Committee of the Whole of the
Fifteenth Special Session
Working Group III
Agenda items 13 and 14

Consideration of the role of the United Nations in the
Field of Disarmament and of the Effectiveness of the
Disarmament Machinery

United Nations Information and Educational Activities in the
Field of Disarmament, Including Measures to Mobilize World
Public Opinion in Favour of Disarmament

Proposals by Canada

1. Canada welcomes the attention of the third special session of the General
Assembly devoted to disarmament will give to questions of United Nations arms
control and disarmament machinery, and information and educational activities.
These issues cut to the core of the place of the United Nations in the overall arms
control and disarmament process. For this reason, these questions must be
approached with a view to ensuring a direct and useful role for the United Nations
in disarmament. This continuing effort to engage the international community in
the disarmament process will produce greater stability over the long term. Such a
multilateral approach will ensure that the many, and not just the few, have an
active interest, and an active role in disarmament. At the same time, we must
expand our visions beyond exclusively United Nations-related bodies, as national
and regional disarmament bodies could prove necessary and useful in the future. In
the mean time, however, we must acknowledge that the United Nations disarmament
machinery requires continual fine-tuning and adjustment. The recognition of the
need to reassess the functioning of United Nations machinery from time to time
indicates a positive approach on our part to the role machinery plays in the arms
limitation and disarmament process.

2. In this context, Canada would like to call the attention of the Working Group
to the procedures of the First Committee of the General Assembly. As indicated by
Canada's co-sponsorship of resolution 42/42 N on the rationalization of the work of
the First Committee, Canada sees room for meaningful improvements in the procedures
by which the Committee carries out its deliberations. The implementation of the recommendations put forth in resolution 42/42 N would substantially improve the General Assembly's ability to speak in a clear and strong voice on arms control and disarmament issues. Such a strong voice is necessary if the United Nations is to be at the forefront of multilateral arms control efforts, and to provide international support and guidance for bilateral or regional efforts. In addition, the third special session should recommend that each succeeding chairman of the First Committee make it a matter of custom to hold consultations with a view to refining procedures and practices of the Committee.

3. Of further assistance to the deliberations of the United Nations would be a strengthened United Nations Disarmament Commission. As an organ charged with the responsibility of considering and making recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament, it is important that the Commission be able to carry out its mandate in a thorough, timely fashion. It is true that the Commission frequently reflects the difficult and sometimes intractable nature of some arms control and disarmament issues. This reality, however, must not inhibit its ability to direct its expertise to areas where progress may be possible. To this end, Canada proposes that the third special session consider the following measures designed to focus and improve upon the ability of the Disarmament Commission to consider the issues before it:

   (a) The imposition of time-limits on subjects which have appeared for a number of years without progress being made; or

   (b) The placing of an item in temporary abeyance if agreement appears remote. This will allow efforts to be concentrated on other issues promising greater potential for success.

4. While the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission are examples of United Nations machinery in need of improvement, it sometimes happens that this machinery would make a valuable contribution to disarmament if only it were made use of. Such is the case with the reporting instrument for military budgets adopted by the General Assembly in 1980. Canada has consistently reported its military budgets through this instrument, but is only one of too few Member States to do so. A firm commitment by all States at the special session to report their military budgets through the standardized international reporting instrument would instill confidence, and indicate clearly to the international community that Member States are willing to accept the principle of transparency as an important first step towards the reduction of military expenditures.

5. Canada attaches high priority to the Conference on Disarmament, a multilateral forum which has significant potential to achieve real progress in the field of disarmament. We encourage the continuing negotiations taking place at the Conference and would seek to have their importance recognized by the special session.

6. The growing international consensus that adequate and appropriate verification is essential to successful arms control and disarmament agreements is an encouraging development, especially since it confirms the role accorded to verification by the Final Document of the first special session devoted to

...
disarmament (General Assembly resolution S-10/2). Canada and the Netherlands have submitted to the current session a working paper (A/S-15/25) which addresses this question. The main purpose of the paper is to advance international understanding of verification, and develop an appropriate role for the United Nations. The first step towards this end would be the convening of a group of experts whose mandate would be to focus on the role of the United Nations in verification. In so doing, the group would consider the merits and implications of various proposals, with particular emphasis on the political, technical and operational aspects of each.

7. The work of the group of experts would serve to identify a verification role for the United Nations that is capable of sustaining broad international support, taking into account political realities, and available expertise and resources. The group's findings could serve as the basis of further action, if deemed appropriate. This is consistent with Canada's view that the role for any new United Nations machinery must be clearly mapped out before the international community commits its energy to such machinery.

8. As witnessed by the recent session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, numerous proposals for a United Nations role in verification have been brought to the attention of the international community. These range from the establishment of a United Nations database to a full-fledged multilateral verification system. Among them is the "Six Nation/Five Continent Plan" which calls for "an integrated multilateral verification system within the United Nations". Each represents a positive contribution to the discussion of the role and importance of multilateral approaches to verification, and the desirability of creating new United Nations machinery. However, these matters are extremely complex and raise difficult issues which lead Canada to have serious reservations. The Canadian delegation intends to play a full part in the upcoming discussions.

