Twelfth special session
AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE TWELFTH
SPECIAL SESSION
Agenda item 13

MEASURES TO MOBILIZE WORLD PUBLIC OPINION IN FAVOUR OF DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 28 June 1982 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith to Your Excellency a statement on the World Disarmament Campaign delivered by the representative of the United States in Working Group III of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Twelfth Special Session on 23 June 1982.

I would be grateful if this statement, which includes specific proposals for the World Disarmament Campaign, could be circulated as an official document of the twelfth special session of the General Assembly under agenda item 13.

(Signed) Kenneth L. ADELMAN
Acting Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations
ANNEX

Statement on the World Disarmament Campaign

1. The United States delegation welcomes this opportunity to discuss the World Disarmament Campaign. We intend to participate constructively in Working Group III to attempt to ensure that a World Disarmament Campaign reaches all peoples in all regions of the world.

2. As President Reagan has repeatedly emphasized, most recently before the special session on 17 June, the United States is committed to meaningful arms control including militarily significant reductions in nuclear weapons. To further that process, and to build confidence among nations and peoples, the United States believes that the open availability of relevant information on disarmament and security matters is vital. The United States itself, as a free and democratic country, publicly makes available vast amounts of information in these areas.

3. We believe that excessive secrecy and censorship can create only mistrust and misunderstanding among the peoples of the world; they are the true enemies of peaceful relations among nations. An informed public is the best guarantee against such misunderstanding.

4. To foster a climate of openness, President Reagan has offered President Brezhnev an opportunity to speak to the American people on our television, if he will allow President Reagan the same opportunity with the Soviet people. He has also called on Soviet and American journalists to exchange views on major events on each other’s television. In addition, as you will recall, on 17 June, President Reagan proposed the convening of an international conference on military expenditures to build on the work already accomplished in developing a common system of military expenditure reporting. Only in such a climate of openness can public understanding of these vital questions be enhanced.

5. It is in this context that we address the World Disarmament Campaign. It is essential that the General Assembly carefully consider and establish the objectives, priorities and modalities for the Campaign before it gets underway.

6. As is well known here, my delegation broke consensus on resolution 36/92 B on 20 November 1981 in the First Committee. As we explained then, we were disturbed that problems of ensuring the effectiveness and possible impartiality of the World Disarmament Campaign had not been seriously addressed, much less overcome. Such a Campaign blurs the distinction between open and closed societies, and such a Campaign inevitably would tend to focus on public opinion in free societies - where numerous private bodies already exist with aims identical to those of the framers of resolution 36/92 B. The United States also emphasized then that "mobilizing world public opinion" - as opposed to supplying facts and expert views - is an activity singularly unsuited to this Organization, which is after all an assemblage of Governments.

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7. The United States continues to have those concerns, as we noted in the
Preparatory Committee on 19 May 1982 (A/AC.206/SR.38, p. 7). In addition, we
pointed out that all decisions with financial implications should be handled in an
appropriate manner. None the less, now that a decision has been taken to launch
such a Campaign and to adopt in due course specific plans for such a Campaign, the
United States delegation believes that it is mandatory to ensure that a balanced
and universally applicable, and fiscally responsible programme is in fact executed.

8. As our explanation of vote on resolution 36/92 B foreshadowed, one overriding
objective that we must endeavour to build into the Campaign is an effect to
disseminate information and encourage a searching discussion on disarmament in all
societies. While we harbour no illusions as to the serious obstacles that will
tend to frustrate that objective - a subject on which we will speak - we are
nevertheless heartened to see that the general and tentative outline for a World
Disarmament Campaign prepared by the Centre for Disarmament and submitted to the
special session under the symbol A/S-12/27, recognized that the "Campaign will have
to be carried out in all regions of the world in a balanced, factual and objective
manner".

9. We must now explore how to translate this lofty goal into a concrete programme
of action. In this connexion, we will be particularly interested in learning
precisely how the Centre for Disarmament is to ensure broad access to and the
presentation of a variety of viewpoints in all societies. Clearly the preparation
of specific plans to ensure universal access by the Campaign will be essential;equally important will be careful and impartial monitoring of such plans, to ensure
that access is not being frustrated. During the coming discussion of the World
Disarmament Campaign we will be joining others in seeking ways to ensure that the
world public will be able to receive information on disarmament directly.
Obviously, as the draft programme for the World Disarmament Campaign notes,
programmes should be planned which have greatest effect, notably by utilizing the
mass communication media.

10. A second major concern of the United States is that the Campaign have as its
objectives the dissemination of factual information and the stimulation of informed
discussion reflecting a variety of viewpoints, with the aim of educating
participants. The United Nations is an assemblage of nations representing a wide
variety of differing viewpoints. The Campaign must reflect this fact. It is,
therefore, inappropriate for the United Nations to "mobilize" or "mold" public
opinion or to espouse one particular point of view on complex and often
controversial arms control and disarmament topics. When, however, people are
exposed to a free and open discussion and a variety of opinions, they will be free
to form their own views on these vital topics on an independent basis.

11. A third concern is that certain activities envisaged in the draft programme of
action, such as awards to non-governmental organizations or individuals, a film
peace prize and an international song-writing contest, do not further the
Campaign's stated objective of providing information in a "balanced, factual and
objective" manner. Contests are by definition subjective undertakings, especially
when the judges hold widely differing points of view.

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