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

AGENDA ITEMS 64, 70 AND 72

Question of disarmament (A/3929, A/3936, A/C.1/L.205) (continued)


The reduction of the military budgets of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and France by 10 to 15 per cent and the use of part of the savings so effected for assistance to the under-developed countries (continued)

General debate (continued)

The responsibility for that situation lay with the ruling circles of the Western Powers, particularly the United States which was using international tension, the "cold war", "positions of strength", and "brinkmanship" as a basis for its foreign policy. That policy was all the more dangerous in that production and stocks of weapons of mass destruction were steadily increasing. Through aggressive pacts, those circles were dragging many other countries in their wake, and recent events in the Near and Middle East and the Far East had shown how they created potential theatres of war in various parts of the world. The establishment of an entire network of military bases on the territories of many European, African and Asian countries bore witness to the fact that a nuclear war was in preparation.

4. Since 1946, the Soviet Union had been submitting proposals designed to settle the disarmament problem as a whole; yet when it had adopted an attitude which could be reconciled with that of the Western Powers, they had suddenly abandoned their own proposals and thus prevented any further progress. When the USSR had proposed partial measures of disarmament, acceptable to both parties, the Western Powers had seen fit to make each of them dependent upon the others. That attitude, in which they persisted, had led to a deadlock in the negotiations on disarmament.

5. The ruling circles of the United States kept referring to "positions of strength", to measures of control, to the deterrent power of nuclear weapons. The United States newspapers daily published threats to the socialist countries. A policy of that kind, which could only lead to increased tension, promote the armaments race and encourage threats of force, should be abandoned. That had been the course advocated by the majority of delegations during the general debate at the plenary meetings of the General Assembly.

6. Among the partial measures which might already have been in force for a long time, the immediate, unconditional and permanent discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests would have the greatest effect. It would prevent the manufacture of weapons with steadily increasing destructive power, halt the armaments race and make it possible to devote the savings so effected to the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Moreover, it would prevent any further increase in the level of radio-activity, already growing more and more dangerous, as indicated in the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/3838). The measure would be a first step towards the total prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons, their elimination from the armaments of States, the cessation of their manufacture and the destruction of stocks of such devices, which could not fail to reduce tension and improve the international situation.

7. In the matter of the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, the year 1958 had been marked by three events of outstanding importance: the unilateral decision of the Soviet Union to discontinue its nuclear weapons tests, the Conference of Experts to Study the Possibility of Detecting Violations of a Possible Agreement on the Suspension of Nuclear Tests, held at Geneva in July and August 1958, and the publication...
of the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. The decision, made by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 31 March 1958, to discontinue nuclear weapons tests and to invite the United States and the United Kingdom to follow suit had been greeted throughout the world with hope and joy. The action had revealed both that the Soviet Union wanted peace and that it was quite possible to discontinue tests. In view of the reaction of world public opinion and the number of Governments expressing gratification, the United States and the United Kingdom might have been expected to take the same course, particularly as they had already carried out a far greater number of tests than the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, those expectations had proved vain. The United States and the United Kingdom had merely stepped up their tests, using the peaceable action of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to achieve military supremacy.

8. Those who had described the discontinuance of tests by the Soviet Union as propaganda had not followed the lead given them because they had no desire for an agreement on the prohibition of tests. They had thereby released the Soviet Union from undertaking which it had unilaterally given. The people of Czechoslovakia, together with public opinion throughout the world, had clearly understood that under those circumstances the USSR had felt compelled to resume its tests and that the responsibility for that decision lay solely with the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom.

9. The Conference of Experts had recommended (A/3897) to Governments an effective system of control, which would make it possible to detect any failure to comply with an agreement on a general discontinuance of test explosions. The Czechoslovak Government, which, like the Soviet Union and many other countries, had always believed such control to be possible, subscribed fully to the conclusions of the experts. Scientists all over the world were calling more and more insistently for the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, as witness the appeal made by 9,235 scientists from all countries, transmitted to the Secretary-General on 13 January 1958, the statement of Dr. Albert Schweitzer of 20 April 1958 and the statements made at the World Congress for Disarmament and International Co-operation, held at Stockholm in July 1958. The report of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation made no secret of the threat to mankind arising out of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests.

