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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. LALL (India) introduced the draft resolutions which India had sponsored jointly with Yugoslavia concerning United Nations machinery for disarmament (A/C.1/L.210) and the conference of experts to study the technical aspects of measures against surprise attack, to convene on 10 November 1958 (A/C.1/L.211).

2. The impasse in general disarmament negotiations, the failure of the United Nations to secure the reduction by a single weapon of the total arsenal of armaments, and the growing volume of increasingly destructive modern weapons had motivated the Indian and Yugoslav delegations in seeking, in a draft resolution (A/C.1/L.210), to ensure the existence of some United Nations machinery for continuing consideration of disarmament problems. The impact of modern weapons was no longer on a specific target, but on the world in general. In any future war, even the non-participants would be victims. That fundamental fact had altered the nature of the discussions in the Committee. It had caused all Member States to be deeply concerned about the armaments position, and whereas in the past there might have been some justification for arrangements for discussions on disarmament among small groups of countries in bodies such as the Disarmament Commission or sub-committees, weapons developments in certain countries no longer justified such restricted discussion. All States were compelled to concern themselves with disarmament problems in the interest of their very survival, and, as the representatives of countries closely concerned had stated, the United Nations could never rid itself of its responsibility in the field of disarmament.

3. As matters stood, it was only during the annual sessions of the General Assembly that the United Nations came close to adopting decisions on disarmament, a fact which could be attributed to the wide participation of Member States in the debate. In contrast, numerous meetings over the years of small groups representing the major Powers, in particular in the Sub-Committee of the Disarmament Commission, had not produced results. Those Powers were not blame for the failure to reach agreement, nor was their good will being questioned. It was no disrespect to the countries represented on the Sub-Committee to state that they should no longer be allowed to meet in that small group. The solution of disarmament problems did not brook delay and the world could not continue to wait, amid growing tension, while the major Powers became deadlocked in time and again. In the interest of its own security and of humanity, no country could stand aside while the dangerous arms race continued. It was logical and reasonable for all States to be in a position to meet—continuously, if necessary, but certainly at any time—in order to consider disarmament issues.

4. With those considerations in mind, the Indian and Yugoslav delegations had called for the reconstitution of the Disarmament Commission with a membership identical to that of the General Assembly, in the light of the failure of the Disarmament Commission and its Sub-Committee to achieve progress, and with time pressing for a solution, it could not be argued that a disarmament commission thus constituted would be too large and unwieldy a body to take positive action. The Indian-Yugoslav proposal did not preclude the Disarmament Commission from setting up committees on specific problems, but the sponsors had not considered that that fact need be specified in their draft resolution. Such arrangements, on an ad hoc basis, would probably be made in the normal course of events; indeed, even as the Committee was deliberating, there was much informal discussion going on in smaller groups. The newly-constituted Disarmament Commission would be free to establish subsidiary bodies, if it saw fit to do so.

5. The other draft resolution sponsored jointly by India and Yugoslavia (A/C.1/L.211) was intended to express the deep desire of the countries of the world
that there should be some progress on another aspect of disarmament, the question of preventing surprise attack, which was to be dealt with at the conference of experts to convene at Geneva on 10 November 1958. The draft merely expressed hope that the conference would be fruitful and, since it was essential that the General Assembly should concern itself with disarmament, asked that the United Nations should be informed of the progress achieved. The General Assembly or the Disarmament Commission might then be able, at the right moment, to give further impetus to the gains made at Geneva.

6. Mr. VIDIC (Yugoslavia), explaining the reasons why Yugoslavia had co-sponsored the two draft resolutions (A/C.1/L.210, A/C.1/L.211), said with regard to the latter, that it would be useful for the cause of disarmament if the General Assembly interested itself in and attempted to promote the success of the experts' talks to commence on 10 November in Geneva on practical means for preventing surprise attack and were informed of their results so as to be able to take them into account in its further efforts to achieve basic initial agreements on disarmament issues. It would also be useful if the Secretary-General were to assist the experts as required.

7. With regard to the other draft resolution (A/C.1/L.210), all States agreed that a resumption of disarmament talks on a permanent basis within the framework of the United Nations was desirable and indispensable. On the other hand, there were no prospects of agreement between the major Powers on the reconstitution of the Disarmament Commission with a limited membership. Accordingly, the draft resolution called for expanding the membership of the Commission to include all Member States. Since the Commission's composition would then be identical to that of the Assembly, the exercise of United Nations competence in that framework should be acceptable to the major Powers and to all States. It might avert the danger of a continuing deadlock in disarmament negotiations and it would stress the common responsibility of all Member States in the matter and permit them to contribute to a solution. As would be seen from the draft resolution, the new Disarmament Commission would have broad terms of reference: it was being requested to consider those aspects of disarmament on which there was the best prospect of agreement. It would also be expected to take due account of the proposals and suggestions made at the General Assembly's thirteenth session and to report the progress achieved to the Assembly, at a special session if necessary.

8. The draft resolutions, which went beyond the pattern of declarations, could have a positive effect on the disarmament deadlock. His delegation hoped that they would receive unanimous support.

