DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

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

Addendum

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ORIGINAL: ARABIC
REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

EGYPT

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The role of the United Nations in halting the arms race and achieving general and complete disarmament is well established and deeply rooted. It is reflected in the Charter of the United Nations and in the activities and resolutions of the Organization over more than three decades, and is performed within the context of its noble goal of achieving international peace and security with the least possible diversion of the human and economic resources of the world to military purposes.

Today, in studying and evaluating the role of the United Nations in this field, our point of departure must be that the international community has long ago reached general agreement on the danger of the arms race, particularly in the nuclear field. While the major responsibility for that state of affairs rests with a limited number of States, it is nevertheless true that, in view of the nature and enormity of the dangers involved, every State in the world has the right, indeed the duty, to strive assiduously to eliminate those dangers. The international community has chosen the United Nations and the United Nations system as the multilateral, international framework for the participation of the States of the world in these efforts, regardless of what States may do alone or in more restricted forums.

As long as all States of the world abide by this consensus and participate, accordingly, with goodwill and sincerity, in the efforts made by the United Nations in the disarmament field, the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is of the view that the basic set-up devised by the United Nations to deal with such matters, and one which it has firmly established over the course of the years, remains essentially intact and basically sound. Our endeavours should centre basically on how to promote the activities and increase the effectiveness of the various bodies formed for this purpose, or those to which responsibilities in the field have been entrusted, without prejudice to the existing system or its supporting structures.

The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is of the view that increasing the effectiveness of the multilateral bodies concerned with disarmament requires, in the first instance, increased co-ordination and greater linkage of the work undertaken by the various bodies. Thus, there should be a clear commitment to developing the ways and means by which issues are handled and studied in each of the various bodies in accordance with the concerns and priorities of the international community, whether in the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Disarmament Commission, or the Conference on Disarmament. All of this should take place with ongoing movement from deliberative bodies to negotiating bodies, in a practical and methodical fashion, and should be translated into concrete measures and tangible disarmament agreements.
In keeping with the foregoing, and without prejudice to the rules of procedure governing the work of the various United Nations bodies or the right of States to vote in the form and manner laid down in such rules, the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt attaches great importance to the endeavour to harmonize the resolutions before those bodies and to make every effort for their adoption by consensus in order to facilitate the practical transition from one phase of action to another and to achieve real progress in a field so vital for the survival of humanity.

The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is also of the view that it is important for each of the multilateral bodies to concentrate on performing the functions and fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to it and that they should agree on resolutions, recommendations, programmes of action or draft agreements which are compatible with their own particular character and which facilitate the work of subsequent bodies.

Member States also have a fundamental responsibility, when adopting their positions, to respect the special character of each of the United Nations bodies, not to stand in the way of the political will of the international community as reflected in the tenor of the resolutions adopted on each issue, and also to respect the special character, deliberative or negotiating, of the body to which consideration of an issue is entrusted. All States should strive to enable all such bodies to set up or establish mechanisms which will allow them to perform the task entrusted to them fully.

In another respect, while we are of the view that the basic structure for the work of the United Nations in this field remains sound, it may perhaps be appropriate to consider how the role of the Security Council and of the United Nations Secretary-General in the field might be enhanced. We also believe that we should examine the means by which the role of the United Nations in the various stages of the implementation of disarmament treaties in general might be developed, with particular reference to the field of verification, bearing in mind that the Organization is the foundation for a civilized international system.

The Egyptian Government is of the view that the role of the United Nations is, as it has previously stated, a basic and a crucial one. That role has, however, gone through a number of phases and has taken on increased importance in recent times in view of the gravity of the disarmament issue and its effect on international peace and security. Perhaps an assessment of each of the bodies individually will throw some light on the Egyptian Government's view of the matter.

The role of the United Nations in the disarmament field is evident in the work of the First Committee, which has, since 1977, been transformed into a committee confined to the consideration of disarmament and international security issues, thereby enabling it to devote itself exclusively to handling such matters in a thoroughgoing manner. Unfortunately, however, it has in more recent years been transformed from a committee discussing and seeking solutions and studying practical proposals for the handling of disarmament issues into an arena for the exchange of accusations, confrontation and the detailed discussion of the same international problems dealt with in the general debate in the General Assembly,
thereby deflecting it from the original goal for which it was established. This is to be attributed to the tendency of the great Powers, in particular, and of many of the States that follow their lead, to regard disarmament from the point of view of special interests rather than the general interest as represented by ensuring collective security for the international community. Accordingly, the Egyptian Government considers that the role of the United Nations should be fundamental and not peripheral. The use made of the United Nations system requires substantial improvement if there is any intention of arriving at serious and radical solutions to disarmament issues through the United Nations with the participation of the international community.