10. The negotiations due to open at Geneva on 31 October 1958 held out new hope to the peoples. Unfortunately, it was clear from the statement made by the representative of the United States at the 945th meeting that that country still intended to make the various aspects of disarmament dependent one on the other. In fact, the United States was putting other measures before its discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, although everyone knew that the Western Powers had steadily opposed the enforcement of those preliminary measures.

11. The United States and the United Kingdom had announced that they were prepared to suspend their nuclear weapons tests for a year, from 31 October 1958. But was it not a well-known fact that they had just completed a series of tests and that they would need about a year to evaluate the results? According to The New York Times, the United States Government was fully in agreement with an article by Mr. Kissinger, published in Foreign Affairs1/ against the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, but recommending that they should be placed under United Nations control.

12. The Soviet Government thought that the Geneva conference should aim at securing agreement on the permanent discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, with the establishment of an appropriate form of control.

13. The Assembly would do little to help the Geneva conference by adopting the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.203). The draft resolution submitted by the Soviet Union (A/C.1/L.203), on the other hand, indicated the right course. It was not enough to wish the negotiators good luck. The Assembly itself must examine the question and recommend the general and unconditional discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests.

14. The United States attitude to the question could be explained by the importance which that country attached to possessing weapons of mass destruction. It was manufacturing large numbers of nuclear devices of an advanced type, with which it was equipping its units stationed in various countries and which it was forcing upon its allies. Moreover, aircraft carrying nuclear weapons were still flying over Western Europe and the Arctic region, in the vicinity of the USSR. Sometimes the use of those weapons depended on one man alone: The New York Times had reported that the order to use nuclear weapons could be given by a divisional commander.

15. It should not be forgotten that the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction was constantly becoming simpler and less costly, which was bringing them within the reach of a larger number of States. France, in particular, was preparing to manufacture nuclear weapons and rockets in collaboration with the Federal Republic of Germany. Could France have forgotten all it had learned of vengeful German militarism?

16. If States did not wish to outlaw nuclear weapons of all types completely, they should at least undertake not to use them. Moreover, States possessing nuclear weapons ought to undertake not to station units with atomic weapons abroad and not to supply arms of that kind to other States. Czechoslovakia, which had never forgotten the Munich Agreement; was very much concerned by the fact that West Germany was being armed within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). By 1963 the army of the Federal Republic of Germany would be reorganized and capable of waging an atomic war. The United States in fact intended to make it the most powerful formation in NATO. There were also plans for the development of the war production of West Germany, which would be able to export nuclear weapons and rockets from the United States until it was in a position to manufacture them at home.

17. German public opinion was denouncing that policy.

with growing resolve, and the German Democratic Republic was actively combating it.

18. The establishment of a zone in Central Europe in which nuclear weapons would be prohibited, as proposed by Poland, would greatly contribute to a relaxation of tension in that part of the world. Such a realistic measure would largely remove the danger of nuclear war in Europe and would make it easier to solve the other problems connected with disarmament. If zones of that kind could also be established in other parts of the world where war threatened, international tension would be appreciably reduced.

19. His delegation attached great importance to the proposal put forward by the Soviet Union that the reduction of the military budgets of the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France should be considered apart from the over-all problem of disarmament. The adoption of the Soviet Union's draft resolution on the item (A/C.1/L.204) would have most favourable economic consequences for the non-industrialized countries; a reduction of less than 6 per cent in the military budgets of the four Powers would adequately finance plans for the economic development of ten African and Asian countries.

20. An agreement on the prohibition of the use of outer space for military purposes, on the elimination of foreign military bases on the territories of other countries and on international co-operation in the study of outer space would greatly facilitate the solution of the disarmament problem. It would be necessary, however, to take into account the security interests of all States, which meant that the General Assembly should consider the question and adopt suitable recommendations.

