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 (A/3925, A/C.1/L.204, A/C.1/L.205) (continued)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. ZORIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on his delegation’s proposal for a reduction of the military budgets of the four great Powers (A/C.1/L.204), declared that the arms race was bringing the world closer to atomic war, while the inflated military budgets led to the squandering of national resources and inflicted unbearable hardships on the peoples. Total world expenditures on armaments for 1956 exceeded $100,000 million, of which the countries members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were spending more than $60,000 million. The arms race was the chief cause of the mounting tax burden, the inflationary rise in prices and the devaluation of currencies. It was ruining peasants and artisans, bankrupting small and middle-sized businesses, and affecting even the large-scale manufacturers of consumer goods.

2. The arms race benefited only a small group of monopolists, whose profits were growing steadily. Monopolies did not exist in the Soviet Union, which had consistently tried to put an end to the arms race. Previously it had sought to achieve this through the direct reduction of armed forces and armaments, but that approach had been unsuccessful owing to the attitude of the Western Powers. The USSR now proposed a reduction in the military budgets of the four nations which possessed the largest armed forces and made the largest arms expenditures. It was worth recalling that on 19 March 1957, at a meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Disarmament Commission, Mr. Stassen, the United States representative, had raised the possibility of a 10 per cent reduction in military budgets. Mr. Zorin expressed the hope that the United States would, therefore, support the Soviet proposal for the reduction of the military budgets of the four great Powers.

3. The halting of the arms race and the reduction of military expenditures would liberate vast productive resources and make it possible to lower taxes and raise the living standards of the peoples. The champions of the arms race argued that military production maintained business activity, stimulated the development of the economy, and raised the level of employment. However, the United States, in spite of its heavy military expenditures, had suffered three economic crises resulting from over-production since the Second World War. The halting of the arms race would not, of course, put an end to the basic economic contradictions of the capitalist system, but it would benefit the people and have a salutary effect on the economy. The Soviet Union had unilaterally reduced its defence expenditures from 112,100 million roubles in 1955 to 96,300 million roubles in 1956; at the same time, it had cut its armed forces by more than 2 million men. Those measures, far from slowing economic development, had promoted the expansion of industrial and agricultural production.

4. A reduction in the military budgets of the four great Powers would make it possible to use part of the savings so effected for economic assistance to the under-developed countries. Those countries had not yet placed their economies on a sound basis, and the arms race was a further factor tending to lower their level of living and impede their development. While the economic advancement of the under-developed countries was primarily the task of the countries concerned, organized assistance by the more highly industrialized countries was required if the former were to achieve the rapid expansion of the productive potential necessary for their development. The under-developed countries had received some assistance of the kind, under bilateral and multilateral agreements and under the United Nations technical assistance programmes, but such assistance had so far been wholly inadequate. The USSR accordingly proposed a 15 per cent reduction in the military budgets of the four great Powers, which would result in an annual saving of at least $10,000-$12,000 million. If only 10 per cent of that amount were set aside for assistance to the under-developed countries, a total of more than $1,000 million would be available. Such assistance should be extended with no military, political or other conditions which would impair the sovereignty of the recipient States.
5. The Soviet Union was prepared to reduce its military budget to the extent proposed and to extend assistance to the under-developed countries if the other Powers took similar action. There were no obstacles to agreement provided the necessary goodwill existed. Nor were any difficulties likely to arise in establishing a system of controls. In previous disarmament proposals, the Soviet Union had recommended appropriate control measures for the reduction of military budgets. Moreover, it was noteworthy that the decisions to reduce military appropriations would be taken by the supreme legislative bodies of the States concerned: that would provide the necessary guarantee that the decisions would be carried out.

6. In order to facilitate the reaching of an agreement, the question of the reduction of military budgets should be considered independently of other aspects of disarmament. To tie it in with other issues would hamper the adoption of a decision on a relatively uncomplicated question.

7. Offering his delegation's preliminary observations on the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205), he said that it was fundamentally unsatisfactory with regard to the chief and most urgent problem of disarmament, the question of discontinuing atomic and hydrogen weapons tests, as it contained no appeal to Powers conducting such tests to halt them immediately and unconditionally. The wording of the draft resolution, which spoke not of the cessation of tests but only of a suspension of tests, revealed the plans of its sponsors to confine themselves to suspending tests for a limited period of time, i.e. for the duration of the forthcoming negotiations in Geneva to begin on 21 October 1958. Therefore, if through the fault of the Western Powers themselves the Geneva negotiations were unsuccessful, the States conducting nuclear tests would have complete freedom to continue them.

8. It was clear, therefore, that, although the General Assembly was in a position to render substantial assistance in ensuring the success of the Geneva talks by appealing unequivocally for the unconditional discontinuance of nuclear tests, the sponsors of the draft resolution were attempting to reduce the Assembly's role in the matter to the adoption of an empty resolution which would commit no one and would do nothing to advance the solution of the question of tests and the disarmament problem as a whole.

9. The seventeen-Power draft resolution laid persistent stress on the idea that the General Assembly should speak in favour of a "technical approach" to the disarmament problem. The vagueness of that phraseology concealed a clear effort by the United States and other Western Powers to transfer all discussion of disarmament questions from the political to the technical level: to substitute for discussion of the substance of those questions, i.e. of agreed practical measures for the reduction of armaments and the prohibition of atomic weapons, a discussion of questions relating to the technique of control over the implementation of measures which not only were not being carried out, but on which no agreement had yet been achieved.

10. Such a technical approach was clearly unacceptable if the goal was to solve the principal questions of disarmament in substance and not merely to bury the question in endless technical disputes, as the Western Powers had done in the League of Nations. At the Geneva Conference of Experts to Study the Possibility of Detecting Violations of a Possible Agreement on the Suspension of Nuclear Tests, the experts of the Western Powers had repeatedly stated that a decision on the substance of the question of discontinuing tests could be taken only in negotiations at the government level. Now the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom were again evading the adoption of decisions on the substance of the question and it was becoming increasingly clear that they were trying to turn the forthcoming conference in Geneva into a new conference for the study of technical control matters, postponing indefinitely the adoption of a decision on the immediate and unconditional cessation of tests.

11. The draft resolution was an attempt to mislead public opinion by references to activities in the field of disarmament when, in fact, the problems of disarmament were not being solved. Such a resolution could only be harmful, for it would seriously handicap instead of promote the success of the forthcoming Geneva negotiations.

12. His delegation considered that the General Assembly had no right to relieve itself of the responsibility for promoting a solution of the urgent questions of disarmament and should clearly and unequivocally support a proposal for the immediate and unconditional discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests by all Powers. A draft resolution containing such a proposal had been submitted by his delegation (A/C.1/L.203) and its adoption by the General Assembly would contribute to a positive solution of the question at the forthcoming Geneva Conference.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.