9. Mr. LALL (India) pointed out that India had co-sponsored three draft resolutions (A/C.1/L.202/Rev.1 and Add.1, A/C.1/L.210, A/C.1/L.211) for which it would vote, and hoped that they would be unanimously adopted. It would not vote in favour of the seventeen-Power text (A/C.1/L.205) or the USSR text on the discontinuance of nuclear tests (A/C.1/L.203 and Corr.1).

10. Mr. SHUKAIRY (Saudi Arabia) said it was clear that a sustained effort was being made to evade and diminish the competence of the United Nations in the matter of disarmament. Had it not been for the Secretary-General's initiative, the question of disarmament would not even have been placed on the Assembly's agenda at the current session. Moreover, the United Kingdom representative, in explaining the seventeen-Power draft resolution (946th meeting), had stressed an ultimatum on the United Nations, not only declaring that it could do no more in connexion with the meeting to be convened at Geneva on 31 October 1958 on the question of nuclear tests than encourage the participants, but also detailing the manner in which that encouragement was to be expressed. Such attempts to rob the United Nations of its primary responsibility for disarmament were inadmissible.

11. No doubt the General Assembly had no statutory power to force the great Powers to follow a particular course of action; nevertheless, it could enunciate general principles for disarmament, and recommend the suspension of nuclear weapons tests and the prohibition of nuclear weapons, the destruction of stockpiles of such weapons and agreement on a co-ordinated plan of disarmament. The plea that the great Powers should be given an opportunity to negotiate could impress only persons ignorant of the history of the disarmament question. For thirteen years the great Powers had been negotiating on disarmament in the United Nations. After all those years of labour, the question of disarmament was still before the United Nations, and its gravity, intensity and complexity had increased tenfold. Each year the General Assembly had appealed for a disarmament agreement, and each year its appeal had been answered only by an agreement to disagree.

12. Now, as the final touch in that melancholy story, the disarmament question had come before the United Nations for the first time in its history without a report and indeed without a substantive proposal. The emphasis had shifted to matters which, while important, were really marginal to disarmament. The United Kingdom, for example, had almost ignored the crucial issue in its statements before the Committee, perhaps because it had lately been too deeply engaged in arming Israel to ponder on disarmament.

13. Along with disarmament there was the twin question of the reduction of the military budgets of the four Powers, which, though included in the agenda as an independent item only at the current session, had been discussed in the United Nations for many years. No progress had been made on the matter during all that time; in fact, the resolution adopted on the question at the twelfth session of the General Assembly (resolution 1148 (XII)), with its conditions and qualifications, had represented a step backward by comparison with the resolution adopted in 1955 (resolution 914 (X)). He would not dwell on the question except to say that the under-developed countries did not covet the resources of the developed ones. They longed for the day when the great Powers would reduce their military expenditures even if those Powers did not then extend assistance to them. It was primarily peace, not economic assistance, that brought prosperity to the under-developed peoples and to the whole world. The allocation to under-developed countries of funds freed by disarmament must, however, be preceded by the rectification of an injustice which was hindering the development schemes of certain small countries: the release of the funds of certain
countries in accounts at present blocked in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

14. With regard to the cessation of nuclear weapons tests, it was his delegation's belief that it was safest and wisest to be guided by the most pessimistic appraisals of the danger such tests represented, for the very survival of the human race was at stake. In that connection, France's rejection of the idea of a suspension of tests, even if the 'nuclear Powers' should reach agreement on the question, was to be condemned, especially since it was not French skies which would be contaminated, but those of the continent of Africa.

15. His delegation was fully aware that a cessation of nuclear tests was not a direct disarmament measure. Nevertheless, the continuation of tests was certain to lead to catastrophic results both by increasing the destructive power of nuclear weapons and by increasing the number of countries which possessed them. It was the duty of the United Nations to prevent that from happening: the nuclear weapons industry must not be allowed to pass from one continent to another.

16. In his delegation's view all the draft resolutions submitted to the Committee were excellent in themselves and differed only in emphasis. The most important question before the Committee was how to reconvene the Disarmament Commission and to end the present deadlock. The suggestions contained in the Mexican draft resolution (A/C.1/L.208) offered a way to do so. His delegation would suggest that the working group proposed in that draft should be as small as possible, consisting perhaps of the representatives of the United States and the USSR, the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the First Committee as chairman of the group.

17. For the rest, his delegation believed that the First Committee's primary duty was to agree on a unanimous resolution from which the forthcoming Geneva conferences, which offered the best hope of breaking the long deadlock on disarmament, might draw inspiration and guidance. His delegation would accordingly suggest that a working group be established to try to produce a single draft resolution containing all the helpful elements to be found in the various drafts and amendments.

18. In conclusion, he would express his delegation's ardent hope for an early settlement of the disarmament problem. The small countries had no arms to reduce, no bombs to ban, and no nuclear tests to cease. Yet they could make a great contribution to the cause of peace by helping the nations grouped in rigid blocs to rise above their narrow antagonisms.