21. The proposals contained in the Soviet Government's memorandum on measures in the field of disarmament (A/3929) could lead to the solution of a large number of related problems. With regard to the reduction of armed forces and conventional armaments, the Soviet Union was ready to accept the proposal by the Western Powers to exchange lists of armaments to be reduced.

22. While the United States armed forces were still at an incredibly high level and the West German armed forces were increasing from year to year, the signatories of the Warsaw Treaty had reduced the strength of their forces by 2,477,000 men since 1955. A further reduction of 419,000 men had been decided upon by the Political Consultative Committee on 24 May 1958. But the States of the socialist camp obviously would not continue that policy if it did not meet with response among the Western Powers, for considerations of security did not allow them to lower their guard.

23. A withdrawal of foreign forces from the territories of other countries, even if only partial, would lead to a reduction of armaments. The first step in that respect could be a reduction by one-third of foreign troops stationed in Germany. A withdrawal of some of the troops of the great Powers from the territory of the States members of NATO or signatories of the Warsaw Treaty would also help to ease international tension.

24. The implementation of disarmament measures should be accompanied by adequate control. In that connexion, particular attention should be paid to measures to prevent surprise attack. The problem should be solved gradually, hand in hand with the measures envisaged for the first stage of disarmament, and an agreement should be concluded on setting up check points at various places and on photographic reconnaissance. His delegation endorsed the Soviet Union's proposal for a meeting of experts, to be held at Geneva on 10 November 1958, to discuss the various means of preventing surprise attack, and was prepared to take part in such a meeting.

25. Technical conferences were clearly of little use unless accompanied by a true desire to carry the measures agreed upon into effect. The attitude taken thus far by the United States and the United Kingdom was hardly encouraging.

26. As to war propaganda, which had reached an unprecedented pitch, an end should be put to it in conformity with the resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1947 (resolution 110 (II)).

27. The Soviet Government's memorandum (A/3929) contained clear-cut proposals, which could be put into effect without delay and without any particular difficulty. His Government, true to its policy of peace, supported them without reservation.

28. The negotiations on disarmament within the United Nations had reached a deadlock. Only the establishment of a truly representative United Nations body to deal with disarmament could rectify the situation.

29. His delegation attached great importance to the forthcoming negotiations at Geneva on the prohibition of nuclear test explosions and on the establishment of a suitable system of control. It supported the Soviet proposal that such negotiations should take place between the Foreign Ministers of the participating States and would welcome any solution of the disarmament problem which safeguarded the legitimate interests of all States.

30. Mr. PADILLA NERVO (Mexico) said that disarmament was the most important international problem of the present time. The present situation in the matter had both positive and negative aspects. The Disarmament Commission had failed, but the technical agreement achieved at Geneva on the detection of nuclear explosions showed the way for a political agreement on the discontinuance of test explosions.

31. It was clear than any disarmament plan, even a partial one, should constitute an organic whole designed to deal with all the aspects of the problem. Nevertheless, test explosions occupied a special place, not only because they demanded economic sacrifices and increased the risk of war, but also because they exposed mankind to grave dangers, particularly by the absorption, as the final step of a series of biological changes, of substances which could have an incalculable genetic effect. Moreover, each new explosion intensified international tension and anxiety among peoples, which made the problem even more difficult to solve. The strategic advantage gained by a country through the continued testing of atomic weapons was illusory and short-lived, for military supremacy which
depended on the constant invention of new devices could not be lasting.

32. The technical agreement arrived at by the Conference of Experts at Geneva should again set in motion the whole mechanism of disarmament. In fact, regardless of the results obtained at Geneva, the responsibility of the United Nations in that field should be reaffirmed. In that connexion, the General Assembly must entrust consideration of disarmament questions to a body which met between sessions. It would be unnatural for the United Nations, which bore the main responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, to deal only once a year with a problem as vital as disarmament, which concerned not only the great Powers but all Member States. Furthermore, no effort should be spared to prevent the situation prevailing since the twelfth session of the Assembly from becoming permanent.

