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Chairman: Mr. Miguel Rafael URQUIZA (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. U THANT (Burma) said it was his delegation's opinion that the issues in the debate on disarmament were now comparatively clear. In the first place, there was plainly a growing consensus among experts that the continuation of nuclear weapons tests might do irreparable harm to humanity. The report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/3838) had confirmed the widespread apprehension regarding the effects of radiation. Apart from all other considerations, therefore, common sense demanded that humanity put an end to the suicidal nuclear test explosions.

2. Secondly, it was obvious that the means for the extermination of the human species which were now in the hands of three great Powers would soon pass into the hands of many States, large and small, and that there would be no end to the spread of nuclear weapons until almost every sovereign State possessed them. While sane rulers would be restrained from making use of such weapons, experience had shown that from time to time power in one or another country fell into the hands of rulers who were not sane. Moreover, there were no final safeguards against the possibility of accidental explosions resulting from human failure.

3. Thirdly, as the report of 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, had indicated (A/3897), it was technically and scientifically practicable to ensure the observance of an agreement on the discontinuance of nuclear tests.

4. The obstacle to a disarmament agreement was the difference of opinion regarding whether disarmament measures should be linked together so that each proposal was contingent on the acceptance of all the others, or whether each measure should be negotiated separately, beginning with the most urgent item. His delegation considered that it would be excessively optimistic to press for agreement on all aspects of disarmament. One of the most urgently needed measures was the discontinuance, of all nuclear weapons tests under adequate control, with the ultimate aim of complete cessation of such tests.

5. Time was already running short, and delay entailed untold risk. No nation was entitled to try to remove an evil by invoking an even greater evil, such as the hydrogen bomb. Those considerations would guide his delegation in voting on the draft resolutions before the Committee.

6. In conclusion, he appealed to the great Powers to show a spirit of understanding and compromise so that positive results might be achieved in the present discussions. The United Nations could take action only if the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were in agreement, and the problem of disarmament in general and of the discontinuance of nuclear tests in particular was one which called for immediate solution.

7. Mr. ESIN (Turkey) said that, although the two disarmament resolutions adopted at the twelfth session of the General Assembly (resolutions 1148 (XII) and 1150 (XII)) had remained unheeded, it was the Assembly's duty to continue to give close attention to disarmament problems and to place its views on record. He noted with satisfaction the outcome of the Geneva Conference of Experts and expressed the hope that the Geneva conference on the suspension of nuclear tests, scheduled to begin on 31 October 1958, and that on measures to prevent surprise attack, to convene on 10 November 1958, would be successful. While only political agreement could bring about disarmament, agreements in the technical field were valuable as a means of building mutual confidence. The discontinuance of nuclear weapons testing was, indeed, important primarily for its effect in creating trust. Nevertheless, the total abolition of nuclear weapons and the reduction of other types of armaments should be the primary objective of the United Nations.

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8. Turkey would be greatly relieved to see general disarmament achieved, for it was obliged to maintain a large defence establishment at a time when it was also striving to raise the living standards of its people. Nevertheless, it could not sacrifice its security for economic advantages, and it felt that disarmament could bring security only if it was accompanied by effective international control and embraced a reduction in conventional armaments.

9. In approaching the disarmament problem, the General Assembly should be realistic and avoid proposals which sounded attractive but were impracticable or peripheral to the problem. While it would have been desirable to reconcile the various draft resolutions before the Committee through a compromise of some kind, the wide divergence of views seemed to preclude that; Turkey found the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205) the most acceptable of those which had been submitted.

10. Mr. BELAunde (Peru) said his delegation believed that the Committee should be guided in its judgement of the draft resolutions before it by the following principles which his delegation had supported since 1951 with regard to disarmament:

1. Disarmament was the proper concern of the United Nations, and peace could be preserved only on the basis of balanced disarmament.

2. Disarmament was indivisible, and must include not only conventional weapons but also nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them.

3. The dangers of atomic weapons made a controlled discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests necessary.

4. The discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests would be a first step towards disarmament and the first experiment in international control of armaments.

5. Nevertheless, the discontinuance of tests could not in itself be considered a disarmament measure, for it did not affect the essence of the problem, which was the production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons.

6. Control by means of adequate permanent inspection must also be applied to the regulation of conventional weapons, to communications centres, to nuclear production facilities, and to military budgets.

