Fifteenth special session
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF THE
FIFTEENTH SESSION
Agenda items 10 and 13

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AT ITS TENTH AND TWELFTH SPECIAL SESSIONS

CONSIDERATION OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN
THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT AND OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

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1. The efforts of the international community in the field of disarmament will
prove effective to the extent that the United Nations, its Security Council and
other international institutions and mechanisms function effectively. The
authority and role of the United Nations and its decisions need to be decisively
increased, and its political, legal and moral status enhanced.

The United Nations objective of ensuring security through disarmament can be
attained only by collective efforts in close co-operation among all States. The
first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament emphasized in
its Final Act that all States have the duty to contribute to disarmament
negotiations and have the right to participate on an equal footing in negotiations
which have a bearing on their security.

Today as never before, the United Nations can and must act as a genuine centre
for co-ordinating the actions of all States in the cause of saving the present and
succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

The third special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is a
major forum which coincides with a pivotal stage in the development of
international relations - the beginning of the process of genuine nuclear
disarmament. Among its tasks is that of ensuring the participation of all States
in the joint search for ways of utilizing the United Nations effectively in order
to build and strengthen confidence, overcome "enemy psychology" stereotypes and humanize international relations.

One way of increasing the efficiency of the United Nations machinery might be the more frequent holding of special sessions on the most urgent political problems and specific issues of disarmament.

2. The role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament could be substantially strengthened if the important political documents on disarmament adopted in the United Nations on a consensus basis were given a more morally and politically binding status. These documents include in particular the Final Act of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament as well as other documents aimed at the taking of tangible measures to curtail the arms race and create a moral and political situation in which real action to limit and reduce military potential could be embarked upon. Nor is it any less important to achieve consensus at the stage of implementation of resolutions as well, and to ensure that the consensus genuinely reflects a readiness on the part of those joining in it to implement measures in the field of disarmament.

There is a reliable basis for this - the obligation of each State Member of the United Nations to discharge in good faith the obligations it has assumed under the Charter and to assist the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security. It is important that all Member States should make every effort to facilitate the consistent implementation of General Assembly resolutions in the field of disarmament, and thus show their resolve to arrive at mutually acceptable, comprehensively verifiable and effective disarmament measures. The topicality of this issue was confirmed by the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 42/38 J of 13 November 1987.

3. Increased effectiveness of United Nations activity in the field of disarmament would be facilitated by a rationalization of the work of the First Committee. It is important that the innovations in this respect adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-second session (resolution 42/42 N of 30 November 1987) should be conducive to the drafting of effective resolutions and should permit this organ to bear the full responsibility incumbent on it in the sphere of disarmament.

In the light of the discussions taking place within the United Nations on this subject, and also the provisions of resolution 42/42 N, it would be desirable to consider the following further steps to improve the work of the First Committee:

(a) Beginning the work of the First Committee simultaneously with the other Committees so as to permit more rational distribution of the time allocated for discussion of individual agenda items;

(b) Expanding the practice of the First Committee adopting, along with resolutions reflecting the position of the majority of States, consensus decisions indicating areas of wide agreement on specific topics;

(c) Adopting, with the consent of the sponsors, only the operative part of those resolutions which are introduced year after year, and approving such resolutions at two- to three-year intervals.
4. The authors of the working paper express their satisfaction at the positive trends apparent in the work of the Disarmament Commission. In their view, it is important to strengthen the atmosphere of constructive dialogue and non-confrontational search for a balance between the interests of all States which emerged at the Commission session in 1988. With a view to increasing the effectiveness of the Commission's activities, a study could be made of the issue of finding optimum ways of combining its work with the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

5. The contribution by the United Nations to resolving the problems of eliminating weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, might be more effective if full use was made of the potential of the Security Council as the body responsible, under Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, for "formulating ... plans ... for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments".

The need to resurrect the Charter role of the Council in dealing with such questions is also of particular significance because within the United Nations system the Council is today the only organ of political collaboration with broad powers to which all five nuclear Powers belong and whose decisions are binding.

