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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. ZORIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Soviet Union, which favoured the complete, unconditional cessation of nuclear weapons testing, had unilaterally halted its tests on 31 March 1958 even though it had conducted fewer of them than the United States and the United Kingdom. However, those two Powers, instead of following the Soviet example, had proceeded to carry out the largest series of tests to date.

2. The Soviet Union fully supported the conclusions and recommendations 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, which had removed the last obstacle to an agreement on the immediate cessation of nuclear tests by demonstrating that a system of controls for such an agreement could be established without any great difficulties. However, the Western Powers, by proposing that the tests should be suspended for a period of only one year, had shown that they were trying to avoid a complete ban on testing. Their assertion that the period of suspension could be extended was nullified by the various reservations which accompanied it. Since approximately one year was required to study the results of a completed series of tests and to prepare for the next series, it was obvious that the Western Powers were seeking to retain the ability to resume testing whenever it suited them and to gain a military advantage over the Soviet Union.

3. The Soviet Union therefore categorically rejected the proposal by the United States and the United Kingdom that nuclear testing should be suspended for one year. It reserved the right to proceed with its tests until the number it had conducted since 31 March 1958 equalled the number conducted since that date by the United States and the United Kingdom combined. Nevertheless, it was prepared to halt its tests forthwith at such time as the Western Powers signed an agreement for the immediate cessation of testing for all time.

4. The General Assembly should adopt an unequivocal resolution calling for the cessation of nuclear weapons testing; such a resolution should remain in force until an agreement was concluded to that effect among the Powers concerned. The cessation of testing should not be made dependent on whether or not agreement was reached at the conference to be convened at Geneva on 31 October 1958, although the Soviet Union intended to contribute to the success of the conference in every possible way. The Soviet Union would not be able to support a resolution behind which the Western Powers could hide while trying to prevent in every possible way the cessation of testing.

5. Mr. BARCO (United States of America), noting the importance of the Soviet statement, said that his Government would study it with great care. He did not intend to reply to it fully at the present stage but, if he had understood it correctly, it justified every fear expressed in the Committee regarding the Soviet Union's real intentions. He hoped and trusted that he was wrong.

6. Mr. NOBLE (United Kingdom) said that his Government would also have to study Mr. Zorin's statement. His first impression was, however, that the Soviet Union was persisting in a position of extreme rigidity hardly calculated to promote an agreed solution. It was in fact insisting on carrying out tests after 31 October 1956. For its part, the United Kingdom was ready to suspend testing for one year from 31 October, when the Geneva talks were to commence, provided the USSR would also agree to discontinue tests.

7. Mr. ZORIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the preliminary observations made by the United States and the United Kingdom representatives on his statement struck him as rather premature. After a study of the statement, they, together with
others, might see their way clear to expressing their considered views and the USSR delegation would then be in a position to clarify certain points and to reply in substance.

8. Mr. CORREA (Ecuador) pointed out that the small nations were especially concerned with disarmament because all they could do in the face of a situation which placed them in mortal danger was to exercise their moral influence through the United Nations.

9. The year since the close of the twelfth session had been one of contradictions and contrasts. Scientific progress had led to the first efforts to conquer space and the technical talks of the Conference of Experts at Geneva had resulted in a unanimous report which held great promise for the future. On the other hand, there had been a diplomatic deadlock in general disarmament negotiations while the arms race continued at an alarming rate. At the same time as the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation was confirming the harmful genetic and somatic effects of radiation, nuclear tests had continued. Moreover, there were contradictions inherent in the debate in the First Committee and certain aspects of it remained shrouded in mystery for those countries which had not shared the secrets of past disarmament negotiations. However, perhaps because there was such a general awareness of the threat to mankind, certain approaches to the problem did hold out some hopes of success.

10. Reviewing the positive aspects of the situation, he pointed out that, despite an unfavourable international atmosphere, the technical approach employed at the recent Geneva Conference of Experts had laid the ground for a diplomatic effort which, it was hoped, would result in agreement on the suspension of nuclear tests under effective control. It was essential and urgent for the great Powers to exert every effort to reach such an agreement for three main reasons: scientists were urging that atomic radiation should be restricted; the Conference of Experts had shown the value of basing diplomatic talks on technical opinions; and agreement would reduce international tension and create a more favourable climate for the discussion of the wider aspects of disarmament. Since the three "nuclear Powers" had accepted the system of control worked out by the Conference of Experts, it was puzzling to find that the Soviet draft resolution on the question of nuclear weapons tests (A/C.1/L.203 and Corr.1) made no reference to such a system.

11. Ecuador had co-sponsored the seventeen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.205) urging the "nuclear Powers" to reach agreement on a suspension of tests and not to undertake further testing while the Geneva negotiations were in progress. The United States and the United Kingdom had expressed their readiness to effect such a suspension for one year from 31 October 1958, provided the Soviet Union did not conduct tests during that period. For its part, the Soviet Union had called for a permanent cessation of tests. It was to be hoped that the Soviet Union would reconsider its position and accept the more logical and realistic proposal of the Western Powers.

12. Since a suspension of nuclear weapons tests was only one aspect of disarmament, the seventeen-Power draft resolution had quite rightly included a provision (section III) designed to promote further efforts to achieve a balanced and effectively controlled world-wide system of disarmament, thus reaffirming the continuing validity of the resolution adopted by the Assembly at its twelfth session (resolution 1148 (XII)). The problem of testing should not be permitted to obscure the dangers of the continued uncontrolled production and accumulation of nuclear weapons and of the eventual danger of international trade in those weapons and of the emergence of other "nuclear Powers". Efforts must be made to counteract those two trends.

