First Committee, 1039th Meeting

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Chairman: Mr. Franz MATHSCH (Austria).

Tribute to the memory of His Majesty Sisavang-Vong,
King of Laos

1. The CHAIRMAN paid a tribute to the memory of His Majesty the King of Laos, who had ruled his country with exceptional wisdom and dignity and whose death was a great loss to mankind.

On the proposal of the Chairman, the members of the Committee observed a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Majesty Sisavang-Vong, King of Laos.

2. Mr. CHAMPASSAK (Laos) thanked the Chairman and the Committee for their expression of sympathy towards his country. King Sisavang-Vong, whose reign had been the longest in the history of Laos, had devoted a life full of dignity and wisdom entirely to his people, to his religion, to progress and to peace.

AGENDA ITEM 70


GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/C.1/L.234) (continued)

3. Mr. FEKINI (Libya) explained that it was because of the importance of the problem of general and complete disarmament that his delegation, together with many others, had agreed to defer consideration of the question—which was nevertheless urgent—of French nuclear tests in the Sahara. That gesture was the most eloquent token of the eagerness with which the Committee was trying to strengthen the hopes which the peoples of the world placed in the United Nations, so as to save present and succeeding generations from the scourge of war and from the horror of destruction. Those hopes had in fact been disappointed after the establishment of the United Nations, for it had not succeeded in ending either the cold war or the armaments race. However, the Organization's perseverance had not been in vain, for the technical discussions on the control and cessation of nuclear weapons tests had progressed encouragingly. It was to be hoped that those negotiations would continue and would lead to an agreement which would open the way to the prohibition of all nuclear tests. Efforts in the nuclear field should be directed exclusively towards the utilization of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Libya was therefore concerned about the imminence of French nuclear tests near its frontiers; it hoped that the results secured at the Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests and the discussions within the First Committee would convince France of the imperative need of abandoning its plans.

4. It was also desirable that the technical discussions begun at the Conference of Experts for the study of possible measures which might be helpful in preventing surprise attack should be continued and brought to a successful conclusion. Similarly, it was to be hoped that the United Nations would continue to explore the prospects of using outer space for peaceful purposes, and that it would have the benefit of active participation by all States which were in a position to contribute in that field. It was gratifying that the United Nations had, by enlarging its Disarmament Commission to consist of all Member States (resolution 1252 D (XIII)), decided to tackle the problem of disarmament on the basis of the broadest possible representation. The establishment of the ten-Power disarmament committee (DC/144) was also encouraging. The United Nations should be fully represented in that Committee and be kept informed of its activities. His delegation agreed with the suggestion of the Greek representative (1050th meeting) that the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission was particularly well qualified to represent the United Nations in the ten-Power committee, and endorsed the procedure proposed in that respect by the representative of Brazil (1035th meeting).

5. The debate on the various problems raised by disarmament was opening under the most favourable auspices. Prospects seemed all the better because the communiqué published on 27 September 1959 at the end of the visit paid to the United States by Mr. Khrushchev, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, had stressed the importance of the disarmament question both for the two countries involved in that visit and for the rest of the international community. The plans laid before the Committee deserved careful consideration and should be discussed with good will and without prejudice. Undoubtedly, the explanations given by their sponsors were prompted by a sincere desire to tackle the problem constructively.

6. Libya was seriously disturbed by the armaments race and hoped that it would be stopped. It was becoming essential to prohibit weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear and thermo-nuclear devices, and to destroy stocks of them within the shortest possible space of time. A phased and balanced reduction of conventional armaments should also be effected as rapidly as possible. Furthermore, it was important to institute methods and procedures which would, under the direction of the United Nations, enable order to be effectively maintained in a disarmed world.
7. Part of the resources freed by disarmament could be used for a fairer distribution of prosperity throughout the world. In the immediate future, the surplus resources available for non-military purposes as a result of the phased reduction of armaments might be placed at the disposal of the United Nations for help to refugees and victims of disasters.