The role and effectiveness of the Security Council in promoting the resolution of disarmament problems in the short and the long term could be significantly enhanced by the adoption of the following measures:

(a) Within the framework of the Council, the nuclear-weapons States, which are at the same time the five permanent members of the Security Council, should hold joint meetings and report regularly to the General Assembly and the Conference on Disarmament about how matters stand in questions related to disarmament, nuclear disarmament in particular, the prevention of nuclear war and the strengthening of international security and also about the status of existing agreements in this area and progress in negotiations involving the nuclear Powers;

(b) It would be useful - after making the necessary preparations - to hold a special meeting or meetings of the Security Council at the foreign-minister level to discuss the aims and purposes of nuclear disarmament. In addition to the questions of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons and establishing the necessary conditions for doing so, such an exchange of opinions could also suggest concrete moves towards ridding the world of nuclear weapons and establishing universal safeguards against their re-emergence;

(c) It would also be worthwhile for the Security Council to meet at the foreign-minister level at the opening of each General Assembly session in order to make an overall evaluation of the international situation and look together for effective means of improving it;

(d) It would be useful to discuss the broad principles of the interrelationship between disarmament and development at a special meeting of the leaders of States members of the Security Council, attended also by other Member States of the United Nations. This would help to boost the authority of the United Nations and give the Organization greater input into the internationalization of
efforts to make disarmament a factor of development, overcome underdevelopment and establish the new international economic order;

(e) A special meeting of the Security Council might discuss the problems of limiting the naval arms race and naval activities, and extending confidence-building measures to cover the oceans and seas;

(f) The Security Council should consider the establishment, in accordance with Article 29 of the Charter, of a subsidiary organ or organs to design guiding principles and courses of action for the effective maintenance of international peace and security, embracing both the political and the military sphere, including disarmament questions. The organ or organs would report through the Council to the General Assembly.

6. Effective steps in the field of disarmament ought to be promoted by more active work in the relevant international forums, notably the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament.

Efforts need to be made to increase the practical output of the Conference on Disarmament. This could be attained by stepping up its activities and moving onto an essentially year-round schedule with two or three breaks. It might be agreed that the subsidiary organs of the Conference should function, in keeping with the general mandate of the Conference, not on a year-by-year basis but continuously until their work is done. The subsidiary organs should provide a hub for the practical work of the Conference. More scholars and experts should also be induced to work on the problems which the Conference has to deal with. By agreement among the participants, the Conference could hold a number of meetings at the foreign-minister level to provide the necessary impetus for progress in the negotiations.

The Conference might eventually develop into a permanent world body for disarmament negotiations.

The work of the Conference should centre around the problems of ending the nuclear-arms race. The reputation of the Conference as the main forum for nuclear disarmament, where States will not only exchange opinions but take crucial decisions, must be enhanced.

7. The United Nations role in the disarmament field would undoubtedly be enhanced by strengthening the links between the Organization and the disarmament negotiations under way outside the United Nations framework. Certain measures could already be taken in the very near future to keep Member States and the General Assembly better informed of the progress of such negotiations, as well as to bring General Assembly resolutions to the attention of the participants in the negotiations. For this purpose, the following proposals could be studied:

- The relevant General Assembly resolutions could be brought directly to the attention of the delegations taking part in the negotiations (for example, through statements made by the special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General or in written form);
- The Secretary-General might submit to the General Assembly an annual report on the disarmament process;

- With a view to preparing such a report, the Secretary-General should be given the possibility of consulting the participants in the disarmament negotiations and of addressing questionnaires to them;

- The States participating in the disarmament negotiations should regularly inform not only the General Assembly but also the Secretary-General on the progress of the negotiations, without prejudice, of course, to their confidential nature; in this regard, future consideration could be given to the possibility that a representative of the Secretary-General might attend the disarmament negotiations;

- The United Nations could become a forum for the world-wide dissemination of experience, fundamental ideas and initiatives in the field of disarmament and international security at the regional level, taking into account the security interests of all States.

8. The preparation by the Secretary-General, with the aid of government experts, of studies on various aspects of the arms race and disarmament is an important aspect of United Nations activities. The contribution of such studies to the practical solution of disarmament issues should be enhanced and the studies should be more closely associated with the actual problems arising in the negotiations. To that end, active use should be made of the potential of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), which should be provided with financial and other support.

9. Greater use should be made of the potential of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Studies, which brings together well-known disarmament specialists from many Member States. The proposals to enhance the Board's effectiveness and expand its authority, involving it more actively in the consideration of disarmament questions and the strengthening of international security, deserve support. It would be appropriate for the Board, in considering certain questions, to involve noted scholars and leading specialists from various countries.

10. Under the Charter, the Secretary-General has the role of assisting the United Nations in discharging its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. All States must afford the Secretary-General maximum support in order to enable him to fulfil his obligations under the Charter with the utmost effectiveness.

In carrying out his duties, the Secretary-General should receive assistance from the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which should be furnished with the appropriate staff and funds.

The Department for Disarmament Affairs should play a play a stronger role in assisting the Secretary-General in his task of co-ordinating the measures taken by the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the disarmament field.