DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

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

Addendum

REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

[9 May 1985]

The United States Government welcomes the opportunity provided by General Assembly resolution 39/151 C to offer its views and suggestions on the United Nations role in disarmament and supports the Secretary-General in his efforts to review United Nations functions in this important domain. As the United Nations celebrates its fortieth anniversary, the United States reaffirms its commitment to the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and pledges to co-operate with the Secretary-General and the other United Nations organs in carrying out their responsibilities under the Charter.

During the last decades the United Nations has devoted increasing time to disarmament issues, particularly to the discussion of numerous General Assembly resolutions. In addressing the effect of these resolutions and the results of other United Nations activities in the field of disarmament, it is the view of the United States that the quantitative output in terms of the record of debates, studies and resolutions is disproportionate to their qualitative impact. This is in large part due to the fact that diplomatic tensions, political insecurity, military instability and the aggressive behaviour of some States are the cause rather than the result (as is often mistakenly assumed) of arms competition and the difficulty of achieving significant arms control agreements.

It is the view of the United States that the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations affords an appropriate opportunity for Member States:

(a) To re-emphasize the importance of strict adherence to the United Nations Charter, and particularly to Article 2 (4) which calls upon all Members to refrain
in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. Respect for this cardinal provision of the Charter would make the most significant contribution to disarmament as such conduct would reduce conflicts, enhance security and diminish the perceived need for armaments;

(b) To demonstrate their concern for compliance with existing arms control agreements as being in the interest of all United Nations Members rather than of benefit and concern only to the major Powers or to the signatories of such agreements. This is important since confidence among the parties is eroded if legitimate questions raised regarding compliance are not satisfactorily resolved. The United Nations could serve as a valuable institution for promoting and assuring compliance with arms control agreements; and

(c) To take a critical look at the quantity and quality of resolutions on disarmament introduced in the First Committee of the General Assembly. During its 1984 session alone, the First Committee adopted over 70 resolutions related to disarmament, most of which were incapable of producing concrete results (although most members have expressed rhetorical support for them). The quality and impact of United Nations resolutions could be greatly enhanced by:

- Avoiding hortatory resolutions which provide no practical possibility of implementation;

- Avoiding the annual duplication of resolutions;

- Avoiding unbalanced resolutions limited to "nuclear disarmament", keeping in mind the tragically destructive nature of conventional conflict and the danger of its escalation to the nuclear level;

- Avoiding unrealistic resolutions calling for unilateral disarmament, which can undermine ongoing, serious negotiations on reciprocal arms reductions;

- Avoiding resolutions which take one side or the other in bilateral or multilateral negotiations, since vital security interests cannot be decided by majority votes in the United Nations General Assembly;

- Avoiding resolutions which can only have an impact on free societies because they call on non-governmental organizations, pressure groups, or public opinion to support disarmament; thus United Nations resolutions should no longer disregard the fundamental differences between open and closed societies.

In several important areas, the personal role of the Secretary-General is decisive. The United States is of the view that with respect to such areas the Secretary-General:
Might wish to consider ways by which any studies to be conducted under United Nations auspices could be focused on subjects that provide an opportunity for achieving practical and positive results;

- Take steps to ensure that projects carried out by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research are pursued in the most efficient and economical manner;

- Pursue General Assembly resolution 37/100 J, which requests the Secretary-General to report annually to the General Assembly on the implementation of the World Disarmament Campaign's provisions regarding the widest possible dissemination of information on security and disarmament in all regions of the world in a balanced, factual and objective manner.

In order that the resources and expertise of both Member States and the United Nations itself can be most effectively and efficiently utilized, the United States suggests that both the Secretary-General and the Member States do everything in their power to ensure that discussions on arms control and disarmament are confined to bodies having mandates to deal with these issues. The United States calls upon both Member States and the Secretary-General to take all available steps to avoid introduction of such subjects into the deliberation of the specialized agencies. Unless this division of labour is strictly observed, the important work of the specialized agencies in the United Nations system will be seriously diluted. Indeed, preoccupation with disarmament issues for which they have no expertise could seriously detract from their missions and at the same time diminish their prestige.

The United States makes these suggestions in the hope that they will contribute to greater balance, fairness and realism in future United Nations deliberations on disarmament, thus ensuring a more useful role for the United Nations in this important domain.