7. It had now been proved that control of armaments was possible, except over stockpiling.

8. Control was not an end in itself, but a means to the absolute prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons. Without control, however, prohibition was meaningless and, therefore, whoever sincerely desired prohibition must desire control.

9. Since control was the guarantee that agreements would be fulfilled, to reject or postpone it was to reject the rule of law in international relations.

10. The acceptance of control was the definitive proof of the good will and good faith of the negotiating parties. The establishment of a system of control would therefore in itself create a climate of confidence in international relations.

11. Control could not be rejected on the grounds of a concept of sovereignty based on the absolute supremacy of the State over and above international law, for sovereignty meant the freedom of a State within the framework of international law.

12. Without emphasizing the technical aspects of the disarmament question at the expense of the political aspects, his delegation believed that study of those technical aspects was useful and important. A meeting of experts should be held to study practical means of establishing control over a cut-off in the production of nuclear weapons and the destruction or conversion to peaceful uses of existing stockpiles of such weapons.

13. Pending an agreement on control, an agreement on the gradual cessation of the production of nuclear weapons and the destruction or gradual conversion of stockpiles to peaceful uses on a basis of equality could be discussed or negotiated preferably under the auspices of the United Nations.

14. Disarmament could not be separated from vital questions of human rights and the right of historic national entities to rule themselves, for it was the violation of those rights which was the fundamental cause of international tension.

15. Whatever difficulties arose in the question of disarmament, the Powers concerned should not abandon the effort to negotiate their differences and every effort should be made to preserve the area of agreement between them.

11. In the light of those principles, the Soviet draft resolution on the cessation of nuclear tests (A/C.1/L.203 and Corr. 1) was open to objection on a number of grounds. It contained no affirmation of the permanent competence of the United Nations regarding the entire question of disarmament, nor did it refer specifically to the need for further negotiation between the parties. Moreover, it ignored the principle that disarmament was indivisible, since it made no reference to other aspects of the question. For those reasons his delegation would be unable to support it.

12. The Soviet draft resolution on the reduction of the military budgets of the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France (A/C.1/L.204), though attractive in appearance, was also open to serious objections. First, since military budgets changed constantly in response to technical progress and the need for extraordinary expenditures might arise at any time, no State could in good faith accept a reduction which it might be unable to fulfill. Moreover, it would be impossible to accept such a proposal without a very carefully planned system of control, for it was recognized by experts on the question that existing budgetary practices made possible the concealment of enormous allocations even in States where information regarding governmental budgets was relatively unrestricted. For those reasons, his delegation would be unable to vote in favour of the Soviet draft resolution.

13. His delegation would, however, vote in favour of the seven-Power amendment (A/C.1/L.208) to the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205), which sought the same end but seemed more in keeping with the realities of the world situation.

14. His delegation viewed the thirteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.202/Rev.1 and Add.1) with sympathy because that draft reflected the desire of all small countries for liberty, economic development and peace. Unlike the Soviet draft resolution, it did not ignore the jurisdiction of the United Nations in the matter of disarmament. It differed basically from the seventeen-Power draft resolution only in calling for
the discontinuance of nuclear tests until an agreement was reached. Since the two drafts had so much in common, it might perhaps be possible for the sponsors to reach agreement on a single text.

15. The seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205), taken as a whole, was in complete accordance with the fifteen principles he had listed, and for that reason he would vote in favour of it.

16. The Irish draft resolution (A/C.1/L.206) on the establishment of a committee to study the dangers inherent in the further dissemination of nuclear weapons was a natural complement to the resolution adopted at the twelfth session of the Assembly regarding collective action to inform the peoples of the world of the dangers of atomic warfare (resolution 1149 (XIII)). His delegation saw no objection to the establishment of such a committee.

17. However, his delegation could not support the Irish amendments (A/C.1/L.207), because in the present state of international tension the possession of nuclear weapons might be a factor necessary to maintain the balance of forces.

18. His delegation viewed the Mexican draft resolution (A/C.1/L.208) with great sympathy because that draft was in accordance with the fifteenth of the principles he had listed. However the practicability of the draft would depend on its acceptance by the Powers concerned. His delegation hoped that they would accept, and that their negotiations would be fruitful. If that effort did not succeed, however, it might be necessary for the General Assembly categorically to invite the Powers concerned to continue negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations and with the help of the Secretary-General. Other Powers who enjoyed the confidence of both sides might also take part in those negotiations. The Secretary-General would have to submit a report to the Security Council which would in turn inform the General Assembly, thus fulfilling the obligations with regard to disarmament imposed on the United Nations by the Charter.

