Twelfth special session
AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE TWELFTH
SPECIAL SESSION
Agenda item 11

DECADE AND CONSIDERATION OF INITIATIVES AND PROPOSALS OF MEMBER STATES

Letter dated 17 June 1982 from the Permanent Representative of Italy
to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Ad Hoc
Committee of the Twelfth Special Session

I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of the document entitled
"Control and limitation of the volume of the international transfer of conventional
weapons" that Italy submits to the consideration of the second special session of
the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

I should be grateful if you would have the annex of this letter circulated as
an official document of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Twelfth Special Session under
agenda item 11.

(Signed) Umberto LA ROCCA
Ambassador
ANNEX

Control and limitation of the volume of the international transfer of conventional weapons

1. The report which has just been prepared for the General Assembly by the Group of Governmental Experts on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development has once again highlighted the gravity of an international situation which is affected to a very great degree by the arms race. The arms race is responsible, inter alia, for an immense squandering of resources, the magnitude of which constantly increases. The price which is being paid by the whole of mankind from the standpoint of economic and social progress is proving increasingly intolerable, especially as far as the poorest developing countries are concerned.

2. If one takes into account, in particular, the very large percentage of total military expenditure which is devoted to conventional weapons, the necessity of an effort aimed specifically at finding more appropriate and effective ways of achieving a substantial reduction in this kind of expenditure is confirmed in all its urgency. It is not without good reason that the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly considers (para. 45) the reduction of conventional weapons to be one of the priorities in disarmament negotiations, and invites (para. 85) major conventional arms supplier and recipient countries to carry out consultations on the control of international transfers of conventional weapons.

3. The importance of conventional disarmament in the more general framework of efforts aimed at achieving substantial progress towards general and complete disarmament under effective international control has been underlined on many occasions since the adoption, of the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session in 1978. In particular, the decisions taken by the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions in resolutions 35/156 A and 36/97 A, concerning the preparation by the Secretary-General of a study on conventional disarmament, served once again to confirm the extent and the gravity of the concerns caused by the frenzied and increasingly uncontrollable character of the conventional arms race. Conventional weapons systems have been used in all the conflicts which have occurred, throughout the world, since the Second World War and, having rendered possible the invasion in 1979 of Afghanistan, a small non-aligned country, are currently being used to perpetuate the occupation of that country.

4. The two General Assembly resolutions referred to merely stressed the necessity of safeguarding the balance established by the Final Document between the most significant areas of the disarmament process, which rightly include the halting and reversal of the conventional arms race. That is why the question of conventional disarmament has for a long time appeared on the general agenda of the Committee on Disarmament, where in 1980 Italy introduced a working paper (CD/56) based directly on the principles referred to in paragraphs 45 and 85 of the Final Document. Stressing that consideration of the question of international trade in conventional weapons could not be postponed any longer, that document made some concrete proposals, taking into account certain basic principles which are solemnly affirmed

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in the Final Document, and even embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, such as the principle of promoting and enhancing international stability at decreasing arms levels, the principle of safeguarding existing security levels and the principle of the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence, which is the recognized right of every Member of the United Nations.

5. While aiming at the creation within the United Nations of an ad hoc body to control and limit international trade in conventional weapons by means of machinery and procedures expressly agreed upon for that purpose, the Italian proposal was designed above all to elicit from all the countries concerned such reactions and initiatives as would serve to engender a debate on the subject as soon as possible. By introducing a draft aimed at promoting the establishment of appropriate machinery and procedures at both global and regional levels, the Italian proposal was meant to help promote, in accordance with the letters of paragraph 85 of the Final Document, the launching of consultations on their complex and delicate issue of reducing the volume of international transfers of conventional weapons, in which many differing and often conflicting interests are involved.

6. Italy none the less believes that the twelfth special session of the General Assembly should, in accordance with the letter of the Final Document, promote the adoption of such measures as would create an atmosphere and technical conditions conducive to the gradual solving of the complex problems posed by the control of international transfers of conventional weapons in strictest compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and the stability and security needs of all the member countries.

7. Italy also believes that the twelfth special session must take the first step in this direction. To this end the Assembly could:

   (a) Decide that the Centre for Disarmament should be entrusted with the task of keeping a register of all international transactions in conventional weapons on the understanding that member countries would provide the Centre regularly with all the information relevant and necessary to the performance of that task;

   (b) Express the wish that, with a view to providing a data base on which to build the consultation procedure referred to in paragraph 85 of the Final Document, appropriate consideration should be given to past or future proposals and suggestions relating to the problems of controlling and limiting the volume of international transfers of conventional weapons;

   (c) Note that the mandate conferred by the Disarmament Commission on the group of experts on conventional disarmament, which refers explicitly to international transfers of conventional weapons, would provide a useful opportunity for such consideration.