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

Second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 13 May 1977, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. ORTIZ DE ROZAS (Argentina)

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77-55904
The meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to documents A/AC.187/29, A/AC.187/30 and A/AC.187/31 prepared by the Secretariat at the Committee's request, which contained a compilation of disarmament resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, a paper on existing principles and proposals for the conduct of disarmament negotiations, and a description of the existing structures and machinery for disarmament negotiations. The documents were in English; the other language versions would be circulated as soon as they were ready.

2. Mr. BJØRNBERGSTEDT (Assistant Secretary-General, Centre for Disarmament) said that delegations had asked the Secretariat to consider preparing a number of studies and background papers for use by the Preparatory Committee. The request had been considered from the standpoint of existing resources and of the time available for preparing such documents between meetings of the Committee.

3. With regard to the request made by the representative of Mexico, who had asked for information on the 10 working papers mentioned in the Mexican reply (A/AC.187/34), the Secretariat believed that it might be possible to prepare them, on the understanding that they would be summaries or comparative lists providing essential background information for the use of delegations, but would not in any way constitute in-depth studies on each topic.

4. He wished to mention that it would be rather difficult to obtain information on some of the 10 points mentioned in the Mexican reply, such as point 9, concerning agreements concluded in the strategic arms limitation talks, since those negotiations were confidential and it was impossible to obtain an up-to-date and reliable report on every detail. As to point 6, the report would be incomplete, since information was not available on every single disarmament meeting. With respect to the Polish request that the Secretariat should prepare a compilation of all disarmament agreements and proposals officially submitted to the United Nations, that information was already covered in detail in two books on the question of disarmament covering the period 1945-1975. However, the Secretariat understood that what the representative of Poland had in mind was a compilation of the essential parts of all the agreements. In that as well as in the other cases, the Secretariat would appreciate it if delegations would give it some guidance as to the urgency and priorities of the various papers envisaged, so that it could concentrate on those which would be of immediate use.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

5. Mr. VAERMO (Norway) said that the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament offered a valuable opportunity for focusing global attention on a complex of problems which urgently required re-evaluation, fresh thoughts and, above all, political action. Not only did the arms race represent a
threat to peace and to the security of all nations; it also involved an unacceptable waste of resources in a world of poverty and distress. The special session would contribute to a greater understanding and awareness on the part of the public of issues which to an increasing extent were becoming technical questions only fully understood by experts. In that connexion, the non-governmental organizations had an important function to perform.

6. There now seemed to exist general agreement on the basic elements of the agenda for the special session, and he appealed to delegations to finalize that agreement so that the Committee could move on to other areas of activity.

7. Norway felt that disarmament issues should be viewed in a broad political context, and it would be particularly important to consider them also from a resource and development perspective. In that connexion, Norway would regard the preparation of a United Nations study on the relationship between disarmament and economic and social development, in the context of a new international economic order, as a valuable contribution.

8. Regarding specific arms control and disarmament questions, his delegation, like many others, felt that the special session should prepare a realistic programme of action. There seemed to be general agreement that the question of nuclear proliferation, vertical as well as horizontal, should be given priority.

9. Norway supported the idea that the agenda of the special session should include the question of strengthening the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. It would seem natural, as a first step, to base its work on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, adopted by the General Assembly at its thirty-first session. He considered the following measures to be of particular importance: improving the methods of work of the First Committee of the General Assembly in disarmament matters; improving existing United Nations facilities for the collection, compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament issues; increased use of in-depth studies of the arms race, disarmament and related matters, and strengthening of the resources of the United Nations Secretariat.

10. With regard to negotiations on general and complete disarmament, Norway had always emphasized the particular importance of the participation of all nuclear-weapon States, whether in CCD, in the special session or in an eventual World Disarmament Conference. Such a conference would not be meaningful unless all militarily important States took part, especially all nuclear Powers. However, that did not seem to be a realistic prospect at present.

11. Mr. UPADHYAY (Nepal) said the fact that the General Assembly resolution convening a special session devoted to disarmament had been adopted by consensus was an indication of the growing willingness of States to participate in disarmament negotiations in a broader forum. The existing bilateral and multilateral forums
for negotiations had been unable to achieve any significant results in the field of disarmament, and as a consequence the world was armed to the teeth with the most lethal array of weapons imaginable.

12. Sensing the urgency and seriousness of the problem, the non-aligned countries had taken a positive step at their fifth summit meeting in Colombo in 1976 and had adopted a resolution calling on the United Nations to convene a special session devoted to disarmament. The General Assembly of the United Nations had subsequently adopted, at its thirty-first session, a resolution to convene a special session devoted to disarmament.