8. Every effort should also be made to maintain confidence and establish healthy relations between States, so as to contribute to the establishment of a really new world. The fresh approach to the problem of general and complete disarmament and the explanations given in regard to inspection and control—both important questions—had led to a useful exchange of views. The First Committee would be well advised to recommend that the General Assembly should note with satisfaction the different proposals and the new approach thus made. It could also consider communicating the texts of the plans, as well as the records of the Committee meetings at which they were examined, to the United Nations Disarmament Commission which could then entrust its Chairman with the task of explaining them to the ten-Power disarmament committee and reporting to the Assembly at its fifteenth session. Libya fervently hoped that, in the atmosphere of relaxed tension and of confidence thus created, the armaments race would be halted as soon as possible; in that way an era of peace, security and prosperity would be ushered in.

9. Mr. SHUKAIRY (Saudi Arabia) said that, despite inevitable divergence of opinions, the members of the First Committee seemed to be inspired by a desire for peace and to be sincerely resolved to arrive at an agreement. That was essential, for no plan for general and complete disarmament could be put into effect in an atmosphere of mistrust or fear. The conversations at Camp David between Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Eisenhower, the President of the United States, had been able to create the confidence which the United Nations had not succeeded in establishing despite thirteen years of effort and the adoption of many resolutions. The new atmosphere had been conveyed to the United Nations by the United States representative (1027th meeting), whose constructive and dignified statement had been a valuable contribution to the debate.

10. Whereas previous efforts had remained fruitless, it was encouraging to note, today, not only the existence of a body whose establishment had been welcomed by the Disarmament Commission—the ten-Power disarmament committee—but also the initial progress made at the Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests. It had been agreed that control and cessation of tests should go hand in hand, that the cessation of tests should be permanent, that Vienna should be the headquarters of the future control commission, and that further testing, restricted to peaceful purposes, should be carried out only under international supervision. Further progress was now possible, for the control system to be applied to nuclear tests would facilitate the establishment of a general system of control over disarmament. It was regrettable that the United Kingdom representative had underestimated that aspect of the question by asserting (1028th meeting) that the suspension of tests did not constitute true disarmament. That was not the view of the Saudi Arabian delegation, or of the Secretary-General, or of the United States representative. Indeed, if that measure yielded satisfactory results and control was effective, it would be possible to envisage more general disarmament.

11. The Soviet Union's plan for general and complete disarmament (A/4219) was clear and precise. It had not been regarded as Utopian, and would be examined by the ten-Power disarmament committee. The United States representative had stated that his country would study it with the greatest attention; and that statement was to be welcomed. Again, in that respect, it was regrettable that the United Kingdom representative had sounded a note of pessimism. In spite of the resemblance that representative had sought to establish between the terms "comprehensive" and "general and complete", the idea of disarmament contained in the United Kingdom plan (A/C.1/920) was different from that inherent in the Soviet plan; the United Kingdom concept of disarmament was the classical one expressed in Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, which spoke not of the prohibition or elimination of armaments, but merely of their regulation. However, Article 3 of the Covenant of the League of Nations had in its time postulated more far-reaching aims in the matter of disarmament. The Soviet plan and the United Kingdom plan therefore differed, not only in regard to stages and priorities, but also in their final objectives; the former was based on the prohibition of armaments and the total suppression of war as an institution, whereas the latter merely restricted that institution. The Soviet formula was thus a completely new one.

12. The United Kingdom plan unquestionably deserved careful scrutiny, but the thinking underlying it nevertheless gave cause for anxiety. The United Kingdom representative had suggested that the temptation to use nuclear weapons would not be as great as they were likely to be employed in any major war, with all their terrible consequences. If that was the case, it might well be asked why the United Nations and the world at large should concern themselves with disarmament and why the United Kingdom itself was submitting a plan for disarmament. At a time when the international climate was more favourable than ever to progress towards disarmament and when, as the United Kingdom representative himself had recognized, an essential ingredient of progress was confidence, such confidence must be built up rather than destroyed. Not only had the United Kingdom representative warned the peoples of the world against over-confidence, but he had appealed to them for patience, thus in effect sabotaging disarmament before it had even begun.

