Organization of the Committee’s work

1. Mr. STEVENSON (United States of America) recalled that, shortly before the General Assembly had in December 1960 temporarily adjourned its fifteenth session, it had been decided not to take any action at that time on some of the draft resolutions concerning disarmament pending before the First Committee. As consultations had been taking place on the matter since the resumption of the session, it would be unwise to take it up again for the time being. It was possible that private discussions might make further contentious debate unnecessary, or might at least enlarge the area of common agreement.

2. He therefore proposed that the Committee should take up the next item on its agenda, entitled “Africa: a United Nations programme for independence and development”, and that it should decide later at what point to resume consideration of the disarmament question.

It was so decided.

Statement by the Chairman

3. The CHAIRMAN said that he was glad to have been able to preside over the first meeting held by the Committee at the resumed fifteenth session, and thus to have the opportunity, before relinquishing his duties as Permanent Representative of Ceylon to the United Nations, of thanking the members of the Committee for their confidence and support. He was sorry that he had been unable, for reasons of health, to carry out the duties of Chairman until the end of the first part of the fifteenth session, and he thanked the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Kurka, for having replaced him.

4. Owing to the large number of plenary meetings and meetings of the General Committee, the First Committee had been unable, during the first part of the session, to consider more than a few of the items on its own agenda. Furthermore, the absence of the necessary agreement between the two great Powers chiefly concerned—the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—had prevented the Committee from completing its work on the vital question of disarmament.

5. The Committee had nevertheless done some very useful work in holding a full discussion on the Algerian question; what had been said during that discussion, and the conclusions reached by the Committee, had undoubtedly contributed to the distinct improvement in the position. He sincerely hoped that the latest information received on the subject was correct and that the negotiations between France and the Provisional Algerian Government would lead to the emergence of a free and independent Algeria. Great credit for the favourable turn of events was due to that great statesman, the President of the French Republic, and to the leaders of the Algerian Provisional Government.

6. He also hoped that a more favourable atmosphere would soon permit speedy progress to be made towards the solution of the disarmament question, which everyone recognized as being of vital importance. For that purpose, fear and suspicion would have to be replaced by real understanding which would produce mutual confidence. Only then would all countries be able to agree to a scheme for general and complete disarmament with effective inspection and control.

7. The Committee had before it, in regard to disarmament, resolution 1378 (XIV) which the General Assembly had unanimously adopted, as well as certain important draft resolutions submitted by various delegations. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Mr. Khrushchev, for his part, had made a great contribution towards the solution of the problem by his statement in the General Assembly (869th plenary meeting) urging general and complete disarmament. The whole of humanity desired the abolition of war and the destruction of all means of waging war. Yet every country was feverishly engaged in increasing its armaments, especially in the nuclear field. The burden of responsibility weighing on the United Nations was therefore very great.

8. He expressed sincere hopes for the success of the United Nations, that great Organization to which he remained deeply attached, for he believed that it was the only body capable of ensuring peace in the world and of enabling all men to enjoy their fundamental rights.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.