Tenth special session
AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE TENTH
SPECIAL SESSION
Agenda items 9 and 11


ADOPTION OF A PROGRAMME OF ACTION ON DISARMAMENT

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the enclosed statement received from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the occasion of the tenth special session of the Assembly.
ANNEX

Statement by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the occasion of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

1. The nations of the world have often gathered in recent times to address the fundamental needs of man, to seek solutions to the problems which affect the quality of life on this earth or to focus on the discriminated, the neglected and the poor. The promise of a better, more equitable and just world has invariably emerged from these meetings.

2. The special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is dealing with one of the most intractable problems of our time. After many years of discussions, little real progress has been achieved. And yet, no promise of a better world can be taken seriously while the arms race continues unabated.

3. The General Assembly has been provided with scores of figures which relate the world's expenditure on armament at the global, regional and country levels to the resources devoted to other sectors, such as health, nutrition and education. These figures indicate that, on average, countries are devoting 5 to 6 per cent of their annual product to military ends and that there is no evidence of any recent decrease in this share. Informative as they are, these figures tell only part of the story. The arms race also has adverse qualitative effects, particularly in developing countries with limited technological capabilities which are often diverted to the defence sector, to the detriment of other areas where they could produce greater social and economic benefits. Agriculture is clearly in this category. Agricultural research in developing countries must be stepped up in order to diminish the present dependence on imported, often unsuitable and sometimes even harmful technology. Training needs further impetus if the rural masses are to participate effectively in development.

4. Countries which give priority to the defence sector are also bound to devote a disproportionate amount of land and other resources, including energy, for military purposes. Large military expenditure contributes to the depletion of natural resources and raw material reserves. These effects are not easy to quantify, and therefore the figures given for world military expenditures, currently estimated at $US 350 billion, give only a rough indication of the nature and magnitude of this phenomenon.

5. This figure is, however, a useful indicator of the inadequacy of resources devoted to other priority sectors, such as agriculture. The flow of external resources to this sector actually declined by 9 per cent in real terms in 1976, a/

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a/ Using the OECD "broad definition" of agriculture, which includes rural infrastructure, fertilizer production etc.
a year in which world military expenditure reached its maximum level. Agriculture received in the neighbourhood of $US 5 billion of external assistance, considerably short of the $US 8 to 8.5 billion which are estimated as annual external investment requirements for achieving a minimum growth rate of 3.6 per cent in this sector. Preliminary figures for 1977 indicate a slight recovery, but external assistance to agriculture still remains pitifully inadequate.

6. Food and agricultural development, especially in the poorer countries, will need large external support in the foreseeable future. The over-all food and agriculture situation, in spite of recent improvements, is still fragile, and the long-term trends do not give reasons for complacency. Food production in the developing world has increased at an average annual rate of 2.6 per cent during 1970-1977 and just managed to keep ahead of population growth. Ravaged by war and drought, food production in Africa has only increased 1.3 per cent annually during this period. This implies an actual decrease of 1.4 per cent in per capita terms over the same period. In effect, per capita production in the group of developing countries increased only marginally (0.3 per cent) from 1970 to 1977.

7. The Fourth World Food Survey conducted by FAO shows that the number of undernourished has continued to grow in spite of marked improvements in certain regions, like the Near East. Although the 1973-1974 food crisis has been overcome, malnutrition continues to be widespread in the developing world. FAO estimates that the situation has not changed much in recent years from 1972-1974, when an estimated 455 million people in the developing market economies, or a quarter of their population, suffered from severe undernourishment. Between 1969-1971 and 1972-1974, the number increased by 15 per cent, which is much higher than their population growth rate.

8. It is against this background that the task of disarmament appears most urgent. Indeed, the vision of an overarmed but underfed humanity is, in itself, demonstrative of man's capacity for absurdity.

9. The world reservoir of destructive technology has grown beyond any reasonable limits, making the notion of security virtually meaningless. At the same time, food security, which would ensure the availability of food supplies for the future, is still far from being attained. Carry-over stocks of cereals are now more or less at the minimum safe levels, but in the absence of any agreement yet on the establishment of a system of internationally co-ordinated national stocks, the world is no better placed to face emergencies such as the one that occurred in 1972-1973.

10. Even a small reduction in current investment in weaponry could have wide repercussions, both material and psychological, if the resulting funds were diverted to development projects. Many such proposals have remained on paper in the past, and technical reasons have been advanced for the failure to implement them. However, most technical difficulties can be overcome by political will. The Assembly will be considering specific proposals for development funds while the developing world looks with hope at its deliberations. FAO, with its responsibility to assist in improving the food situation and bettering the standards of living, /...
particularly of the rural masses, also hopes that the results will, this time, be positive and is ready to co-operate in the implementation of development projects in its field.

11. Disarmament and development have been identified as the two most pressing problems of humanity. Near the end of the Second United Nations Development Decade, it has become apparent that its goals will not be achieved. Much the same can be said of the Disarmament Decade, which was held simultaneously. The intimate links that join the two do not need to be stressed again. The special session is being held at a time when preparations for the next international development strategy are entering their active phase. The world at large stands to benefit from the agreements that may be reached in this Assembly, with the aim of reducing military expenditures and using the resources which would thus become available for development purposes.

12. The ultimate objective of peaceful coexistence cannot be achieved in the conditions of economic and social disparity that prevail today. Should the arms race continue at the present pace, it can only bring the world closer to total destruction. There is not much time left for words. The world has to act.