9. The United Nations Disarmament Commission, in its consensus report on verification adopted at the 1988 session, has reaffirmed that the determination of proper procedures and techniques for verification will vary with each arms control and disarmament treaty. This requirement would demand a considerable pool of expertise, technology, resources and operational experience on the part of the United Nations if it were to be tasked with such an assignment. Canada is concerned that the United Nations does not currently possess these resources and that, for this reason, the premature establishment of a United Nations verification system would ultimately hinder and not promote multilateral verification.

10. These pragmatic considerations, and others, combined with the undeniable growing interest in a United Nations verification agency, make the establishment of the group of experts a clear priority for the special session.

11. Paragraphs 27 and 114 of the Final Document of the first special session, on the central role of the United Nations in disarmament remain as important today as they were 10 years ago. This assertion makes it incumbent upon all Member States to evaluate critically the effectiveness of disarmament machinery. Only in this way can we adopt the appropriate measures to ensure that the goal of general and complete disarmament is best served. Canadian proposals on United Nations machinery are presented in this spirit. It is a spirit which recognizes the /...
importance of multilateralism to the disarmament process, yet is keenly aware that multilateralism carries with it a particular burden of responsibility. It is Canada's desire that this Working Group and this special session will convince all who might doubt the relevance of multilateral approaches to disarmament.

12. Of great importance to making advances in disarmament is an informed and educated public. This was recognized by both previous special sessions devoted to disarmament and the Government of Canada strongly endorses this conviction and believes it should be reaffirmed by the third special session.

13. The General Assembly at its first special session called upon Member States to expand their efforts in the field of research, education and the dissemination of information. The Government of Canada has pursued this call in a vigorous and concrete fashion, with the aim of improving the dialogue between Canadians and their Government. We believe the Canadian experience in this area is useful to recall:

(1) In August 1978, Canada created the position of Adviser on Disarmament and Arms Control Affairs to demonstrate that Canada was serious in its intention to follow up the recommendations of the first special session. In 1980, the Adviser's position evolved into that of Ambassador for Disarmament, which was established to represent Canada at international arms control and disarmament conferences, and to serve as the principal point of contact between the Government and the community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

(2) In 1979, a consultative group was established, comprised of private individuals, NGO representatives and members of the academic community. The Consultative Group, under the chairmanship of the Ambassador for Disarmament, meets regularly with Canadian government officials to exchange views on matters of arms control and disarmament and offer recommendations.

(3) In 1980, the Disarmament Fund was established by the Department of External Affairs to assist Canadians seeking to contribute to the discussion of disarmament issues. The Fund has distributed over $1.7 million to date to interested Canadians to hold conferences, carry out research and engage in other such activities.

(4) In 1984, the Parliament of Canada created the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security. Currently funded at a level of $5 million per annum, the Institute seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of international peace and security issues from a Canadian perspective.

14. These measures, and others, reflect Canada's deep commitment to public awareness of, and participation in, disarmament issues. For this reason, Canada attaches considerable importance to similar efforts undertaken by the United Nations Secretariat.

15. From the beginning, Canada has been a strong supporter of the World Disarmament Campaign. In fact, since its inception, $400,000 has been contributed by Canada (making it a leading financial supporter). The Canadian contribution at
the 1986/87 Pledging Conference represented 10 per cent of the total pledged. Of 55 delegations at that Conference, however, only 13 made pledges. This reflects the less than enthusiastic response of the international community to the Campaign. In light of this, Canada challenges other Member States to state definitively their position on the World Disarmament Campaign. For the Campaign to succeed, a clear statement of political and financial support is required. If that support exists, Canada will continue to help make the Campaign successful. If that support is not forthcoming, Canada believes the special session should call for an assessment of the continuing viability of the World Disarmament Campaign.

16. With respect to the Department for Disarmament Affairs, Canada seeks a strengthened role for the Department. We feel the Department should be enabled to do more, e.g., developing and operating orientation programmes for NGO representatives. These programmes would serve to improve NGO understanding of the functioning of the United Nations and its role in disarmament. The Canadian practice of sending NGO representatives to the First Committee and the special sessions of the General Assembly on disarmament could be taken as an example of an approach to such an orientation programme. In the mean time, the Government of Canada will actively consider developing further programmes of the same type for the Canadian NGO community. The results and experience of these Canadian programmes will be shared with the international community in the hope that these programmes may have applications elsewhere. This proposal meets the appeal made by the Secretary-General in his address, on 31 May, to the opening meeting of the third special session:

"... for public opinion truly to have an impact on (the disarmament) process, more effective ways have to be found to reach those in the education and scientific community, the media, the arts and other walks of life so as to encourage their participation in this vitally important endeavour." (See A/S-15/PV.1.)

17. As its proposals indicate, Canada is firmly committed to a United Nations whose machinery and programmes effectively promote the goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. Progress towards this goal will require a realistic and dedicated approach which recognizes both the potential and the limitations of the United Nations. With the growing recognition that the security of the few cannot be had at the expense of the security of the many, we are confident that it will be the potential of the United Nations which is expressed by this Working Group, and not its limitations.