33. The First Committee should therefore consider the possibility of recommencing effective negotiations and could request the representatives of the great Powers to meet forthwith, in New York, to consider the resumption of discussions on disarmament and to try to agree on the body which should be set up for the purpose. The Chairman of the First Committee could take part in those meetings, which would also benefit from the assistance of the Secretary-General. If that proposal was adopted, it would be advantageous if the talks in question took place as soon as possible, preferably before the end of the general debate.

34. He recalled in that connexion the work done by Sub-Committee 18 of the First Committee, which had met from 1 to 10 December 1951. That body had been composed of representatives of the four great Powers, who had been requested to consider in private the draft resolutions on disarmament submitted by various delegations. The members of the Sub-Committee had been unanimous in recognizing its usefulness, as well as the importance of the recommendation on setting up a new body, General Assembly resolution 502 (VI), and the subsequent resolutions on the Disarmament Commission, should also be kept in mind. By following that precedent, the great Powers should be able to meet again, at the request of the First Committee, in order to consider the possibility of resuming negotiations on disarmament as a means of breaking the deadlock persisting since the preceding year.

35. Mr. LODGE (United States of America), explaining the meaning and scope of the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/1/L.203), said that it outlined policies and procedures which would make a concrete contribution to disarmament. It dealt, in the first place, with the suspension of nuclear weapons tests, on the subject of which there was a widespread desire among Members of the United Nations for an early agreement. The United States shared that desire.

36. Operative paragraph 1 stressed the importance which the General Assembly attached to the success of the conference which was to open on 31 October 1958 between the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom. It urged the parties to make every effort to reach early agreement. Such a strongly worded recommendation from the General Assembly should encourage the participants to do everything in their power to make the conference a success.

37. Operative paragraph 2 urged the parties not to undertake further testing of nuclear weapons while the negotiations were in progress. The United States and the United Kingdom had already declared themselves ready to stop nuclear weapons tests for one year from 31 October 1958. The Soviet Union also refrained from conducting tests during that period. That suspension could be extended indefinitely, if it were known each year that an agreed inspection system was functioning properly and that reasonable progress was being made on other aspects of disarmament.

38. Next, in paragraph 3, the draft resolution dealt with the possibility of surprise attack, the danger of which was increasing daily in an era when the warning time had been reduced to a matter of minutes. The so-called "open skies" plan put forward by the President of the United States, Mr. Eisenhower, in 1955 (DC/TI, annex 17), and the United States' recent efforts in the Security Council to bring about an agreement on an Arctic inspection zone, showed how much that danger occupied the minds of the United States. The disarmament proposals of the Soviet Union revealed a similar concern. If the talks to take place at Geneva on 10 November 1958 on the technical aspects of measures to prevent the possibility of surprise attack proved successful, and an agreement on that subject was subsequently reached, its practical value would be very great, for it would inter alia, increase confidence between States.

39. The draft resolution then dealt with the matter of objectives, and expressed the determination of its sponsors that the technical approach, as well as other approaches, should be vigorously pursued with a view to achieving the ultimate goal, a comprehensive disarmament agreement. It was clear that technical studies could be an effective means to that end.

40. Finally, the draft resolution dealt with the vital responsibility borne by the United Nations in the matter of disarmament, and showed how the United Nations and the conferences could assist each other. That was the purpose of paragraphs 5, 6 and 7, which provided for the assistance of the Secretary-General and the communication to the forthcoming conferences of the records of the meetings of the First Committee on the subject of disarmament.

41. The United States delegation hoped that the General Assembly would unanimously endorse the draft resolution, for its contained positive measures consistent with the Organization's obligations and the aspirations of all mankind.

42. Mr. UNDEN (Sweden) said that he would confine himself, for the moment, to the question of the suspension of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests. Although a discontinuance of nuclear tests did not in itself constitute disarmament, there were obvious explanations for the interest shown by the general public, in recent years, in an agreement on that particular question. In the first place, the tests entailed considerable risks through the dissemination of radioactive fallout. Although in the present state of science there was incomplete knowledge of the magnitude of those risks, enough was known about them for it to be possible to say that the present generation was acting irresponsibly in subjecting mankind, to a constantly
increasing extent, to nuclear weapons tests, the harmful effects of which would be felt by future generations too.