19. The debate in the Committee had been very useful. The General Assembly was a sounding-board and it was necessary to point out that the armaments race was forcing certain countries to channel their production into arms, to the detriment of their economy. The huge expenditure on armaments, as cited by the Soviet representatives, had proved that the great Powers were neglecting their duty to the rest of the world: the duty to devote part of those expenditures to fighting the miseries that plagued humanity.

20. Mr. WALKER (Australia) reviewed the negative developments of the past year in the matter of disarmament. He noted particularly the failure of the Disarmament Commission to function owing to a threat of boycott by some of its members, the waning of Soviet enthusiasm for a meeting of Heads of Government, and the fact that General Assembly resolution 1148 (XII) had remained inoperative. The stalemate in disarmament discussions had reached such a point that it was the Secretary-General who had ultimately requested the inclusion of the item on the agenda of the thirteenth session, at the same time submitting an extremely valuable memorandum on the subject (A/3936).

21. Recent events outside the United Nations had to some extent revived hopes for some progress in disarmament, in particular, the agreement reached by the Conference of Experts in Geneva that the violations of a possible agreement on the suspension of nuclear weapons tests was feasible. Those hopes had been reinforced by the acceptance of that agreement in principle by the three "nuclear Powers", and the prospect of a further experts' conference on measures to prevent surprise attack. While some might regret that that measure of progress had been achieved outside the United Nations disarmament machinery, it was clear that no progress could be expected unless there was agreement among the "nuclear Powers". His delegation believed that procedural formalities should not be permitted to jeopardize the prospects of such an agreement. In any case, if agreements were reached, appropriate United Nations machinery would be needed for their effective implementation.

22. The immediate purpose of the present debate was to contribute to the success of the tripartite negotiations in Geneva to begin on 31 October 1956. An agreement, resulting from those talks, for a discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests under a system of international inspection would be welcomed by the whole world, not only because of the protection it would afford against the hazards to human health of nuclear test explosions, but also because it might constitute a first positive step towards more important measures of disarmament backed by international inspection.

23. The subject of the forthcoming Geneva negotiations was not a simple one, as the Soviet representative appeared to suggest. The agreement that a workable system of control was technically feasible was not sufficient to bring such a system into operation. As the report of the Conference of Experts explained, the system envisaged required the establishment of an international control organ, the development of various types of apparatus, the selection of sites for control posts and the establishment of a world-wide network of such posts, the establishment of a reliable communications system, machinery for the analysis and processing of data from the observations of the control posts, and arrangements for staffing the posts (A/3897, annex VII). While the experts had specified the number of posts considered necessary and the distances between them, they had pointed out that the exact number could be determined only in the process of actually disposing them around the globe. They had also envisaged arrangements for air sampling to be carried out by aircraft flying over areas remote from surface control posts. Indeed, the whole operation would be one of considerable magnitude in a new field of international co-operation.

24. According to the experts, there were to be seven control posts in Australia, and it was conceivable that additional posts might be proposed for places within Australian territory. While the Australian Government was prepared to accept in principle the establishment of inspection posts in Australia, it could not commit itself to any inspection system that did not include potential aggressors and, if such posts were actually to be established, Australian security requirements would have to be met. Consequently, the Australian Government expected to be consulted in the event of technical discussions relating to the establishment of posts and inspection procedures in its territory. He had thought it necessary to make that position clear because Australia was a country in which nuclear tests had taken place.
25. But control posts would have to be established in many parts of the world where there had not yet been any nuclear tests and the countries concerned would have to extend their full co-operation in overcoming the practical and political problems that were bound to arise. The forthcoming tripartite negotiations could be expected to be, not only complex, but somewhat protracted. At some stage, other countries would have to be brought in to the extent that their agreement was necessary for the practical implementation in their territory of the proposed inspection and control system.