The Disarmament Commission, established in 1978 by the General Assembly at its first special session devoted to disarmament in order to enable all States Members of the United Nations to participate in the consideration of disarmament issues, has undoubtedly passed through difficult times in which particular items on its agenda have come up for discussion again year after year because of the lack of agreement on solutions within the Commission. In this connection, the question must be asked whether the rule of consensus, which makes agreement impossible, should be retained as the basis for the Commission's work, particularly when there is a negotiating body, namely, the Conference on Disarmament, in which that rule is applied. In general, we call for the rationalization of the Commission's work in the disarmament field within the framework of the United Nations. This call was made in the Egyptian statement to the First Committee at the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly. In that statement, we stressed the importance of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative body entrusted with responsibility for analysing and evaluating the international situation in the disarmament field and submitting concrete recommendations to the First Committee for the adoption of well-defined resolutions on the matter.

With regard to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the single negotiating body, the Egyptian Government considers that the work of the Conference has not been marked by success in recent years, except for its successful handling of a few items on which it is making some progress, such as that on the prohibition of the production, development, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. Perhaps this delay in the work of the Conference is in general due to the present state of international tension. We should nevertheless, at the same time, like to stress the need to retain the Conference, with its present composition and membership, in order to ensure smooth functioning, thorough discussion and effective results.

There are other activities of the United Nations system, such as the studies published by it. In this connection, the Egyptian Government welcomes the continuing role of the Secretary-General in preparing the various studies which throw light on disarmament problems. We nevertheless warn against the transformation of the expert group meetings into forums for political negotiations. The Egyptian Government is also of the view that the Secretary-General can play a more active role, that is to say, a special role, by taking it upon himself more forcefully, and acting in a prompt and decisive manner, to assist such studies in general when they are threatened with delay or failure. It is important that use should be made of them, in spite of the lack of consensus, in their field of application in the various aspects of the disarmament process.
With regard to the role of the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations, the Egyptian Government considers that there is a need to support and expand its activities, provided that these are co-ordinated with other similar activities of the Organization, such as those of the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

The Egyptian Government also calls for the strengthening of the World Disarmament Campaign, which has not received the support that it deserves from all States Members of the Organization, particularly since its work depends on the contributions of States in order to meet its expenses. The Egyptian Government is of the view that the principles on which the Campaign is based must be re-examined so that it may achieve greater acceptance and become more effective than it is at present. If, for example, we examine the promotional activities undertaken by the Campaign, it becomes evident that they can be improved by making use of regional organizations and through co-operation with them and with local authorities at the State and regional levels, instead of concentrating such activities in the United Nations alone.

An important body in the disarmament field in the United Nations is the Advisory Board on Disarmament Studies. It undoubtedly plays a useful role by making recommendations for the preparation of many studies that may prove useful in various aspects of the numerous disarmament fields, such as the conduct of negotiations, consultations and discussions. The role of the Board in overseeing the activities of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research is of great practical benefit in identifying and guiding studies and ensuring that they are updated from time to time in order to keep pace with technological developments in the arms race. We must also not forget the role of the Board in overseeing the World Disarmament Campaign. In the view of the Egyptian Government, it would be commendable for the Board to be accorded a degree of continuity in order to ensure the successful performance of its active role in the disarmament field within the United Nations system.

In general terms, the role of the Organization in the disarmament field could be more far-reaching than it is at present if States had the necessary political will and if the Organization could be freed from many of the bureaucratic restrictions which limit its activity.

Most States Members of the United Nations rely on the Organization to provide a forum for them to express their positions and policies on disarmament issues. The first special session devoted to disarmament gave these States the opportunity to participate in the consideration of these important issues and, indirectly, in the adoption of resolutions relating thereto by the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament. This places upon the Organization the responsibility of giving States the opportunity to help it play its role in curbing the arms race and reversing its course and in the disarmament fields in general.