43. There was, however, another reason for the demand for the discontinuance of tests: the desire for a limitation of the production of nuclear weapons, as a first step towards the total prohibition of such weapons of mass destruction. Such a limitation might be possible if the three members of the "atom club" agreed, given adequate control, to stop all new production of nuclear weapons. That was the position taken by the Western Powers in 1957, but the Soviet Union Government had not accepted it, expressing the view that the suspension of tests could be adopted as a separate measure, and not as part of an agreement to suspend the manufacture of nuclear weapons. It was, moreover, true that the prohibition of the manufacture of such weapons and, still more, the elimination of existing stockpiles, raised difficult problems of control which could not yet be solved. The discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests was in certain respects a more limited measure, but if the prohibition of tests became universal its effect would be—and that was important—that certain States which had not yet manufactured nuclear weapons would not be carrying out possible plans for future production. The General Assembly ought not, therefore, to limit itself to an appeal to those States which possessed nuclear weapons to discontinue further tests, but should call a halt to all nuclear weapons testing.

44. Swedish technicians believed that, within a certain number of years, they would be able to manufacture smaller, so-called tactical, atomic weapons. Up to the present, however, they had not been authorized to enter into production of that kind. It had been reported in the Press that the Swedish Military Command had recently recommended that, during the coming fiscal year, preparations should be made for the possible future manufacture of atomic weapons of that type. But the matter had not yet been considered by the political bodies, namely, the Government and Parliament.

45. The Swedish Government supported the proposal for a universal discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, and it was ready to co-operate towards the achievement of that end.

46. The Swedish delegation would have liked to address a particular word of acknowledgement to the Government of the Soviet Union for its decision, on 31 March 1958, unilaterally to suspend nuclear weapons tests. Unfortunately, however, the Soviet Government had already retracted its decision and had recently undertaken new tests. It had explained its change of attitude by stating that the Western Powers had not, on their side, immediately put an end to tests. Obviously, the discontinuance of tests ought to be based on reciprocity, but the Government of the Soviet Union could hardly have expected the date it had chosen for the suspension of its own tests to be acceptable as a suitable starting date for the Western Powers too.

47. The Swedish delegation noted, however, with great satisfaction that the three Members possessing atomic weapons—the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union—seemed to be in agreement in principle that a discontinuance of the tests was highly desirable. Furthermore, it assumed that all three now accepted 31 October 1958 as the date on which the first year of prohibition was to begin.

48. He deeply regretted that the United States and the United Kingdom had proposed a very short period—one year at a time—for the maintenance of the prohibition, and ventured to appeal to the Governments concerned to extend the period for a possible agreement. The United States made it the condition for each prolongation of the agreement that an inspection system should be installed and working effectively; it further wished to stipulate that satisfactory progress should have been made in reaching agreement on and implementing the arms control measures long sought by the United States. The United Kingdom had formulated similar conditions. If the Western Powers intended, by those conditions, that substantial disarmament measures should be accepted and applied before the opening of negotiations for the first prolongation of the agreement, that was to say, within a year, the period seemed unreasonably short.

49. In conclusion, he wished to say that a general prohibition of nuclear weapons tests would, in addition to the important and favourable consequences to which he had already referred, have a great psychological effect on the general public in all countries. The long debates on the disarmament question would at last have produced a positive result. Even if the agreement were to be only temporary, a very strong current of opinion would demand its prolongation at the end of the given period. Once a control system for an agreement on the suspension of testing had been successfully tried, there would be nothing to prevent the incorporation of the necessary control machinery in more complicated disarmament agreements.

50. A heavy responsibility lay, therefore, with the three big Powers which were to take part in the forthcoming conference on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests. Those negotiations would be followed with keen interest and attention. The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.