19. In recent months evidence had been accumulating in the Press that Israel was contemplating an attack on Jordan. He wished to state solemnly, for the United Nations and all Governments to note, that any such attack would be regarded by all the Arab States as a direct attack upon themselves, to be met with all the collective measures of self-defence for which the Charter of the United Nations provided. Should Israel embark upon such an attack, the peace of the world would be endangered an the work of the United Nations for disarmament would be brought to an end.

20. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the obstacles to disarmament were chiefly political in nature and could be overcome if the States concerned showed good will. However, United States professions of willingness to co-operate were belied by President Eisenhower's recent statement that United States policy must be based on "positions of strength". The United States and the United Kingdom had obviously ruled out disarmament as a means of safeguarding peace and were relying instead on nuclear weapons.

21. The Western Powers, instead of dealing with the problem at a pace at a time, were piling up preliminary conditions, prominent among which was an exclusively technical approach. At the same time, they were trying to convince public opinion that disarmament was hopelessly complex and unattainable and the nuclear arms race a vital necessity, while seeking to minimize the dangers of nuclear weapons testing.

22. The position taken by the Western Powers had made a comprehensive solution of the disarmament problem impossible. An effort should therefore be made to seek partial solutions. The cessation of nuclear weapons testing and the reduction of the great Powers' military budgets were two immediately feasible partial measures which could contribute towards halting the arms race.

23. The Soviet proposal for the immediate stopping of atomic and hydrogen weapons tests (A/C.1/L.203) represented an important step towards the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons. Some representatives had cited the Soviet Union's recent resumption of testing in an attempt to cast doubt on its sincerity in advancing the proposal, but they had appeared quite unmoved by the failure of the United States and the United Kingdom to follow the Soviet Union's example in unilaterally suspending testing on 31 March 1958. At the 960th meeting, the Peruvian representative had rejected the Soviet proposal for the immediate prohibition of testing as too drastic. At the 955th meeting, the French representative, on the other hand, had contended that it did not go far enough. However, the Soviet Union was concentrating its efforts on the specific problem of a prohibition of testing because such a prohibition was both vitally necessary and feasible; once it was achieved, it would be possible to go on to broader issues. France opposed the immediate cessation of testing because it aspired to join the ranks of the "nuclear Powers".

24. The sponsors of the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205) favoured the suspension of nuclear weapons testing for one year instead of the permanent cessation proposed by the Soviet Union. The United Kingdom representative had, it was true, stated that such a suspension could be continued indefinitely if satisfactory progress was achieved in the field of actual disarmament (946th meeting). The proposals of the United Kingdom, the United States and France dated 25 May 1958 for the agenda of a possible summit conference made it clear that the progress referred to consisted in the establishment of a system of inspection and in the cessation of the production of fissionable materials. Yet the Western Powers refused to eliminate nuclear weapons and prohibit their use, which would constitute a real disarmament measure. Historical experience with the prohibition of chemical warfare favoured such an agreement. Close study should be given to the Ethiopian
proposal for convening a special conference under United Nations auspices to work out an agreement prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons (955th meeting).

25. In his statement of 10 October, the United States representative had said that substantial disarmament could be expected only when the political situation had improved (945th meeting); the Western Powers had taken the same position in the proposals put forward in the Sub-Committee of the Disarmament Commission on 29 August 1957 (DC/113, annex 5). The West's strategy was evidently to link the cessation of testing with more complex questions on which the Western Powers themselves had blocked agreement and then to link the solution of those problems with the solution of basic political issues. 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 provided the technical means of solving the problem of controlling a ban on testing, hitherto considered the key problem, and full use should be made of the opportunity thus presented. However, it should be borne in mind that the League of Nations had solved almost all the technical aspects of the disarmament problem: the only thing lacking had been a political decision by the Western Powers to disarm. Similarly, the issue now was not whether the technical problems could be solved, but whether the United States and the United Kingdom were prepared to match the good will displayed by the Soviet Union.

26. Mr. NOBLE (United Kingdom) rejected the Saudi Arabian representative's assertion that, in co-sponsoring the seventeen-Power draft resolution, the United Kingdom had confronted the General Assembly with an ultimatum. (Incidentally, such an accusation, if true, would apply equally to the other sixteen sponsors.) Any member of the Committee which sponsored a draft resolution presumably did so because it approved of its contents, but that scarcely made the act of sponsoring tantamount to presenting an ultimatum.

27. On the contrary, the United Kingdom had pointed out that progress on disarmament would be achieved only by agreement and that agreement could be achieved only by negotiation. He believed that the technical agreement reached by the Conference of Experts could be followed by a political agreement at the meeting scheduled to open at Geneva on 31 October 1958; such an agreement would represent a far more solid achievement than any mere declaration, by however large a group of Powers.

28. Mr. BELAUNDE (Peru), replying to observations made by the representative of the Ukrainian SSR, said that he had consistently supported the suspension of nuclear tests. However, while the suspension of tests should not be made conditional on the halting of the production of nuclear weapons, a parallel effort should be made to attain both of those goals.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.