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REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT

Working paper submitted by Hungary

1. Form and substance are attributes that are considered to be inseparable, constantly influencing each other. This is also true for disarmament where form is represented by the machinery, and substance by the political will exercised by the parties involved. It is widely recognized that the effectiveness of the disarmament machinery depends to a large extent on the political will exercised by States. Yet the effective utilization of the multilateral disarmament machinery and improvements on it will certainly have a positive impact on the process of disarmament. The absence of concrete results in multilateral disarmament during the past years reflects the need to review the disarmament machinery as well. The Disarmament Commission has been considering the issue for the past four years but has failed to come up with a set of recommendations aiming to improve the machinery. Last year the fifteenth special session of the General Assembly, the third special session devoted to disarmament made a remarkable attempt in this field as well, unfortunately with similar "results". It is imperative, therefore, to address the related issues again at this session of the Commission.

2. The General Assembly being the main deliberative organ of the United Nations has the major task of promoting the conclusion and implementation of disarmament agreements and measures. There are serious shortcomings in the implementation of resolutions on disarmament and much is to be done in this field.

3. Measures to improve the work of the First Committee are reflected in General Assembly resolution 42/42/N. Unfortunately little was implemented of the recommendations contained therein, at the forty-third session of the General Assembly. Although attempts were made to merge agenda items and draft resolutions there are still a number of overlapping resolutions, and this fact may substantially lessen the chances of their implementation.

4. The Secretary-General has an important role to play in ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security in the field of disarmament. The important task of prompt investigation of reports of the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons as requested by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly is a challenge requiring additional expertise, financial resources, and full support from Member States. The Secretary-General should prepare, with the help of qualified experts, studies on important issues of disarmament as requested by the General Assembly, keeping in mind the need of strengthening the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.

5. The Department of Disarmament Affairs should continue to assist the Secretary-General to carry out his functions in the field of disarmament. Given the enormous burden of the task, the Department is understaffed, lacking appropriate financial resources compared to other sections of the Secretariat. This situation might lead to serious difficulties in performing the increasing duties imposed upon the Department.

6. The Conference on Disarmament is a unique multilateral disarmament negotiating body with a mandate and functions that are of primordial interest to the international community as a whole. It is regrettable that the Conference spends too much time on procedural matters thus limiting the time available for substantive issues. The number of meetings has significantly increased but this has not led to the acceleration of the solution of outstanding problems. Efforts aimed at expanding the membership of the Conference have not yielded results. Having this in mind, the fact that 25 non-member States are taking part in the work of the Conference this year, and that Member States have not impeded the participation of certain States that had previously been barred from being present at the Conference, is a positive development. Consideration of improved and effective functioning should be continued by the Conference resulting in concrete recommendations and decisions. In this context priority should be accorded and great attention paid to the question of the establishment of subsidiary bodies and their mandates. Every effort should be made to increase the time available to the subsidiary bodies where work has already reached the stage of the actual preparation of agreements.

7. The United Nations has a central role and primary responsibility in the field of disarmament as formulated in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. A significant amount of work has been done to improve the multilateral disarmament machinery. The third special session devoted to disarmament made remarkable progress towards reaching consensus on the issue. The working paper of the Chairman annexed to the report of Working Group III contained in document A/S-15/AC.1/20 and Corr.1. together with the proposals and amendments to the text of the Chairman's working paper as contained in the annex of document A/S-15/AC/21 represent a sound basis for the future work of the Disarmament Commission. Hungary believes that consensus could be reached on the grounds of the contents of the documents mentioned above. A substantial amount of time could also be saved for seeking compromise formulations if the Commission made use of these texts as a basis for considering the agenda item.