DISARMAMENT COMMISSION
Agenda item 7

CONSIDERATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN THE
REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY
ISSUES ENTITLED "COMMON SECURITY" THAT RELATE TO DISARMAMENT AND
ARMS LIMITATION AND TO SUGGEST, IN A REPORT TO THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY HOW BEST TO ENSURE AN EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP THERETO WITHIN
THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM OR OTHERWISE

Working paper: Mexico

1. In the Final Document approved by consensus in 1978 the General Assembly,
after declaring that establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones "constitutes an
important disarmament measure", went on to stress that:

"The process of establishing such zones in different parts of the world
should be encouraged with the ultimate objective of achieving a world entirely
free of nuclear weapons".

2. Unfortunately, although the agenda of the Assembly has included several times
items on the creation of such zones in different regions of the world - Africa,
Central Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia - up to now the Latin
American nuclear-weapon-free zone established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco continues
to be the only one of such zones in existence covering densely populated
territories, although Antarctica, outer space and the sea-bed also have a régime of
military denuclearization.

3. In view of the awesome size of the nuclear arsenals in Europe and of the fact
that this is the main theatre of confrontation of the two large military alliances,
there is no doubt that the most significant nuclear-weapon-free zone which could be
established in the world would be a European zone.

* Reissued for technical reasons.
4. Since existing conditions are not too propitious for the immediate realization of such an initiative, which would certainly be one of the most important contributions to peace and disarmament ever made, it is obvious that the only practical approach needs to be a gradual approach.

5. That is why the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues has proposed in its report entitled "Common security - a programme for disarmament", as the first step for "the gradual removal of the nuclear threat posed to Europe", the "establishment of a battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone" in that continent. The main provisions of the report dealing with this matter are the following:

"We call special attention to the dangers posed by those nuclear weapons whose delivery systems are deployed in considerable numbers to forward positions in Europe. These are known as 'battlefield' nuclear weapons. A large portion of NATO's and the Warsaw Pact's nuclear munitions in Europe are of this type. The weapons are designed and deployed to provide support to ground forces in direct contact with the forces of the opponent. Their delivery systems have ranges up to 150 kilometres, and are primarily short-range rockets, mines, and artillery. Most of the delivery systems are dual-capable, i.e. they can fire either conventional munitions or nuclear munitions.

"Because of their deployment in forward areas battlefield nuclear weapons run the risk of being overrun early in an armed conflict. Maintaining command and control over such weapons in 'the fog of war' would be difficult. Pressures for delegation of authority to use nuclear weapons to local commanders and for their early use would be strong. The danger of crossing the nuclear threshold and of further escalation could become acute. It should be remembered in this connection that the areas close to the East-West border in Central Europe are densely populated and contain large industrial concentrations.

"The Commission recommends the establishment of a battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone, starting with Central Europe and extending ultimately from the northern to the southern flanks of the two alliances. This scheme would be implemented in the context of an agreement on parity and mutual force reductions in Central Europe. No nuclear munitions would be permitted in the zone. Storage sites for nuclear munitions also would be prohibited. Manoeuvres simulating nuclear operations would not be allowed in the zone. Preparations for the emplacement of atomic demolition munitions and storage of such weapons would be prohibited.

"There also should be rules governing the presence in the zone of artillery and short-range missiles that could be adapted for both nuclear and conventional use. The geographic definition of the zone should be determined through negotiations, taking into account the relevant circumstances in the areas involved, but for illustrative purposes, a width of 150 kilometres on both sides may be suggested. Provisions for verifying compliance with these prohibitions would be negotiated. They would have to include a limited number of on-site inspections in the zone on a challenge basis."
6. There have been subsequently some encouraging developments in connection with this question.

- The Soviet Union informed the Swedish Government last January that it endorsed the idea, although it felt that the present proposal did not go far enough and that the width of the zone should be, in its view, between 500 and 600 kilometres.

- The German Democratic Republic, in a letter addressed to the Government of Sweden on 27 January 1983 and reproduced in the Disarmament Commission document A/CN.10/39 of 9 May 1983, expressed similar views, adding that "it is prepared to make available its entire territory for such a zone provided the principle of equality and equal security is observed".

- The International Herald Tribune of 15 March 1983 published a report from Washington in which it was stated, inter alia, that:

  "The Pentagon, in a reassessment that would reverse 20 years of army policy, is questioning the need for thousands of short-range, battlefield nuclear weapons that it has deployed or plans to build, according to top Defense Department officials."

7. Finally, one of the most serious specialized magazines of the United States, the Scientific American, in the leading article of its April 1983 issue, after posing the question of "what would the implementation of the battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone accomplish?", answers it in the following manner:

  "For one thing, it would strengthen the barriers against the inadvertent or accidental initiation of nuclear war. It seems clear that nuclear war is not likely to result from a cold-blooded calculation of advantage during normal times; the forces of both sides are too large for either side to see any meaningful advantage to be gained. It is likelier that nuclear war would emerge from desperate decisions in an intense crisis, probably one in which the conventional forces of the two sides had already been engaged. Under such circumstances one side or the other might initiate a nuclear attack because it saw no other option for averting a catastrophic defeat, or because it had concluded that its adversary was about to escalate to the nuclear level.

  "The removal of all nuclear weapons from a zone of substantial width on both sides of the East-West boundary in central Europe would reduce the chances of the contingency most likely to precipitate such desperate decisions ...

  "The implementation of a battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free-zone would not eliminate the risk of nuclear war in Europe. Some risk will remain as long as nuclear weapons remain in the inventories of the major powers ... The proposed battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone, however, is a pragmatic and politically feasible measure to control the danger of nuclear war in Europe. It merits serious consideration by all citizens and governments."

8. Bearing in mind all the preceding facts and considerations, the delegation of Mexico believes that the report which the Disarmament Commission must submit to the...
General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session should include a paragraph like the following:

"The Disarmament Commission endorses the proposal outlined by the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues in its report entitled 'Common security - a programme for disarmament' for the establishment of a tactical or battlefield-nuclear-weapon-free zone in Europe. It firmly believes that the provisions on geographic delimitation, verification machinery and other relevant points for the treaty or convention which would have to be concluded to that effect should be negotiated without delay between the NATO and the Warsaw Pact military alliances."