13. The United States position was, fortunately, more encouraging. The United States representative had announced that President Eisenhower was setting in motion a new and thorough review of the disarmament question in the light of present-day technology, so that the United States could participate fully and constructively in the deliberations scheduled for 1960. He had added that his country would follow to the end the road leading to disarmament and would reject useless ideas. The United States had stressed the importance of control, without which disarmament was inconceivable and which must proceed pari passu with it. However, neither the United Kingdom plan nor the Soviet plan was silent on control. According to Mr. Khrushchev (739th plenary meeting), the USSR always recognized that it was necessary. If the principle that international control must be applied with all the necessary vigour was taken as a point of
departure, the world would have the assurance that disarmament was moving towards its goal.

14. The United States representative had raised three pertinent questions with regard to the situation that would prevail in a disarmed world. The question of what internal security forces would then be required in the various countries must be taken up in any disarmament plan and must be the basic element in it.

15. As to the international police force which would have to be set up in order to preserve international peace and security, and the principles of international law that should govern its use, those were two highly complex political and legal questions in which the competence of the Security Council and the United Nations Charter itself were involved. The Security Council would unquestionably remain the supreme organ in dealing with the matter, but the question of the conditions under which it would assume that responsibility must be thoroughly examined. The international Court of Justice would also have to be brought into the picture in order to ensure that the actions of the Security Council were in accordance with law and equity, for international situations should not be governed solely by political considerations. With regard to the manner in which international security should be maintained, that was a problem which did not fall within the competence of the Disarmament Commission or, a fortiori, of the ten-Power committee.

16. It would be for the General Assembly to examine the two matters raised by the United States, for, while they had a bearing on the question of disarmament, they did not constitute part of it. The Secretary-General would unquestionably place them on the Assembly’s agenda when sufficient progress had been made in the disarmament negotiations to warrant his doing so.

17. For the present, the crucial question was how the ten-Power disarmament committee could best approach its task. The idea put forward by the French representative at the 103rd meeting was one that should be taken up. It seemed that, by its very nature, the advance of technology was bound to be more rapid than the course of disarmament negotiations. Negotiations would no sooner begin to deal with a given stage of scientific progress than they would find that stage already a thing of the past. Caught in that vicious circle, disarmament would always lag behind technological progress. The "point of no return" referred to by the French representative was not a static point but a continuing process. Action must therefore be taken first of all to arrest that process: there must be an arms truce subject to effective control. Consequently the ten-Power committee should begin by arranging such a truce—one which was general and complete, which was controlled, and which provided for cessation of the testing and manufacture of all types of weapons, whether nuclear or not, since the time might come when nuclear weapons were themselves regarded as conventional weapons. During the truce, the great Powers should retain only the armaments they now had. Once that balance had been achieved, the process of disarmament could proceed in a normal way, for there would then be the assurance that the disarmament measures provided for at a given stage would not be nullified by scientific advances. Just as an armistice normally led to peace, an arms truce must lead to final disarmament.

18. It was unfortunate that, at the 1037th meeting, the representative of Israel had chosen to raise the question of regional disarmament and to inject complicating factors into the debate by suggesting a disarmament scheme for the Middle East. The Middle East was undeniably a troubled area, but that problem had arisen only after the emergence of Israel, which had resulted in disarmament on an unprecedented scale in the area. It was apparent that no regional disarmament plan was possible in the Middle East so long as Israel's aggression continued to make itself felt. To disarm at a time when aggression had brought about military occupation would be tantamount to committing suicide. There was no need for the United Nations to concern itself with a disarmament plan for the Middle East, since the Middle East would scrap its armaments the moment the causes of the present trouble were removed, i.e., when Israel departed from the area.

