Thirty-first session
FIRST COMMITTEE
Agenda item 49

GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 26 November 1976 from the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith an aide-mémoire concerning the regional aspects of disarmament and arms control.

I should be grateful if you would have this text circulated as an official General Assembly document under agenda item 49, "General and complete disarmament".

(Signed) André ERNEMANN
Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations
Aide-mémoire on the regional aspects of disarmament and arms control

1. A substantial part of the statement made in the General Assembly on 29 September 1976 by Mr. Van Elslande, Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, was devoted to disarmament problems, including the regional aspects of disarmament.

   The Belgian ideas on the regional aspects of disarmament were subsequently expressed in the statement made by the Belgian representative on 9 November 1976, in the general debate on disarmament, at the 26th meeting of the First Committee.

2. In a written communication addressed to the Secretary-General on 27 April concerning the strengthening of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament Belgium had already stated: "The possibilities for negotiations on disarmament and arms control, at the regional level, may not have been given sufficient attention in the discussions held in the General Assembly during the past".

   Parallel to the work and negotiations carried out at the world-wide level, the possibilities for work, initiatives and negotiations at the regional level should be studied thoroughly.

   The intention is in no way to oppose the regional approach to the world-wide approach in the field of disarmament. Those approaches, like any eventual bilateral action, are complementary and fall within the general framework of the efforts to be undertaken with a view to promoting disarmament measures throughout the world.

3. Security requirements are sometimes more easily perceived between States in the same region. The elements for negotiation will sometimes be more rapidly identified at the regional level, whether it is a matter of the limitation or reduction of forces, nuclear-weapon-free zones, control of the arms trade or other measures aimed at increasing confidence among the States of the region. The prospects of reaching such agreements will, moreover, vary from one region to another.

4. Without seeking to usurp the place of the States of the regions concerned in determining the timeliness and modalities of the possible measures to be envisaged, the Assembly could undertake a comprehensive study of disarmament matters lending themselves to a regional approach. The path has already been traced by the comprehensive study on nuclear-weapon-free zones carried out in 1975. Moreover, a decision to undertake an in-depth study on the regional aspects of disarmament would correspond to the recommendations submitted to the current session of the Assembly by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament.

5. The study should cover all aspects of regional disarmament. To that end, it should include not only disarmament measures proper, together with limitation or non-armsment measures, but also any measure taken in the military field liable to increase stability or confidence among States.

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The study could also consider the relationship between regional disarmament measures and the transfer of arms to the region concerned.

The Belgian Minister, in his statement to the Assembly, expressed the following view on that subject: "Could not the United Nations help the States of a region to define norms that would ensure their security without forcing them to incur expenses incompatible with their development? The agreements thus reached would be respected by all other States".

It would, of course, be for the States of the region concerned to define their needs and the level of their defence forces. Thus, the measures recommended would in no way infringe upon the legitimate right of States to organize their own security in exercise of their sovereignty.

6. But, if the States of a region were to decide to resort to arms limitation, it would be for the international community - and particularly arms-supplying countries - to respect the regional agreement concluded. That would be very comparable to the respect required of the international community for a nuclear-weapon-free zone established in a given region. Belgium is of the opinion that some regional organizations could contribute to a deeper study of these questions.

7. The study advocated by Belgium could be undertaken with the assistance of qualified government experts. That formula, which has already been used, notably in connexion with the study on nuclear-weapon-free zones, would permit an exhaustive examination of the subject. It would also offer an opportunity to submit a balanced report reflecting the views of various experts.