CONTENTS

Agenda items 64, 70 and 72:
Question of disarmament (continued)

The discontinuance of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests (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) ........................................ 71

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

AGENDA ITEMS 64, 70 AND 72


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. NÚÑEZ PORTUONDO (Cuba) said that the long and fruitless discussion of disarmament in the United Nations had often served merely to provide a propaganda forum for those who wished to persuade the unwary of their pacific intentions while at the same time they unleashed aggression throughout the world. Although the people and Government of Cuba had always been resolute enemies of war, they could not be neutral in the conflict now dividing the world, for their traditions, political philosophy, religion, culture and way of life were opposed to the atheistic and imperialistic totalitarianism of one of the two sides. Cuba would never do anything which could be interpreted even indirectly as weakening the position of its allies, chief among them the United States, which by defending themselves were also saving the world from the expansionist efforts of the aggressive Powers.

2. Nevertheless, Cuba felt that an agreement on disarmament was more than necessary. It also held that the problem of disarmament had not been adequately explained to the masses, which were reached only by the incessant propaganda of the aggressor Powers. It should be clearly explained that the communist Powers had a great advantage in conventional weapons and that the only factor equalizing the situation was the possession of nuclear weapons by the Western Powers. It was a grave error to affirm that nuclear weapons had not served to preserve the integrity and liberty of States, for recent history demonstrated that States and peoples which could not defend themselves had been reduced to slavery while the countries possessing atomic weapons, and their allies, had remained free.

3. It would, of course, be desirable to establish a basis for agreement which might lead to the prohibition of nuclear weapons. But it would be dangerously imprudent to accept the prohibition of a weapon which equalized the strength of the opposing sides without a general agreement on disarmament at the same time. To do otherwise would mean to grant the Soviet Union a free hand in conquering the world.

4. Fundamentally, the problem was one of mutual trust. The United States, which had for a long time been the only possessor of atomic bombs, had never taken an inch of foreign territory. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had conquered many countries, and its Prime Minister had on several occasions threatened to use atomic weapons against even so unoffending a State as Switzerland. Its campaign against nuclear weapons was intended to achieve, not humanitarian goals, but the unilateral disarmament of the Western Powers, and thus to leave it overwhelmingly superior in conventional weapons and manpower.

5. The Cuban delegation welcomed, as a step forward, the conclusion that it was possible to detect clandestine nuclear explosions. It was also indispensable, however, to obtain full guarantees against surprise attacks with conventional weapons and to balance the military forces and capacities of both sides. For that reason, Cuba would vote against any draft resolution advocating a solution to the problem of nuclear weapons in isolation from the disarmament problem as a whole. On the other hand, it would enthusiastically support any initiative towards a general solution of the question which would include mutual guarantees, strict fulfilment of the obligations assumed and the stabilization of military forces on a basis of complete parity. It would vote on the draft resolutions submitted to the Committee in accordance with those fundamental ideas.

6. It would like also to repeat the suggestion it had already made on 2 October 1958 in the General Assembly (767th meeting) that an emergency fund financed by voluntary contributions should be established for the maintenance of peace, so that the Secretary-General could deal with unexpected situations when they led to expenditures exceeding budgetary appropriations for the purpose. It seemed neither just nor equitable that all Member States should have to contribute, as in the case of the United Nations Emergency Force, according to the percentage they contributed to the regular costs of the Organization. Small, peace-loving States which
did not provoke conflicts and took no part in disputes occurring in other parts of the world should not be asked to make contributions as large as if they bore an equal share of responsibility for those problems. In that connexion, he would draw attention to the memorandum presented by twenty Latin American delegations when the matter had been raised for the first time. His delegation did not intend to submit draft resolution on the question, but hoped that other delegations would examine the idea, which might serve as a basis for discussion in the future.

7. Mr. SCHURMANN (Netherlands) said that, following the deadlock in disarmament deliberations which had resulted from the failure of the great Powers to agree on matters of substance and the refusal of the Soviet Union to participate in the Disarmament Commission and its Sub-Committee, even though the Commission had been expanded to meet the wishes of that country, the Netherlands delegation had welcomed with some relief the constructive and promising work accomplished in the period between the twelfth and the thirteenth sessions of the General Assembly. Significant progress could now be expected from the forthcoming meetings of the "nuclear Powers" to discuss possible agreement on the cessation of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests and of experts of both sides to consider the practical aspects of safeguarding against surprise attack.

