republic of Germany) said the fact that the Committee could only make recommendations to the competent United Nations organs with respect to the funds needed to finance the documentation should make it easier to take an immediate decision. In his view, the documents should be ready before the opening of the special session, so as to facilitate the work not only of delegations but also of the information media.

OTHER BUSINESS

13. Replying to a question put by Mr. BANTON (Canada) concerning the request for additional funds submitted by the Office of Public Information (note by the
Secretariat of 23 February 1978), the CHAIRMAN said that, even if the Committee approved the additional funds, their use would require the approval of the relevant organs of the General Assembly.

14. Mr. BARTON (Canada) asked whether, in that case, it would not be reasonable to use the funds available to the Secretary-General for unforeseen expenses, which would be approved subsequently in accordance with the usual budgetary procedure.

15. Mr. DURANT (Office of Financial Services) said that, as stated in the Secretariat note of 23 February 1978, the funds available to the Office of Public Information would not cover the activities envisaged. Consequently, if the Committee decided to recommend that those activities should be carried out, the prior approval of ACABQ would have to be sought before they could be initiated. The Advisory Committee was at present in session, but only until early in the following week.

16. Mr. ADENIJI (Nigeria) said that he was in favour of giving the widest possible dissemination to the proposed brochures before and after the special session, although he appreciated the restrictions imposed by the limited funds available for producing them in non-official languages. Judging by the document of 23 February 1978, the range of non-official languages did not seem to reflect an equitable geographical distribution, and his delegation would therefore like to know from the representative of OPI whether any specific criteria had been used in selecting the languages.

17. Mr. GRIBKOV (Office of Public Information) said that the languages mentioned in the Secretariat note of 23 February 1978 were only an indicative listing. In the first place, the list of non-official languages was incomplete; in addition, there was the possibility that some Member States would arrange for their own services, official or other, to help with the translation. Generally speaking, the criteria used to determine the need for translations of the brochures would be mainly numerical; in other words, the decision would depend on the number of people who used a language. It should be borne in mind that the system of United Nations information centres covered only some languages, and Swahili and other African languages should certainly have priority if agreement was reached on the provision of additional funds.

18. Mr. PFEIFFER (Federal Republic of Germany) observed that the number of languages into which the brochures were translated would affect the final cost, and it would therefore be necessary to have a list before a decision was taken.

19. Mr. ADENIJI (Nigeria) said that, even if the list of non-official languages was indicative and not exhaustive, it should take into account the purpose of producing the brochures and the resources available. In his view, the basic criterion should be the number of people whom the various language versions would reach.

20. He was glad that the representative of ILO had pointed out the omission of Swahili from the list of non-official languages, which he hoped would include Swahili and possibly another language that was widely used in West Africa, Hausa;
otherwise, one or perhaps two integral parts of the African continent would be excluded from the public information activities.

21. Replying to a question put by Mr. VINCI (Italy), Mr. DURANT (Office of Financial Services) said that the activities could begin as soon as the approval of ACABQ was obtained.

22. Mr. GRIĐKOV (Office of Public Information) said that, in carrying out the proposed activities, the Office of Public Information would be guided by the decisions or recommendations of the Committee. As for the reallocation of resources, that was in accordance with the decisions taken at the thirty-second session of the General Assembly.

23. Mr. SOKALSKI (Poland) said that he had no objections to the activities planned by OPI in connexion with the special session, which should be an important event from the standpoint of public information as well as in other respects. However, it should be borne in mind that the Preparatory Committee had no authority to make recommendations or decisions on financial questions. It could only recommend that the programme of activities should be approved, on the understanding that ACABQ and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly would have to give thorough consideration to the financial implications of the programmes in question.

24. The CHAIRMAN said that the representative of Poland was correct. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Preparatory Committee agreed to recommend approval of the public information activities in connexion with the special session, which would have additional financial implications as described in the note by the Secretariat of 23 February 1978 and in document A/AC.187/83, except that the cost of item B.6 would be reduced from $12,000 to $6,000 and that of item (e) from $10,000 to $5,000, on the understanding that OPI would take due account of the comments made on the subject by various members of the Preparatory Committee.

25. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.