Twelfth special session

AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE TWELFTH
SPECIAL SESSION
Agenda item 11

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION OF THE 1980s AS THE SECOND
DISARMAMENT DECADE AND CONSIDERATION OF INITIATIVES AND
PROPOSALS OF MEMBER STATES

Letter dated 28 June 1982 from the Permanent Representative of Austria
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the statement by the Federal Minister for
Foreign Affairs in Austria, His Excellency Mr. Willibald Pahr, at the twelfth
special session of the General Assembly, on 9 June 1982 (see A/S-12/PV.4). On that
occasion, the Austrian Foreign Minister proposed measures to improve the
reliability and objectivity of information in the military area.

In this connexion I have the honour to submit the text of a memorandum on this
issue and request that it may be circulated as an official document of the twelfth
special session of the General Assembly under agenda item 11.

(Signed) Karl FISCHER
Ambassador
ANNEX

Memorandum on measures to improve the reliability and objectivity of information

1. Inadequate information on military matters and uncertainty concerning the military strength of States are among the main reasons for the continuing arms race and for the failure to achieve balanced disarmament.

2. Because of the inadequacy of reliable information, national assessments of the military strength and intentions of others are often incorrect. As these assessments are of vital importance for national security, there is a natural tendency to overestimate rather than underestimate an adversary's military capabilities. To minimize the risk of being taken by surprise, Governments frequently initiate arms programmes on the basis of "worst-case" estimates. The negative consequences of this syndrome of inadequacy of information, insecurity, mistrust and over-reaction are multiplied as it is mirrored by the same behaviour on the side of the adversary. Thus, the armament measures, which result from inaccurate assessments of an opponent's military strength, lead in an action-reaction pattern to the acceleration of the arms race and the exacerbation of international tensions. Inadequate information is further one of the main obstacles to efforts to bring the arms race under control. Militarily significant agreements on the limitation or reduction of weapons and forces presuppose an understanding of the actual state of armament. In situations where little or no information is available, Governments are usually reluctant even to enter into disarmament negotiations. If they do, long and protracted negotiations do not produce tangible results.

3. Austria therefore believes that efforts to increase the flow of information on military matters and to enhance its reliability and objectivity are a promising approach to improve the situation. Apart from measures to enhance the openness regarding military data, objective mechanisms for the establishment and evaluation of the state of armaments could fulfil a useful function in this regard. Evaluations of the military situation undertaken by independent organs could in specific situations contribute to defuse international tensions, build confidence and promote peace. Such mechanisms could also be usefully employed on a regional, inter-regional or global level to establish an objective data base concerning specific types of weapon systems and military forces and their comparability as a step towards disarmament agreement.

4. The institutional arrangements for such mechanisms need to be carefully elaborated according to the special conditions and requirements of the respective area of application.

5. The United Nations would have to play a leading role in this context. The Security Council and the General Assembly could adopt decisions concerning their development and application. The experience gained with fact-finding methods and study groups could provide valuable guidance.

6. Austria hopes that the second special session on disarmament will devote special attention to the promotion of openness and objectivity in the military area.