19. Any disarmament plan must be accompanied by a plan for solving the major political problems of the present day, which, in the main, affected three areas of the world: the Far East, the Middle East and Central Europe. A summit conference could accomplish a great deal in the matter of disarmament, where there was wide scope for compromise and negotiation, but it should proceed cautiously with regard to political problems, which did not admit of partial solutions based on convenience. The only acceptable solutions would be those based on justice and equity. The problems of the Far East, Germany, Algeria and Palestine could precipitate an international crisis at any time, regardless of what measures of controlled disarmament were taken. If the political problems were not resolved in accordance with the letter and spirit of the United Nations Charter, all efforts to achieve disarmament would be doomed to failure. The summit conference must therefore start out in the right direction. However, its success seemed already threatened by the attitude of France, which, in its communiqué of 21 October 1959, set certain conditions which were unworthy of that country and which detracted from the dignity of the conference itself. If France really wished to see the problems of Africa solved before the summit conference was held, it had only to leave the whole of Africa.

20. General Assembly resolution 41 (I) stressed the urgent need for disarmament. Yet, for the past thirteen years, the speed urged by the Assembly had been applied instead to the terrible arms race. States must therefore take advantage of the opportunity now presenting itself for the first time to save mankind from self-annihilation. For the Committee indeed had before it the first time a draft resolution submitted by all the States Members of the United Nations (A/C.1/L.234), which, it was to be hoped, marked the beginning of a new era of good will between East and West.

21. Mr. LOURIE (Israel), in exercise of his right of reply, called attention to an error in the statement of the representative of Saudi Arabia. The Israeli delegation had not suggested a disarmament scheme for the Middle East, but had merely said that Israel would be prepared to co-operate fully in any discussions on a regional scheme for limitation of armaments, appropriately guaranteed. The representative of Saudi Arabia rejected that idea as he had rejected the idea of peace in the Middle East. That and the tone and content of his references to Israel in themselves showed what significance should be attached to his remarks on the subject of disarmament as a whole.
22. Mr. WALDHEIM (Austria) noted with satisfaction, particularly in view of Austria’s geographical position, that the present international climate, in which the spirit of conciliation seemed to prevail over distrust, was more auspicious than ever for disarmament. Instead of confining itself, as it had done in 1958, to the question of the suspension of nuclear weapons tests, the First Committee was in a position at the current session to consider the whole problem of disarmament.

23. The Austrian delegation was convinced that the proposals submitted by the USSR and by the United Kingdom reflected a clear desire on the part of the sponsors for an early settlement of the problem. Both proposals had the same aim but a different approach, the United Kingdom proposal being somewhat more conservative. In any event, there was every reason to welcome the establishment of the ten-Power disarmament committee, the composition of which encouraged the hope that positive results could be achieved. It would be useful to establish a link between the ten-Power committee and the United Nations and, in that connexion, the Austrian delegation supported the proposal that Mr. Padilla Nervo should be entrusted with that function. It also endorsed the Netherlands delegation’s view that the question of the relationship between the United Nations and the future international organization which would control the cessation of tests should be examined.

24. For progress to be achieved in the forthcoming negotiations, three basic requirements had to be fulfilled: the existing balance of power must not be upset while disarmament was in progress; disarmament should proceed in stages; and an effective international control system should be established. While a measure of confidence at the outset was an essential requisite, it did not exclude effective control measures. Moreover, the work of the Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests justified a measure of optimism. Another problem which the ten-Power committee would have to consider was that of a balance in Austria’s view, between the two types of disarmament; disarmament in the field of conventional weapons and disarmament in the field of nuclear weapons.

25. With regard to the suggestion that an international police force should be established to keep order in a disarmed world, the forthcoming conversations at Geneva should offer an opportunity to explore that problem, which was without precedent. The relevant provisions of the Charter would no doubt have to be amended after the negotiations had been successfully completed.

26. The draft resolution submitted by the entire membership of the United Nations reflected the extent of world support for a solution of the all-important disarmament problem. Austria whole-heartedly supported the draft resolution, being alive to the significance of the forthcoming negotiations and determined to promote universal and comprehensive disarmament, under international control, in order to spare humanity the horrors of a new war.

