Chairman: Mr. Miguel Rafael URQUIA (El Salvador).

Statement by the Chairman

1. The CHAIRMAN expressed his gratitude for his unanimous election as Chairman of the First Committee and said that the Committee had been presented with an excellent opportunity to contribute to the reduction of international tension, notwithstanding a recurrence of the "cold war". While it was true that the prospects for giving impetus to efforts on behalf of disarmament and related issues were not very bright, the disarmament picture was not altogether discouraging. As had been pointed out in the Secretary-General’s memorandum (A/3936), the General Assembly might wish to encourage and assist the Governments that were due to meet in Geneva on 31 October 1958 to negotiate an agreement on the suspension of nuclear weapons tests and the establishment of a control system to ensure its observance. He appealed for moderation on the part of all speakers with a view to creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and serious deliberation, which would greatly improve the chances of conciliation.

Election of the Vice-Chairman

2. Mr. VITETTI (Italy) nominated Mr. Osman (Sudan) as Vice-Chairman.

3. Mr. SERRANO (Chile) supported the nomination.

Mr. Osman (Sudan) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

Election of the Rapporteur

4. Mr. LALL (India) nominated Mr. Matsch (Austria) as Rapporteur.

5. Mr. ALEMAYEHOU (Ethiopia) and Mr. BELAUNDE (Peru) supported the nomination.

Mr. Matsch (Austria) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

Order of discussion of agenda items (A/C.1/806)

6. Mr. ZORIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) emphasized that the most urgent questions on the Committee’s agenda were those relating to disarmament. The general debate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly had reflected almost unanimous agreement among Members that disarmament should be dealt with at the thirteenth session as a matter of priority. Having established that priority, it would be logical to turn to those disarmament issues which were the most urgent and the closest to solution, and the first of those issues was the discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests [item 70*]. The discontinuance of those tests, which was to be negotiated at the forthcoming Geneva talks among the three Powers which produced nuclear weapons, directly and immediately affected the interests of all States. If they were to give expression to their concern in a General Assembly resolution calling for a general and unconditional ban on tests, their action would have a most favourable effect on the course and outcome of the Geneva negotiations. The USSR had already submitted an appropriate draft resolution (A/C.1/L.203). It/ Consequently, the Soviet delegation held that the First Committee should begin its work by discussing item 7 of the letter from the President of the General Assembly (A/C.1/806).

It was opposed to combining that item with the other disarmament items on the Committee’s agenda because that would be tantamount to acting against the General Assembly decision that the various disarmament questions should be considered as independent items. Moreover, the method of combining all disarmament items had proved ineffective in the past and was likely to result in failure to settle any one of them. It was a method favoured by those who were not anxious for a solution of disarmament problems.

7. Having disposed of item 7, the Committee might then discuss either item 8, dealing with the reduction of military budgets and the use of part of the savings so effected for assistance to the under-developed countries [item 72*], or item 2, concerning the question of the peaceful use of outer space [item 60*]. An agreement on item 8 would greatly contribute to the work of the Second Committee and of those other United Nations organs concerned with technical assistance to under-developed areas.

8. Upon completion of discussion on items 7, 8 and 2, the Committee should go on to item 4, dealing with the more general questions of disarmament [item 64*].

9. The Soviet delegation was prepared to be guided by the views of the States most directly concerned with regard to the order of the remaining items on the Committee’s agenda.

10. Mr. LODGE (United States of America) said his delegation agreed that the disarmament question as a whole should be considered first; it could not, however, support the Soviet proposal that item 7, on the discontinuance of tests, should be put ahead of the

*/ indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

/ Previously distributed as document A/L.247.
other disarmament items. The usual procedure was to take up items in the order in which they had been introduced, and item 7 had been introduced after the general question of disarmament. Moreover, it was logically subordinate, for testing was only one of the many complex issues involved in disarmament and action on it alone would not bring the world closer to the goal of universal disarmament under effective control.

