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DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA ITEM 4 IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Working paper by the Chairman

The Commission decided on 9 May 1983 to adopt the Chairman's suggestion that item 4 be entrusted to the Committee of the Whole. As the Chairman explained, the reasons for proposing this procedure were twofold. First, there is no specific General Assembly resolution dealing with this item, as there are for the four other substantive items on the Commission's agenda; secondly, at the beginning of the present session, there were no concrete documents on which the Commission might base its work on item 4. Later on, a document of the German Democratic Republic was distributed on 9 May 1983 (A/CN.10/39). The Chairman was informed, furthermore, that some non-aligned delegations were working on a text to be submitted in due course. Other delegations might wish to do likewise.

Many delegations have expressed, in past sessions of the Commission, as well as in other forums the great importance that they attached to this item. It should be recalled, in this connection, that in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament highest priority was assigned to negotiations on the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, which constitute the subject matter of item 4 (a) and (b). The Chairman therefore expected that delegations would avail themselves of the early meetings of the Committee of the Whole to take the floor on the substance of these questions.

As the Chairman emphasized in his opening statement to the Commission on 9 May 1983, the work this year should follow the guidelines contained in resolution 37/78 H. The Chairman also noted that the 1983 session of the Commission should be considered as a transitional period in which the Commission should adapt its working philosophy to the new approach introduced by that resolution. It should be recalled that in resolution 37/78 H the General Assembly requests the Commission "to continue its work in accordance with its mandate, as set forth in paragraph 118 of the Final Document"; it also requests the Commission "to direct its attention at each substantive session to specific subjects from
among those which have been and will be under its consideration"; finally, it asks the Commission "to make concrete recommendations on such subjects".

Given the importance and priority that all delegations attach to the main subject matter of item 4, that is, the cessation of the nuclear arms race, the prevention of nuclear war, and nuclear disarmament, the Chairman expected that the Committee of the Whole would, at this session, direct its attention to the specific subjects dealt with in the context of this item, with a view to making concrete recommendations on them to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session. The comments that delegations wish to make as the Commission starts its debate in the Committee of the Whole will guide the Chair in suggesting the subsequent treatment of this matter, including the establishment of a subsidiary body to examine texts that may be submitted.

Based on the guidelines given to the Commission by the General Assembly, and as stressed in his opening remarks to the Commission on 9 May 1983, the Chairman would therefore suggest at this point that the Commission envisage a report on item 4 containing concrete recommendations on specific subjects, rather than remaining on the level of generality which characterizes the previous reports of the Commission to the General Assembly on this item. The final shape of the report will depend, of course, on the suggestions and texts submitted by delegations and on the outcome of the debate on them. It is the Chairman's understanding, however, that such a report should be action-oriented and contain recommendations that the Commission would be able to agree upon at the close of its work. The Chairman believes that, in this way, the Commission will be fulfilling the express wish of its parent body, the General Assembly, as contained in paragraph 3 of resolution 37/78 H.