27. Mr. FÉTER (Hungary) said that the way in which delegations in general approached the problem, their efforts to understand one another and their confidence in the work of the ten-Power disarmament committee reflected a substantial improvement in the international climate.

28. The initial reaction to the proposal for general and complete disarmament augured well for the forthcoming negotiations. The attitude of the United Kingdom, in particular, was encouraging, that country currently placing greater emphasis on comprehensive disarmament than in the past. The Soviet proposal had been well received not only because of its content, but also because of the manner of its presentation, devoid of any vestige of the cold war. Discussions had thus far been held in an atmosphere of understanding and good will. Differences of opinion had been narrowed because the Soviet proposal attacked the very roots of the complex problems of disarmament and reduced them to a few specific elements. Some considered the proposal an oversimplification of the issue. The Soviet scheme, by urging recognition of the need for general and complete disarmament, tended to eliminate armed rivalry between Powers. It successfully integrated disarmament and control by proposing that enforcement of the disarmament programme should, from the very beginning, be under the control of an organ composed of all States. It brought the concept of a warless society closer to realization by offering the prospect of complete disarmament and comprehensive control. By providing for the maintenance of peace and security in accordance with the principles of the Charter, it furnished the guarantees necessary for world order after complete disarmament had been achieved. Lastly, it proposed the shortest possible time limit, which emphasized its particularly realistic character.

29. The Soviet delegation had indicated its readiness to consider any other proposal providing for general and complete disarmament. In order to spare mankind the horrors of a new war, old rivalries which dated back to the policy of "positions of strength" should be abandoned. In the future, nations should compete only in proving their good will. The wording of the draft resolution before the Committee reflected such a spirit of good will, as did the efforts of delegations representing different social systems to agree on a common text.

30. The Western Powers appeared to desire a more detailed presentation of certain aspects of the problem before the meeting of the ten-Power committee. The President of the United States had recently decided to initiate a thorough review of disarmament in the light of modern technology. That explained to some extent the reserved attitude of the United States representative, who had dealt mostly with surprise attacks and the banning of nuclear tests under international control, which were not real disarmament measures. In fact, at the same time, the Governor of a State in the United States had advocated the resumption of tests, while the RAND Corporation, in a book written for officers of the United States armed forces, contended that complete nuclear disarmament was not a reasonable objective.

31. The United Kingdom, in its statement had sought to prove that the Western Powers wanted control, not in order to engage in military intelligence, but solely to supervise the implementation of disarmament measures. However, some parts of the statement seemed to imply that the control body might concern itself with armed forces in general even before a disarmament agreement was achieved. It was to be hoped that the British position would be more clearly defined in the ten-Power disarmament committee.
32. The French representative had somewhat dis- 
appointed the First Committee by stating at the outset 
that in his view the time for a complete plan was not 
yet at hand and that armies would still be necessary 
so long as distrust reigned. It was to be hoped that 
the French Government would reconsider its position 
before the meeting of the ten-Power committee.

33. Some representatives had criticized ideas which 
were not even included in the Soviet proposal. To 
them, it represented an "all-or-nothing" approach; it 
did not envisage the establishment of an effective con-
trol organ from the very beginning of the disarmament 
process; and its main objective was the four-year 
time limit. Others had distorted the problem by ad-
vocating the retention of armed forces on the grounds 
that, in their view, military institutions offered cul-
tural and moral advantages. When peace had been 
secured, better institutions would offer man advan-
tages. Lastly, some had indicated that hatred and war 
were essential to man. But when the problem of dis-
armament had been solved, the United Nations would 
be strong enough to maintain order in the world.

34. As had been demonstrated by the Conference on 
the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, true 
progress could be achieved as soon as the need for 
general and complete disarmament was recognized. 
The Hungarian delegation noted with satisfaction the 
unanimity achieved by the great Powers in drafting 
a joint resolution and wished the ten-Power committee 
every success.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.