26. The need for early agreement was further emphasized by the general recognition that disarmament in nuclear weapons would be gravely complicated by the emergence of additional "nuclear Powers". There were already a number of countries with the technical and industrial capacity to enable them to enter the nuclear arms race if they so chose. With the international spread of the peaceful uses of atomic energy, the number of countries capable of manufacturing nuclear weapons was bound to increase still further. Australia regarded the prospect of the production of nuclear weapons by additional countries with the greatest concern. It would be recalled that the Prime Minister of Australia had said in Parliament on 19 September 1957 that one of the principal reasons why Australia should not embark upon such production was that there was an advantage to the world in having nuclear weapons in the hands of the three "nuclear Powers" and no others. Those Powers, he had pointed out, were sufficiently informed about the deadly character of those weapons to be reluctant to provoke a war in which they would be used; they were thus a deterrent, not only to prospective enemies, but to themselves. He had further expressed concern lest the extension of the manufacture of nuclear weapons to other States might increase the danger of irresponsible action. It was for those reasons that the Australian Government had decided that apart from the experimental work proceeding at Woowera and Maralinga in co-operation with the United Kingdom, Australia would confine its defence plans to the field of conventional armaments. Every increase in the number of Powers capable of producing nuclear weapons complicated the process of securing international agreement on nuclear disarmament. If the manufacture and possession of those weapons were to become widely disseminated, the negotiation, and certainly the implementation, of an effective disarmament agreement might well become practically impossible.

27. In the circumstances, it was urgent not only that a control system for the suspension of nuclear weapons tests should be put in operation, but that agreement should be reached on such other measures as would remove the incentive to additional countries to manufacture nuclear weapons. Australia had co-sponsored the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205) in the belief that, while not a blueprint for disarmament or a definition of the United Nations role in future negotiations, it indicated the most constructive lines along which progress could be sought in the forthcoming months. The prospects for further progress would depend upon the results achieved at the Geneva negotiations. Moreover, the seventeen-Power text embodied ideas that should command the unanimous support of the General Assembly, and his delegation hoped that progress could actually be carried beyond what was explicitly set out in the text, although the process of negotiation would not be helped by making that text any more specific.

28. The main emphasis in the draft resolution was on the need for agreement in the coming negotiations and the desirability of avoiding nuclear weapons testing while the negotiations were in progress, but attention should also be given to paragraph 4, which stressed the importance of the technical approach in disarmament deliberations. The significance of the Geneva Conference of Experts was that it proved the efficacy of a free and private exchange of views between qualified experts from both sides. The essential contribution of the technical approach was to enable the men who had to take political decisions to base those decisions on a firm foundation of agreed scientific knowledge, rather than on a welter of conflicting opinions. It was to be hoped that the same method would produce agreement on the prevention of surprise attack.

29. While the concluding paragraphs of the seventeen-Power draft were intended to establish a link between the United Nations and the negotiations taking place outside the United Nations, no attempt had been made to deal with the problem of continuing the United Nations disarmament machinery. That omission should not deter the General Assembly from supporting and encouraging the Governments that were to participate in the forthcoming negotiations.

30. Bearing in mind that a suspension of nuclear tests left untouched the complex problems of nuclear disarmament and its relation to conventional disarmament, the Australian Government wished to stress that it had never considered it realistic to draw a sharp distinction in any disarmament plans between conventional forces and weapons on the one hand and nuclear weapons on the other. The prohibition of nuclear weapons under effective international control should proceed concurrently with major reductions in conventional forces and weapons to agreed levels. Agreements developed mainly in the light of the security problems of the great Powers might require some adjustment to take account of the effects of proposed arrangements on the security of smaller countries in various parts of the world. Australia felt, for example, that a disarmament agreement that did not impose suitable obligations on Communist China would fall short of what was required for security in Australia's part of the world, where the disproportionate strength of Communist China's conventional forces and the militarization of its population were the major potential danger to the peace of Asia and the countries bordering on it. It would be unfortunate if preoccupation with the problem of reaching agreement on the suspension of tests, measures to guard against surprise attack and nuclear disarmament diverted attention from other basic aspects of disarmament of direct and vital concern to Australia and its neighbours.

31. Mr. WALDHEIM (Austria) expressed gratification at the success of the Conference of Experts and said he hoped that the Geneva negotiations scheduled to open on 31 October 1958 would result in an agreement on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests. Although disarmament was primarily a political question, he agreed with the view expressed in the Secretary-General's memorandum that the technical aspects of disarmament should be thoroughly explored (A/3936, para. 3). The work of such bodies as the Scientific
Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and the Second International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy could contribute to lessening world tension by promoting the exchange of information concerning military technologies and armaments.