11. The United States proposed that the Committee should first discuss items 4, 7 and 8 of its agenda as a group, with the understanding that representatives would, if they so desired, be free to discuss the items separately and in any order they wished. That procedure was logical and would promote orderly discussion, since the three items were interrelated; it was also in accordance with the Committee's past practice. Moreover, it would enable each member to deal with the subject of disarmament in the way he believed would be most constructive; thus, any representative who wished to deal first with the discontinuance of tests would be free to do so. Lastly, its adoption would in no way prejudice the Committee's final action or exclude separate votes on specific proposals.

12. His delegation rejected the Soviet representative's insinuation that those who did not agree with him were not interested in achieving results in the matter of disarmament. For its part, the United States had made abundantly clear its eagerness to obtain an agreement on the suspension of nuclear tests.

13. His delegation considered that the Committee should postpone a decision on the order of the remaining agenda items until a later date.

14. Mr. DAVID (Czechoslovakia) said that it had become established practice for the First Committee to examine first those questions which required immediate consideration. The most urgent items on the Committee's agenda were some partial aspects of the disarmament problem, the successful solution of which would open the way to the settlement of wider international issues. The discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests should be dealt with first because the continuing tests represented an immediate danger to mankind and because, as the Conference of Experts to Study the Possibility of Detecting Violations of a Possible Agreement on the Suspension of Nuclear Tests, held in Geneva in July and August 1958, had proved, the discontinuance of such tests was feasible. The General Assembly should express its opinion in the matter and help to ensure that States possessing nuclear weapons entered into negotiations with a view to achieving an agreement.

15. Two other aspects of the disarmament question also warranted priority consideration, the questions of the peaceful use of outer space and of the reduction of military budgets.

16. His delegation was convinced that the sequence of items proposed by the Soviet representative was in accordance with the views expressed by most delegations in the plenary meetings and with the relative urgency of the items.

17. Mr. NOBLE (United Kingdom) agreed that disarmament was the question which the Committee could most usefully discuss first. However, in addition to the general item originally proposed by the Secretary-General, two other items on the Committee's agenda, items 7 and 8, concerned matters which fell under the general heading of disarmament and could be most suitably and usefully discussed in that context. It did not seem either logical or helpful to separate the various aspects of the question, as the Soviet representative had proposed. The United Nations had a clear responsibility for dealing with the subject of disarmament as a whole, and although the discontinuance of tests should certainly be discussed, the Committee should not lose sight of the need for balanced and controlled disarmament in general. His delegation therefore supported the United States suggestion that the Committee should discuss items 4, 7 and 8 of its agenda as a group and deal with those three items first.

18. It also agreed that the Committee should defer until a later date any decision on the order in which the remaining items on its agenda should be taken up.

19. Mr. MICHALOWSKI (Poland) said that in his delegation's opinion the order in which items were discussed in no way reflected the importance attached to them; the First Committee had in the past often placed the very important question of disarmament in the middle of its agenda. What should decide the order of the items was political expediency and the ripeness of questions for discussion and agreement. From that point of view, it seemed to his delegation that the question of the discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests should be discussed first. The matter had been actively discussed during the past year and a large measure of agreement now existed with regard to it. An immediate debate would, moreover, contribute to the successful outcome of the forthcoming conference on the subject in Geneva and give all members an opportunity to express their views on the matter.

20. The question was also urgent, since each week of inaction by the United Nations increased the dangerous contamination of the earth's atmosphere. Moreover, there was great public interest in the discontinuance of tests and a postponement of the debate on that issue would disappoint world public opinion and be a blow to the authority of the United Nations.

21. A decision to discuss all the items relating to disarmament as a group would involve the Committee in a debate which would be too general and endless, and lead to misunderstandings and confusion. His delegation therefore supported the proposal made by the USSR representative.

22. Mr. BELAUDE (Peru) stressed that the problem of disarmament was indivisible, that it was the fundamental issue confronting the United Nations and that the Organization must act immediately to establish a juridical organ for disarmament. There was no middle way for the United Nations: human survival was at stake.

23. The problem of disarmament should be attacked at the root; the central issue must be dealt with first. That central issue was the continued production of nuclear weapons and of intercontinental missiles. Consequently, the crux of the problem was to stop that production and to destroy stockpiles. The other aspects of disarmament must be seen in terms of a
ban on production; they were peripheral rather than basic problems. For even if tests of atomic and hydrogen weapons were banned, production could go on on the basis of methods already worked out by previous tests.