8. Although those developments represented marginal approaches to the central problem of disarmament and had not broken the deadlock entirely, they could, if they led to an agreement, reduce the distrust between the great Powers and give impetus to further progress in other fields of disarmament. The merit of the method called "the technical approach" was that it paved the way for political decisions by a thorough investigation of their practical consequences, and it accordingly deserved to be given every possible chance. It was therefore regrettable that the representative of the Soviet Union had (947th meeting) denied the desirability of adopting that method to problems other than the cessation of tests and the prevention of surprise attack. On the other hand, the technical approach was not a panacea for disarmament. Progress achieved by that means was valuable only if it served as an incentive to disarm in such a way as to guarantee continuous security for the world throughout the disarmament process. That process could only be set in motion by political negotiations.

9. In the opinion of the Netherlands delegation, disarmament in nuclear weapons, disarmament in conventional weapons, and effective control were inextricably linked. The Netherlands was constantly aware of the presence, only a few hundred miles to the east of its borders, of the enormous armed strength of the Soviet Union, especially in the form of manpower equipped with conventional weapons, and its opinion was therefore based on obvious practical necessity. The crux of the matter was that the huge Soviet armies could only be held in check by the nuclear armaments of the Western Powers; consequently, to reduce or prohibit those armaments without at the same time reducing that force equipped with conventional weapons was to make Western Europe defenceless against an overwhelming numerical superiority. Subject to that reservation, the Netherlands was prepared to endorse the view that the General Assembly should concentrate, at its current session, on promoting an agreement between the "nuclear Powers" with regard to the cessation of nuclear weapons tests.

10. The people and Government of the Netherlands sincerely desired an early and permanent cessation of nuclear weapons tests. Public pressure for such a move had increased since the publication of the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/3380). The conference in Geneva scheduled to begin on 31 October 1958 should not fail to draw its own conclusions from that report in its efforts to agree on the cessation of nuclear tests. On the other hand, no agreement on the cessation of tests could be put into effect unless a control system were operating effectively. It would be desirable to have such a system incorporated in the United Nations machinery, but whatever form it took, it would have to be continuously effective. Moreover, in order to build mutual trust and for reasons of security, controlled cessation of tests would have to be accompanied by progress in respect of other aspects of disarmament. A cessation of tests should be followed rapidly by a cessation of the production of nuclear weapons, a reduction of stocks of such weapons and a lowering of the levels of armaments and conventional armaments, all those measures to be carried out by agreement. The Netherlands delegation extended its best wishes for success to the experts to meet in Geneva on 10 November 1958 to discuss practical means of safeguarding against surprise attack. Any technical agreement they might reach should be followed by political negotiations on minimizing the danger of surprise attack.

11. Prompted by all those considerations, the Netherlands delegation had co-sponsored the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205). That text formulated in an appropriate manner the expectations of the General Assembly with regard to the forthcoming discussions in Geneva, indicated the course to be followed towards real disarmament, and recognized the United Nations responsibility in the matter.

12. The Netherlands could not, on the other hand, support the draft resolutions on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests submitted by the Soviet Union (A/C.1/L.203) and by India and others (A/C.1/L.203/Rev.1 and Add.1) in the conviction that a cessation of tests could only be brought about on the basis of a formal agreement and not by a request to the parties to stop tests without any prior agreement.

13. A reduction in military budgets, as proposed by the Soviet Union (A/C.1/L.204), could only be carried out as a result of an agreement on the reduction of armed forces and of both conventional and nuclear armaments. Unless budgets were cut under those conditions, it would be impossible to assess the effect of budgetary cuts on the nuclear and conventional strength of the principal Powers. Thus, action not based on previous agreement between the Powers involved serious risks of affecting the balance of power and security in the world. Moreover, no reduction of military budgets would be valid without effective control and, it would be noted, the Soviet draft resolution made no provision for such control. Finally, in view of the differences in the budgetary systems and in the social and economic structures of the Powers concerned, the budgetary reductions proposed by the USSR would not have the same effect in both camps. The whole question required much further study.
14. The Netherlands delegation wished to emphasize its belief that the promotion of the economic and social advancement of the less developed countries was so essential for the maintenance of world peace and security that it would be wholly unjustified to defer measures for improving their living conditions until effectively controlled world-wide disarmament had been secured. The savings on armaments should not be depended upon to furnish the primary funds for economic development; they should provide additional funds for that purpose, and it was fortunate that the General Assembly had not waited for agreement on disarmament before establishing, by resolution 1219 (XII), the Special Fund. The Netherlands trusted that the Special Fund would expand and become really effective, regardless of whether military budgets were ultimately reduced.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.