32. The Eastern and Western nations were in agreement that nuclear weapons tests should be discontinued, but they disagreed on the duration of such discontinuance. Since both sides were apparently acting in good faith, it should be possible to resolve that difference, preferably on the basis of a permanent cessation of tests rather than a temporary suspension. The Committee should not attempt to settle the basic issues involved, but should concentrate its efforts on combining the various draft resolutions into a single resolution which could be adopted unanimously. Such a resolution should call upon the participants in the forthcoming Geneva negotiations to reach an early agreement on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests under international control and should express the desire that as a result of such an agreement no further tests should take place. As a symbolic first step towards the prohibition of the production of nuclear weapons, the atomic Powers should voluntarily contribute to peaceful uses through the International Atomic Energy Agency part of the fissionable material destined for military purposes.

33. Both East and West were aware of the danger of surprise attack and appeared to agree that preventive measures must include both control stations on the ground and aerial inspection; the extent of the zones of control was still at issue. He hoped that the negotiations which were to begin in Geneva on 10 November 1958 would lead to some progress.

34. An agreement on the reduction of the military budgets of the great Powers would help to reduce world tension, and the proposed utilization of part of the savings so effected for assistance to the underdeveloped countries would be most welcome. Although the extent of the projected budget reduction and certain other questions were still matters of controversy, there was agreement in principle on the usefulness of such a measure; hence, it should be possible to arrive at a solution. An objective study by a committee of experts drawn from the countries concerned might be advisable.

35. The question of the peaceful use of outer space, though not before the Committee at the moment, was one on which international agreement should be reached as soon as possible, lest the situation in that regard should become as critical as that which had arisen with respect to the use of atomic energy.

36. Mr. LOUTFI (United Arab Republic) said that, although disarmament was the primary responsibility of the major Powers, it was of vital concern to all peoples. Member States should make every effort to bring about a rapprochement of views among the great Powers which would lead to a constructive solution. The United Nations must find a way to reactivate the Disarmament Commission or establish some United Nations machinery through which disarmament negotiations could be pursued. In that connexion, constructive proposals had been made by Mexico (A/C.1/L.208) and by India and Yugoslavia (A/C.1/L.210).

37. The United Arab Republic had always pressed for a cessation of nuclear tests and welcomed the agreement reached by the Conference of Experts and the prospect of tripartite negotiations to begin on 31 October 1958 in Geneva. His country had declared itself in favour of a cessation of tests as early as the African-Asian Conference, held at Bandung in 1955; at the Conference of Independent African States, held at Accra in April 1958, it had reiterated its support by subscribing to a resolution adopted by those States specifically condemning proposals for holding nuclear weapons tests in the Sahara. In view of the findings of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, there was no doubt that it was in the interest of humanity to find means of discontinuing tests and thus protecting present and future generations from radiation hazards.

38. The United Arab Republic had been deeply alarmed by the rumours regarding French intentions of carrying out test explosions in the Sahara. It associated itself with Ghana, which had appealed to France not to hold such tests (952nd meeting). However, judging from Mr. Moch's recent remarks in the Committee (955th meeting), France was determined to carry out tests unless the present "nuclear Powers" stopped increasing their stockpiles of nuclear weapons and began to reduce them.

39. Although the cessation of tests was not a solution of the problem of nuclear disarmament, it was a step in the right direction. The United Arab Republic fully supported the view expressed by the representative of Sweden that if nuclear tests were stopped by the great Powers, other States would renounce their plans to develop nuclear armaments (946th meeting). Moreover, a cessation of tests would be a step towards the cessation of production of nuclear weapons and the destruction of existing stocks. While there were differences among the "nuclear Powers" on certain important aspects of the problem, those differences were not irreconcilable.

40. The United Arab Republic believed a cessation of tests to be so urgently required and so ripe for solution that it had co-sponsored a separate draft resolution on the matter (A/C.1/L.202/Rev.1 and Add.1). It had done so in a spirit of compromise, and would draw special attention to operative paragraph 4 calling upon the "non-nuclear Powers" not to embark upon the testing of nuclear weapons pending the completion of the negotiations to be begun on 31 October 1958 between the "nuclear Powers". In that connexion, the Irish amendments (A/C.1/L.207) and the Irish draft resolution (A/C.1/L.206) deserved close study.

41. In matters of disarmament, the United Arab Republic believed that majority votes often had the effect of making divergent positions more rigid. The Committee should strive for a single text capable of securing unanimous acceptance. His country appealed to the "nuclear Powers" to make every effort to reach agreement during the Geneva negotiations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.