Twelfth special session
Agenda item 12

ENHANCEMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MACHINERY IN THE FIELD OF
DISARMAMENT AND STRENGTHENING OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED
NATIONS IN THIS FIELD, INCLUDING THE POSSIBLE CONVENING OF A
WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

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BELGIUM

[Original: English]

[17 June 1982]

1. Belgium expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General and the experts who assisted him for the efficient manner in which the report was prepared. As a demonstration of its interest in the subject and of its constructive attitude, Belgium wishes to refer to the detailed views it submitted in written form on the subject of international arrangements relating to the process of disarmament.

2. Considering the central role and primary responsibility in the sphere of disarmament vested in the United Nations and in view of the fact that disarmament and arms control constitute an important and difficult field of international concertation, Belgium believes that provision should be made for the adequacy of the machinery available to the international community.

3. At the same time, it must be recognized that progress towards real measures of arms control and disarmament is more often determined by substance of the matter under negotiation and the quality of the international climate than by the institutional framework. The primary objective of institutional arrangements should be to enable the United Nations to carry out its role in enhancing international peace and security by furthering the progress of the disarmament negotiations.

4. For these reasons, Belgium will give appropriate attention to the institutional evaluation process which is due to take place at the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

5. As far as the existing machinery is concerned, Belgium notes that this has expanded remarkably since the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament:

   (a) The First Committee of the General Assembly now deals only with questions of disarmament and related international security questions.

   (b) The Disarmament Commission was established as a deliberative forum of all States Members of the United Nations.

   (c) The new structure of the Committee on Disarmament assures a more democratic approach to this problem. Any proposition for a new increase of membership should take into account the necessity to preserve the efficiency of this single multilateral negotiating forum. The possibilities of lengthening of the session as well as providing for more frequent sessions of the various working groups could be examined.

6. A considerable number of expert studies have been undertaken at the request of the General Assembly. A United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research was established. A United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme is running. More and more United Nations publications on disarmament appear.
7. Belgium recalls that the General Assembly, through its First Committee, remains an important forum in the field of disarmament. In general, it considers that the reorganization of the work of the Committee has been beneficial. Belgium fears, however, that the growing interest and more active involvement of a larger number of States in disarmament affairs, as well as the increasing number of problems under consideration, could lead to an increased work-load which could hamper the effectiveness of the work of this body.

8. Member States might consider reaching an informal understanding to limit the draft resolutions submitted by the First Committee, thus concentrating the delegation's attention on the most relevant and urgent matters.

9. It might also be desirable to consider a better division of labour between the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission. In this context, the latter could be called upon to assume tasks which at present are not dealt with in depth by the former. With regard to the principle of consensus basis on which the Disarmament Commission has operated, Belgium takes the view that it should be maintained.

10. As a result of the tenth special session in 1978, the functions of the Centre for Disarmament have been expanded. Belgium recognizes that the Centre has played hitherto a considerable role and that its staff has performed various services to the benefit of other disarmament bodies within the United Nations system.

11. Belgium expresses the view that in order to improve the effectiveness of efforts made in the disarmament sphere, the co-ordinating role of the Centre for Disarmament vis-à-vis the other bodies performing disarmament-related activities needs to be strengthened. In particular, the advice of the Centre should be obtained before any of the specialized agencies becomes involved in the discussion of substantive disarmament issues.

12. In this connexion, Belgium supports the recommendation of the group of experts that Member States should be kept informed of the progress made in the matter of co-ordination as well as of the difficulties encountered.

13. Belgium notes that there was no agreement among the experts on whether it is necessary at present to enlarge the Centre to meet new responsibilities or to turn into a separate department of the United Nations.

14. Considering the new and heavier responsibilities the Centre will have to assume in the future, its status within the Secretariat should be re-examined. After careful consideration of all implications, in particular in the financial field, the possibility of upgrading the Centre to a department headed by an Under-Secretary-General who would be reporting directly to the Secretary-General might be considered.

15. Belgium supports the view expressed in the report that when substantial progress has been made in the current negotiations, it would be appropriate to consider institutional arrangements for the implementation and verification of disarmament agreements.
16. Belgium welcomes the establishment of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) which represents a significant additional strengthening of the research capabilities of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. Belgium is confident that the second special session on disarmament will take a decision concerning a permanent status of UNIDIR which would allow a better co-ordination of its work with the activities of the Secretariat, which might be asked to prepare factual background papers and UNIDIR might be given responsibility for policy studies. The new status should also guarantee a scientific independence.

17. In this context, a more precise definition of the role of the Advisory Board, which clearly is in need of review, is called for. Furthermore the Board should be encouraged to develop a role in the co-ordination of studies. Also, a small board might be more effective.

18. It could, moreover, be envisaged that the Advisory Board would serve as a consultative body of UNIDIR.