General Assembly

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF THE
FIFTEENTH SPECIAL SESSION
Working Group III
Agenda Item 13

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

Working paper submitted by Canada

1. Experience suggests that participants to the debate on disarmament machinery fall roughly into two distinct "camps". One holds that the present organizational arrangements are sufficient and that only the exercise of political will is needed to make progress. A second approach suggests that, while there is some merit in the first position, prospects for meaningful progress would be enhanced if procedures were updated and streamlined so that the existing institutions could operate more effectively.

2. A section entitled, "Machinery" was included in the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly (resolution S-10/2). It recognized, in paragraph 113, that

"In addition to the need to exercise political will, the international machinery should be utilized more effectively and also improved to enable implementation of the Programme of Action and help the United Nations to fulfill its role in the field of disarmament."

3. The subject of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament - including the matter of disarmament machinery - was raised in the General Assembly. In resolution 39/151 G of 17 December 1984, the Assembly requested the United Nations Disarmament Commission, at its substantive session in 1985,

"to carry out as a matter of priority a comprehensive review of the role of the United Nations in the field disarmament, taking into account, inter alia, the views and suggestions of Member States on the subject."

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4. The 1985 Canadian paper submitted to the Disarmament Commission suggested that the United Nations was overextending its limited resources and should, instead, aim at accomplishing successfully a few important tasks. After a discussion of detailed steps which could be taken, Canada listed six main recommendations:

1. A sharper focus on top priority issues;

2. Strong practical support for the disarmament efforts of the Disarmament Commission, the Secretariat and related United Nations bodies which would enhance the negotiating and deliberative processes and broader public knowledge of the issues;

3. The removal of the procedural obstacles to negotiations by the Conference on Disarmament at Geneva;

4. A greater sensitizing of the Security Council to the arms control and disarmament problem in the context of the broad efforts to prevent the resort to force and to create the positive political atmosphere which is needed for negotiations on arms control and disarmament;

5. A further development of the Secretary-General's good offices as a contribution to preventive diplomacy;

6. Greater attention to dealing with the tensions and sensitivities in a regional context, such as to reduce the pressure for armaments.

These reasons are still valid.

5. During the past few years, succeeding chairmen of the First Committee have attempted to improve procedures. However many countries have persisted in an unwillingness to support a consensus to the effect that an improvement in disarmament machinery is desirable.

6. At its forty-second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 42/42 N, co-sponsored by Canada, entitled "Rationalization of the work of the First Committee", in which it called for the implementation at the forty-third session of the Assembly, in 1988, of a range of measures including:

   a) A recommendation that procedural matters should be handled by decisions rather than resolutions;

   b) Merging of similar resolutions;

   c) Allocation of a specified period of time during the session for discussion and consultations;

   d) Allocation of a specific period for general debate.

Canada strongly supports these and other measures aimed at increasing the effectiveness of United Nations institutions.
7. With this background in mind, the Canadian delegation to the third special session devoted to disarmament presents the following measures for the consideration of Working Group III:

(1) A reaffirmation of the central role and primary responsibility of the United Nations in the field of disarmament;

(2) A determination not to allow administrative procedures to stand in the way of substantive progress;

(3) An endorsement of the provisions of resolution 42/42 N and a recommendation that each succeeding chairman of the First Committee continue to hold consultations with a view to refining further practices and procedures of the committee;

(4) Strengthening the ability of the Disarmament Commission to provide in-depth, analytical consideration of a limited number of issues;

(5) The initiation, by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, of an orientation programme designed to promote and improve the understanding of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament by the community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In this same connection, the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Secretary-General should be encouraged to draw upon NGO disarmament expertise whenever possible;

(6) The continued support of the Department for Disarmament Affairs at its current level of financing and staffing;

(7) The recommendation that the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of qualified governmental experts and making appropriate use of the capabilities of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in a consultant capacity, should undertake an in-depth study on the subject of the existing and possible activities of the United Nations in the verification of multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements.

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