13. It was therefore essential to attempt to break the deadlock in general disarmament negotiations, and the Ecuadorian delegation hoped that the Mexican draft resolution (A/C.1/L.208) would be unanimously adopted. It further hoped that the Secretary-General would participate, not only in the forthcoming negotiations on testing, as suggested in the seventeen-Power draft, but in any future disarmament negotiations. Recalling a suggestion made at the twelfth session for the appointment of a United Nations commission for disarmament (699th plenary meeting, para. 159), he pointed out that the Secretary-General could play an extremely important part in arriving at constructive solutions.

14. With regard to the item relating to the reduction of the military budgets of the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France, Ecuador wished to state its support of the amendment submitted by seven Latin-American countries (A/C.1/L.209) to the seventeen-Power text.

15. Mr. MOCH (France) defined the position of France on the various draft resolutions before the Committee. With regard to the discontinuance of nuclear tests and without reference to Mr. Zorin's most recent statement, France would not choose between the permanent and unconditional cessation advocated by the Soviet Union (A/C.1/L.203 and Corr.1) and the temporary suspension proposed by the seventeen Powers (A/C.1/L.205). France continued to adhere fully to the reasonable and balanced programme of disarmament set forth in General Assembly resolution 1148 (XII). The seventeen-Power text dealt with only one item of that programme, except for the vague reference in its section III to world-wide disarmament. That vague reference could not give satisfaction to those who, like the French, wished to retain the close links between the various aspects of disarmament. Consequently, France would abstain in the vote both on the Soviet draft and on the seventeen-Power draft.

16. The French delegation would also abstain in the vote on the Soviet draft resolution proposing a reduction in the military budgets of the four great Powers (A/C.1/L.204). The draft offered no specific controls of the suggested reduction, and that question required a preliminary study owing to the divergencies between the various budgets to be compared.

17. Similarly, France would abstain in the vote on the seven-Power amendment (A/C.1/L.209) to the seventeen-Power text and on the Irish amendments (A/C.1/L.207). With regard to the latter, France would not accept being excluded from the number of "nuclear Powers" so long as other Powers continued to increase their stockpiles of nuclear weapons and, consequently, the risks of war.

18. The draft resolution submitted jointly by India and Yugoslavia regarding the forthcoming technical talks
on measures to prevent surprise attack (A/C.1/L.211) was no more than a pious wish and France had no objection to voting for it. The Mexican draft resolution proposing consultations with a view to reactivating United Nations machinery for disarmament negotiations (A/C.1/L.208) also would obtain France's affirmative vote. France would be prepared to take part in those consultations within the hour following the adoption of the proposal.

19. With regard to the Indian-Yugoslav proposal for an eighty-one-member Disarmament Commission (A/C.1/L.210), he recalled his earlier statements regarding the disadvantages of unduly large commissions. While so large a group was capable of conducting an interesting general debate, it was incapable of working out the terms and weighing all the forms of a treaty on disarmament. France favoured as small a working committee as possible, but since every Member State had a right of veto on disarmament—for no treaty for disarmament could be imposed by a majority vote on a minority which was unwilling to accede to it—the composition of the working organ was actually of secondary importance: an eighty-one-member group would be no more effective than a twenty-five-member commission. However, since the Indian representative had specifically stated that the Commission he suggested would be free to create committees (962nd meeting), the French delegation might give favourable consideration to the proposal for an eighty-one-member Disarmament Commission, provided operative paragraph 1 were amended by the addition of the clause:

"that it will set up a small working committee and that groups of experts may be convened whenever that seems advisable".

20. In connexion with operative paragraph 2 of that draft, the French delegation hoped that the sponsors would accept a further amendment designed to stress that the disarmament sought be balanced and effective and that the aspects to be selected for priority consideration should, in the opinion of the Powers directly concerned, offer the best possibilities for rapid agreement. The problems to be dealt with might appear easily soluble to those not directly concerned, whereas they were in fact extremely difficult to agree upon from the point of view of the States directly involved. Moreover, such States need not be among the so-called "principal Powers": it was a fact, for example, that in a discussion of the demilitarization of Central Europe, Luxembourg would be a State directly concerned. Consequently, France would amend operative paragraph 2 of the Indian-Yugoslav text to read:

"Requests the Disarmament Commission to make every effort to reach agreement or agreements in the field of effective and balanced disarmament commencing with those aspects of the problem which, in the opinion of the Power directly concerned, offer the best possibilities for rapid agreement".

21. If the sponsors of the draft resolution accepted those amendments, France would be prepared to vote in favour of their draft. France's position on any future proposals or amendments tabled would be governed by its adherence to Assembly resolution 1148 (XII); it would not support any text which, albeit inadvertently, departed from the programme set forth therein.

22. Mr. LALL (India) said that he would present his views on the French amendments to the Indian-Yugoslav draft resolution (A/C.1/L.210) after studying them in writing. He would, however, draw the French representative's attention to the fact that the possibility of further precision regarding the establishment of committees by the expanded Disarmament Commission had not escaped the sponsors. They had felt, however, that it might be wiser to allow the Commission to meet and discover whether its objectives and programme would be facilitated by the establishment of such groups on an ad hoc basis. They would, moreover, give careful study to the second group of French amendments and might be able to accept some of them. There was no great difference between their text and the object of the French amendments: they hoped that, even if they could not accept all the French amendments, France would not stand against their proposal in principle and would be in a position to support it with its vote.

23. Mr. VIDIC (Yugoslavia) said that he, too, would give careful study to the French amendments and associated himself with the position taken by the Indian representative.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.

1/ Subsequently distributed as document A/C.1/L.212.