Tenth special session
AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE TENTH
SPECIAL SESSION
Agenda item 11

ADOPTION OF A PROGRAMME OF ACTION ON DISARMAMENT

Note verbale dated 9 June 1978 from the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat

The Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations and has the honour to request the circulation of the attached note, entitled "Proposal by Ireland for a study of the possibility of establishing a system of incentives to promote arms control and disarmament", as a document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly under agenda item 11.
PROPOSAL BY IRELAND FOR A STUDY OF THE POSSIBILITY OF
ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM OF INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE ARMS
CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

1. In his address to the General Assembly on 25 May 1978 (A/S-10/FV.4,
p. 26) the Prime Minister of Ireland, Mr. John M. Lynch, proposed, inter alia, that
a study should be undertaken on the possibility of working out a system of targets
and incentives to encourage progress in arms control and disarmament. Such a study
could be carried out by the Secretary-General with the assistance of governmental
experts as appropriate.

2. The study might consider, among other possibilities, whether it would be
feasible to set maximum ceilings for national defence expenditures which States
would be encouraged to observe. This might be done by fixing, by agreement, as a
voluntary target figure, an upper limit for the maximum proportion of its gross
national product (or alternatively gross domestic product) which a State should
devote to military expenditure.

3. There are considerable differences in the circumstances of different
States and differences in what they consider to be their vital security needs.
Accordingly it would seem best to maintain the idea that while the target or
ceiling, expressed as a percentage of the gross national product (GNP) or of the
gross domestic product (GDP), should be a matter for general agreement, a decision
as to how far it could keep to the target set would be a matter for each State to
take on a voluntary basis and without constraint. However, the setting of a
general target figure, even on such a voluntary basis, could encourage progress
towards disarmament and have considerable moral force, since it would help over a
period to win wider and more general acceptance for the idea of specific and agreed
limits to be observed by all States, on arms expenditure and armaments of all kinds
(conventional as well as nuclear).

4. The ceiling to be set by general agreement might be a global one in the
sense that a single target figure expressed as a percentage of GNP (or GDP) would
be proposed for voluntary adoption by all Member States of the United Nations
prepared to accept it. Alternatively, separate targets might be set for
particular regions between the States of the region.

5. If progress is made towards disarmament it might be possible to envisage
that the target or targets set could be steadily revised downward, at suitable
intervals. In the course of the study consideration might also be given to the
possibility of an arrangement which would encourage States to devote some or all
of any consequent savings on armaments to increasing the funds available for
development.
6. It is recognized that the development of a system of voluntary ceilings and incentives will need to be compatible and co-ordinated with current efforts in the United Nations towards the standardization of military budget statistics as well as with studies on the relationship between disarmament and development. It is also recognized that the effective implementation of such an incentive system would be facilitated if an appropriate United Nations agency were to be given responsibility for the necessary studies and recommendations.

7. The Government of Ireland considers that, as a first step, it would be useful to begin now to examine these ideas and, accordingly, proposes that the tenth special session of the General Assembly should consider the inclusion of the following language in the final document of the special session, in the section relating to studies in the draft Programme of Action:

"The possibility of establishing a system of targets and incentives to promote and encourage progress in arms control and disarmament and, in particular, the possibility of proposing for general adoption a voluntary ceiling (or ceilings) on national defence expenditures, expressed as a proportion of gross national or domestic product, which States would be encouraged to observe."