13. Problems relating to disarmament could not be solved in one or two special sessions of the General Assembly. Everyone knew that the problems were too complex and myriad in nature. But the time had come to tackle the issues squarely rather than to avoid them simply because they were too numerous and complicated. The special session would provide an unprecedented opportunity and a suitable framework for all endeavours to that end. Success or failure would depend to a large extent on the work done by the Preparatory Committee and the progress achieved in its deliberations. The first task before the Committee was to agree on an agenda for the special session. Once there was agreement on the agenda, it would be much easier to plan the future work of the Committee. Although not exhaustive, the four items enumerated in document A/AC.187/43, submitted by Ambassador Amerasinghe on behalf of the non-aligned group, covered by and large the main areas that the special session would have to concentrate on. As pointed out in that document, the special session should proceed with the review and appraisal of the present international situation and the causes underlying the lack of progress in the field of disarmament, since such a stock-taking would make it possible to correct mistakes and chart a future course of action with greater prospects of success.

14. Disarmament must be linked with economic development. However unpalatable it might be to a few, the truth remained that disarmament could contribute to real development in a great number of countries and benefit the vast majority of mankind while at the same time imparting a sense of international peace and security.

15. The special session should take up other important questions like the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty, the concept of the nuclear-weapon-free zone and the creation of zones of peace. One of the most alarming features of the current situation was the phenomenal growth in conventional arms. The production and development of conventional weapons at present accounted for four fifths of the entire expenditure on armaments. That problem therefore required study, as did the effect of international trade in arms on the growth of conventional arms.

16. Having reviewed and discussed the existing situation, the special session should draw up and adopt a declaration of principles on disarmament, along with a
comprehensive programme of action in that field. There seemed to be a broad
degree of agreement on that point.

17. A major area for consideration should be the machinery for disarmament. His
delegation considered that the United Nations should play an increasingly active
role in the field of disarmament. It supported the convening of a World
Disarmament Conference with the participation of all major Powers, including the
nuclear Powers.

16. In conclusion, he wished to point out that many non-governmental
organizations had been actively associated for many years with questions relating
to disarmament; their knowledge and experience should be utilized and they should
be encouraged to continue their useful work.

19. Mr. FLORIN (German Democratic Republic) said that the German Democratic
Republic was striving for general and complete disarmament and was ready to exert
the greatest efforts to that end. How that the necessity of halting the arms race
and making a start on disarmament was apparent, there was a more favourable climate
for the adoption of concrete measures to that end. The United Nations had a
special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security by
implementing the decisions of its various organs.

20. The resolution on the World Disarmament Conference had been adopted in 1961
and had been confirmed at all subsequent sessions of the General Assembly. A
World Disarmament Conference, with the participation of all States, would be a
proper representative forum in which broad measures for disarmament could be
discussed. The Government of the German Democratic Republic believed that such a
conference would have the necessary authority to achieve real progress on the
question of disarmament. A session of the General Assembly, or a special session,
could not replace a world conference. In the view of the German Democratic
Republic, the link between a special session devoted to disarmament and the World
Disarmament Conference was that the special session could and should be made an
important step in the process of convening a World Disarmament Conference. That
position was in keeping with the Colombo Declaration, and he regretted the attempts
which had been made to ignore the basic document of the Colombo Conference on so
important a question.

21. With regard to the agenda for the special session, his delegation considered
that it would be inappropriate at the current stage to adopt hard and fast
formulations which in fact constituted an assessment of the situation prevailing
in the disarmament field. The decisions of the General Assembly should not be
anticipated, since there was always a danger of being mistaken.

22. On the other hand, neither was it possible to use as the sole basis existing
agreements and treaties, since in recent decades international relations had
unquestionably undergone decisive changes. It was a fact that the first partial
results in the field of arms limitation already existed in the form of bilateral
and multilateral agreements.
23. The German Democratic Republic had always linked consideration of the problem of arms limitation and disarmament with that of many other questions of world-wide importance, since all were closely bound up with the security of States, and their solution was therefore very complex.

24. The failure of certain bodies to achieve positive results could frequently be explained by the lack of will on the part of States. His delegation hoped that the debate which would take place at the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament would create an atmosphere conducive to achieving positive agreements in the disarmament field.

25. Even if the special session merely established principles, that would nevertheless constitute a new step in the desired direction. The final document or documents might contain something more than mere principles, since proposals already existed with regard to curtailment of the nuclear arms race, prohibition of nuclear tests, banning and destruction of chemical weapons, prohibition of new types of weapons of mass destruction and reduction of armed forces and conventional weapons. In that connexion, the memorandum on questions of ending the arms race and disarmament, submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in September 1976 (A/31/232), deserved detailed study.

26. As to the final document or documents, there was a need for prior study of the replies sent by Governments to the Secretary-General in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 31/189 B. He regretted to note that fewer than half of all Member States had submitted replies.

