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Agenda item 5

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEVOTED TO DISARMAMENT

Working paper submitted by the United States of America

Statement on agenda item 5 made on 24 April 1996 to
Working Group II by the United States Representative
to the Disarmament Commission

1. Yesterday, in my off-the-cuff remarks I noted that there appeared to be a tendency to put the cart before the horse in addressing the issue of another special session on disarmament. That is to say, there seemed to be interest in setting a date for a special session before we establish what it would be all about.
2. In those remarks I also went through a long list of multilateral endeavours on disarmament that provided opportunities for extensive debate, particularly on nuclear disarmament, but produced no concrete results. This was due to differing perceptions of what had been achieved in the nuclear disarmament field and what should be the basis for future work on disarmament, including nuclear disarmament. 1/
3. There appears to be general interest in another special session on disarmament. Yet we risk another unsatisfactory result if we do not first establish a firm foundation for a special session. We should start by asking ourselves some fundamental questions. Why have another special session? What would it achieve? How would it be different from the failures of the second and third sessions? Should it be balanced across the whole spectrum of disarmament? Should it be focused especially on, for example, nuclear disarmament issues? At a time of scarce financial resources, would the estimated cost of \$15 million for a special session on disarmament be worth the anticipated result?



4. We have to keep in mind that between now and the end of the century the disarmament field will witness more efforts that will produce more results than has been the case during a similar period of time in the past. To name only a few developments, we can expect the conclusion of treaties on a comprehensive test-ban and on fissile material cut-off, entry into force and implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of START II, and further progress in conventional arms control.

5. We should also keep in mind the reality of the NPT process, and the series of Preparatory Committee meetings that will be held starting in 1997, leading up to the NPT Review Conference in the year 2000. That Review Conference will look at many of the same disarmament issues that a special session on disarmament would consider.

6. As to what those issues should be, the United States believes strongly that any special session on disarmament should be balanced in its treatment of disarmament, giving comparable attention to issues related to weapons of mass destruction, to conventional disarmament and to the concept of general and complete disarmament. The United States could not agree to a special session on disarmament excessively weighted towards nuclear issues.

7. Concerning costs, Secretary Christopher made clear in the General Assembly last fall that, in a time of scarce financial resources, we all need to take a stern look at large, expensive conferences. The United States will want to be assured that another special session will be good disarmament value.

8. We should also consider that all previous special sessions have been convened as the result of consensus decisions. If the Secretary-General were to convene a special session on disarmament without a consensus to do so, this would be an unprecedented act. Convening a special session on disarmament in this way could reduce participation and call into question the credibility of any results of such a meeting. The vote on General Assembly resolution 50/70 F of 12 December 1995 indicates clearly that no consensus currently exists in the international community on this issue. Many, including the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, believe that the time is not right for holding a special session on disarmament; and, if one were held, it would likely be unproductive.

9. If we were to hold a special session on disarmament, what should be our approach?

(a) Would we try to set up a network of negative disarmament linkages? "If you won't do what I want on this, I'll refuse to allow that to happen!" Or, would we seek common ground and shared interests in moving things forward?

(b) Would we seek to impose obligations on individual parties by hectoring, repetition, rhetoric and appeals to the gallery? Or, would we seek convergence and agreement to move forward in small increments?

(c) Would we seek to force movement on disarmament by politics, voting and majority rule (Example: Is it acceptable to charge that 8 nations have no right to stay outside a treaty that 180 have joined?)? Or would we proceed by

negotiation and the attempt to identify common ground, that is, will we work by consensus-building?

(d) Will we seek Utopia in disarmament? Or will we seek common cause?

10. These are the kinds of questions we should begin to address. And, we owe it to the international community, to the disarmament community and to ourselves to try to do it "right" this time; not passionately as in the record of failure I recalled yesterday, but deliberately and cooperatively.

11. Until such time as we do reach agreement on what it is we would be trying to do and to achieve, my Government could not join consensus on scheduling a special session on disarmament. Frankly we do not foresee such a consensus emerging in the next few years, but we are willing to do our part to work towards that goal.

12. I hope that these comments will help to set the state for the necessary deliberations in this group that you predicted at yesterday's meeting.

Notes

1/ Our record of failure:

1986 Second special session: no final document.

1988 Third special session: no final document.

1990 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference: no final document.

1991 Disarmament Commission 12-year item on nuclear disarmament: no final document.

1995 Disarmament Commission 5-year item on nuclear disarmament: no final document.

1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference: no final document on review.

1995 Conference on Disarmament, fissile material cut-off: no negotiation.

1996 Conference on Disarmament, fissile material cut-off: no negotiation.