24. From the procedural point of view, the disarmament question should be taken as a whole and should encompass all the relevant items on the Committee’s agenda. If the order of items proposed by the USSR were adopted, a discussion of the cessation of production and the destruction of existing stockpiles would be last. Moreover, the discontinuance of tests depended to a greater extent at the moment on the forthcoming Geneva negotiations than on the United Nations deliberations. On the other hand, the order of items proposed by the United States did not preclude full discussion of the discontinuance of tests. Indeed, it might even enable the Committee to reach unanimous agreement on a draft resolution for the guidance of the negotiators at Geneva. There was no irreconcilable difference of views: by grouping the relevant items under the general heading of disarmament, as the United States had suggested, no speaker would be prevented from starting the discussion with the ban on tests. On that understanding, Peru was prepared to support the United States proposal.

25. Mr. BRUCAN (Romania) supported the idea of separate discussion of each aspect of the disarmament question as the discontinuance of tests and the reduction of military budgets, since past experience had shown that a broad, abstract discussion of disarmament failed to produce concrete results. He supported the Soviet proposal that debate should begin with the question of the discontinuance of tests, which offered the best prospects for agreement.

26. Mr. VIDIC (Yugoslavia) thought that the question of the discontinuance of tests should be given priority. However, he hoped that the Committee would avoid dividing itself on the issue by reaching agreement without taking a vote.

27. Mr. BOUZA (Uruguay) agreed that disarmament was the principal question before the Committee, although it was for the individual representatives to discuss such particular aspects of it as they saw fit. He therefore supported the United States proposal.

28. Mr. ZORIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed satisfaction that all the speakers had agreed that the disarmament problem should be discussed first. He agreed with the United Kingdom representative that a decision on the order of discussion of the other agenda items could be deferred.

29. He found unconvincing the arguments advanced in favour of en bloc discussion of the disarmament items. For one thing, it was not true that that method had always been employed in the past, for specific issues had on occasion been singled out for discussion. Moreover, unsatisfactory practices should not be continued merely because they had prevailed in the past.

30. The agenda approved by the General Assembly contained four separate items dealing with disarmament. Whereas the General Committee had combined two items on the provisional agenda into a single item, which now appeared on the Committee’s agenda (A/C.1/806) as item 2 (Question of the peaceful use of outer space), no such action had been taken on the other items relating to disarmament. He saw no reason for revoking the decision of the General Assembly. Even if the order of the items on the provisional agenda were followed, as proposed by the United States representative, it would still be necessary to deal with each of the items separately.

31. He proposed as a compromise that it should be decided at once to put the item on the discontinuance of tests at the head of the agenda so that it could be discussed before the forthcoming Geneva conference, and that the order in which the remaining disarmament items were to be discussed should be decided later.

32. Mr. TARABANOY (Bulgaria) said that disarmament was the most important item on the Committee’s agenda. Since the past practice of discussing all aspects of the disarmament question together had been unproductive, it was advisable to consider first the problem which was most susceptible of solution and most urgent, i.e., the question of the discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests. A solution of that problem would constitute the first and most important step towards the prohibition of the use of such weapons and the solution of other aspects of the disarmament question. Priority consideration of the question of discontinuing tests would also serve to acquaint the participants in the forthcoming Geneva conference with the opinions of Members of the United Nations on that matter.

33. He proposed that the item dealing with the discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests should be discussed separately and that the order of priority for the remaining items should be decided subsequently.

34. Mr. DELGADO (Philippines) supported discussion of the entire disarmament question as a single item since such action would not preclude discussion of the discontinuance of tests or the adoption of a resolution on that subject.

35. Mr. LODGE (United States of America) said that simultaneous consideration of items 4, 7 and 8 of the Committee’s agenda would provide scope for full debate before the opening of the two Geneva conferences on 31 October and 10 November 1958.

36. Mr. Krishna MENON (India) moved that the meeting adjourn until the following morning.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.