27. During the forthcoming weeks questions directly related to the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament would be considered in many forums. Disarmament questions would also be considered at the thirty-second session of the General Assembly. The outcome of all those discussions should be borne in mind during preparations for the special session. Consequently, only after the thirty-second session would it be possible to make concrete preparations for drawing up a final document of the special session.

28. Like the other States of the socialist community, the German Democratic Republic felt that the special session should contribute to the solution of disarmament problems.

29. At the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee (A/AC.187/SR.1), his delegation had pointed out that, when the Committee was being set up, the views of the socialist States of Eastern Europe had not been taken into account. Accordingly, it would be appropriate if the question of the composition of the Preparatory Committee was examined at the thirty-second session of the General Assembly with a view to increasing the number of its members. The Committee's report to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session should include a recommendation to that effect.
30. In the statement made by Poland on 10 May 1977 (A/AC.187/5/SR.5), the Secretariat had been requested to provide the Committee with a document listing disarmament proposals officially submitted to the United Nations. That document would present the substance of the proposal, the date and country of submission, and the status of its follow-up. His delegation supported that suggestion, since it felt that the document would enrich the working documents available to delegations.

31. Mr. ASHE (United Kingdom) said that his delegation warmly welcomed the decision taken by the Committee at its fourth meeting (A/AC.187/8/SR.4) concerning the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Committee, since the subjects under discussion affected the way of life of peoples all over the world. The non-governmental organizations, which reflected public opinion on questions of disarmament, should have the opportunity to make known to delegations their views on the matters under discussion, and it was to be hoped that they would take advantage of the possibilities which the Committee had provided for them.

32. On the subject of the agenda of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, he felt that the wording of the agenda should not be prejudicial to the points of view of any particular State or group of States. Therefore, with regard to item 1, which would consist of a general debate, his delegation did not favour language which appeared to make a judgement in regard to the present disarmament situation or attempted to single out some aspects of the special session's deliberations as being more significant than others. Similarly, with regard to item 4, his delegation felt it inappropriate to single out specific proposals concerning international disarmament machinery, since that could endanger the prospects of active participation by all members in the work of the special session. Such selection would amount to discrimination. His delegation hoped that the special session would result in broad agreement on disarmament machinery and the means by which the work of the special session should be followed up. The special session was still a year away and it was not appropriate in 1977 to prejudge decisions which the special session was to consider in 1978.

33. On the subject of the documentation which the Committee should request the United Nations Centre for Disarmament to provide, he was grateful to the representative of Mexico for his proposal that the Centre should prepare a document summarizing the views of Governments on different aspects of the special session under appropriate headings. For the rest, it would be necessary to proceed with some caution. In the first place, there was the question of finance. The General Assembly at its thirty-first session had allocated the sum of $90,000 for the preparation of background documents for the special session, and he felt that the Secretariat should not be requested to provide material costing more than the sum available. Moreover, the Centre for Disarmament had limited manpower. More important, in requesting the Centre to prepare studies, it was necessary to bear in mind the political implications of those studies. His delegation had a high regard for the impartiality of the Centre for Disarmament and for its ability to deal with potentially difficult subjects in a non-controversial manner. However, it felt that the Centre should not be asked to prepare studies which would require of it political judgements of the sort which international civil servants, who must always remain impartial, should not be asked to make.

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34. As to the future work of the Committee once the agenda for the special session had been agreed, his delegation agreed with the views expressed by the representative of Sweden at the 5th meeting (A/AC.187/SR.5) to the effect that the primary object of the present session of the Preparatory Committee should be to start action oriented preparations for the special session so as to lay a basis for other discussions on the substantive issues before the special session itself. The representative of Sweden had also said that by the end of the current session of the Committee a decision should be taken concerning the work to be accomplished during the intersessional period. His delegation further agreed with the statement made by the representative of Romania on 11 May (A/AC.187/SR.6) to the effect that the Committee had the responsibility to complete the preparation of the draft documents of the special session before the session opened. Similarly, his delegation agreed with the suggestions made by the representative of Canada and was also willing to give positive consideration to other proposals concerning ways in which work on the basic documents of the special session could be pursued between the present time and September.

35. His delegation repeated its pledge to play an active and positive role in the search for a co-operative approach to the problems to be considered both by the Preparatory Committee and at the special session and drew attention to the fact that, in the reply sent to the Secretary-General in compliance with resolution 31/109 B, the United Kingdom Government had expressed the view that a special session could enhance the prospects for disarmament, provided that it was thoroughly prepared and widely attended, particularly by all significant military Powers. Thorough preparation meant that preparations should start as soon as possible, wide and active attendance would be facilitated by a sensible compromise on the question of the agenda. Such a compromise would be an important first step in the achievement of the co-operative approach which was sought.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.