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DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 9 October 1978, at 3 p.m.

Chairman.

Mr. VELLODI

(India)

- Opening of the session by the Secretary-General
- .. Election of the Chairman
- .. Statement by the Chairman
- Adoption of the agenda
- .. Election of Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I declare open the first meeting of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

The importance of this occasion is apparent from the fact that it marks a major step in implementing the decisions of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

It was one of the positive results of the special session that it recognized the urgency of making a new beginning in the effort towards disarmament. To that end, it decided to improve and strengthen the disarmament machinery of the United Nations. It established a deliberative body with the representation of all Member States and a negotiating forum of limited size whose membership will be reviewed at regular intervals. There is a balance established between the two bodies. One will consider and make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament and follow up the relevant decisions of the special session. The other will negotiate measures for implementing the international disarmament strategy,

It is a cardinal feature of the machinery now established that the two organs should be mutually reinforcing and that the output from the one should be channelled into the other.

By setting up the present Disarmament Commission as a successor to the one established in 1952, the General Assembly has decided to broaden, and indeed intensify, the deliberative function of the United Nations in the disarmament field. It has given an opportunity to the entire membership of the world Organization to consider, amplify, refine or elaborate the elements of a comprehensive programme for disarmament which are to be submitted as recommendations to the General Assembly, and, through it, to the negotiating body, the Committee on Disarmament.

(The Secretary-General)

This cannot simply mean a reformulation of generalities. It requires making concrete contributions towards the solution of the complex problems of disarmament. It signals the opening up of new avenues for tangible action towards this goal. It calls for a sustained and persevering effort to translate the decisions and recommendations of the special session into initiatives which, through active negotiations, can help realize practical objectives.

I feel confident that, aware of its mandate, the Disarmament Commission will be one of the principal instruments of the international community to accelerate progress towards banishing the spectre of an unceasing and ever-increasing arms race. This confidence is based upon the Commission's apparent strengths.

The Commission represents the entire membership of the United Nations and thus brings to bear on the consideration of the questions of disarmament the collective political awareness of the world community.

The Commission's task is facilitated by the fact that the foundations of a strategy for all disarmament efforts have been laid with universal acceptance. Basic principles have been defined and priorities identified within a comprehensive framework.

The Commission comes into being at a stage when, with the participation of all Member States, a two-fold consciousness has been lucidly articulated by the special session of the General Assembly: first, that while bilateral, multilateral or regional efforts towards measures of arms reduction are most valuable, the United Nations has a central role and primary responsibility in this sphere; secondly, that the programme of action is to be kept under continuous review if this role is to be fulfilled and this responsibility discharged.

In the course of the special session it became increasingly clear that the approach to disarmament, which focuses on arms limitation rather than on disarmament measures, has not been adequate to contain, much less reverse, the arms race. In view of rapid technological innovations and

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the emergence of new weapons systems, the development of which proceeds more rapidly than the pace of disarmament negotiations, no one can deny the urgency and critical importance of progress in this field.

The Commission has thus to sustain a political momentum already gained through the special session of the General Assembly. It has now to stimulate the conversion of ideas into action. It has to concentrate on urgent questions with a view to promoting new steps towards real arms reduction. It has to monitor and oversee all progress achieved in this field. The basis of its deliberations is that disarmament is neither a peripheral issue nor a sectional interest in the life of the world community but integral to the issue of the security of all nations, large or small. The degree of realism and accommodation and the quest for accord which were the most encouraging features of the special session will, I hope, continue to characterize the deliberations of the Commission.

By fulfilling its mandate, the Disarmament Commission will prove of immense help in halting and eventually reversing an arms race that is wastefully consuming a large proportion of the energies and resources of mankind. It must ensure that the deadly logic of the arms race can no longer be allowed to dominate humanity's welfare and security.

I extend to you all my best wishes for success in your most important endeavours.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I now invite the members of this Commission to proceed to the election of the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission and I call for nominations.

Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): Some of the most important decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session can be found, as you yourself, Mr. Secretary-General, have pointed out so correctly, in section IV of the Final Document that was adopted by consensus. In that section it was recognized that there is a great need to use more effectively the international machinery for disarmament and to improve it by revitalizing it in order to ensure that the United Nations

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will be able adequately to fulfil the primary role that the international community has entrusted to it in this field.

Following this line of reasoning, the General Assembly very clearly decided that two types of bodies are required, those of a deliberative nature in which all countries would be represented and those of a negotiating character, which by their very nature and mandate would be of more limited size.

Among the former, the General Assembly quite logically reserved to itself the primary and fundamental responsibility of examining, as a whole or separately, all problems touching on disarmament. But, aware of the fact that its own deliberations only take place normally during the regular sessions, it also decided to reactivate this Disarmament Commission, which is today beginning its work, as an intersessional subsidiary.

Those of us who were able to follow closely the work of the Preparatory Committee and later the special session of the General Assembly held a few months ago took good note of the leading role played by the delegation of India at both those sessions and the effort it made in order to strengthen the deliberative structures of our Organization. I do not believe I am wrong when I say that it was thanks to the initiatives of India that the General Assembly agreed to establish this Disarmament Commission as a successor to the Commission that had originally been created by resolution 502 (VI).

In due acknowledgement of that constructive effort, I assume it is both a privilege and a great pleasure for me to present the candidacy of His Excellency the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs of India, Ambassador Mulla Aravind Vellodi, as Chairman of this Disarmament Commission. Mr. Vellodi's wide experience acquired over long years in the United Nations and in other important posts in the foreign service of his country were manifest in the intense action recently developed and carried out in the Preparatory Committee and the Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament. His thorough knowledge of the subject-matter, his patience, his tact and negotiating skill reaffirmed his widely known qualities as an outstanding

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delegate serving his great country. These very same qualities will enable him successfully to guide the work of this Commission during the difficult period of the organization of its work, the preparation of its programme, and its progress towards fulfilment of the very delicate mission conferred upon it by the General Assembly.

Aside from his vast experience as a governmental representative, Mr. Vellodi has the advantage of knowing very intimately the ways, means and procedures of the Secretariat of which he was a member from 1962 to 1969 as Deputy Under-Secretary-General for Political and Security Council Affairs, as Secretary of the First Committee for seven successive years and as Secretary of the Committee on Peace-keeping Operations.

I could speak at some length and mention many other responsibilities that he has fulfilled but we all know the calibre and the merits of Mr. Vellodi. Therefore, in submitting his nomination to preside over the work of the Disarmament Commission, I formally propose that this nomination be approved by acclamation.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I thank the distinguished representative of Argentina.

Mr. Vellodi of India has been nominated to be Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. Since this is the only nomination, I propose that we proceed to elect the Chairman by acclamation. May I take it that this is the wish of the Commission?

It was so decided.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: I accordingly declare Mr. M. A. Vellodi, the representative of India, elected Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, and I extend to him my warmest and very best wishes for his important work. The new Chairman, who is a most able and well-known diplomat and administrator, brings with him to this new post a vast experience, as was rightly stressed by the representative of Argentina. He brings with him wisdom and a deep understanding of international affairs in general and of disarmament matters in particular. I wish also to recall, as Ambassador Ortiz de Rozas recalled, Mr. Vellodi's outstanding contribution as an international civil servant in the Secretariat of the United Nations, where he spent several years as Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General in the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. I had the personal pleasure of working with him on several occasions and I remember with gratification his most constructive contribution to the work of our Organization.

It gives me great pleasure to invite Mr. Vellodi to take the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN: Distinguished delegates, before we proceed to the consideration of the next item on our provisional agenda, permit me to express to all of you my deep gratitude and appreciation of the honour you have done my country by electing me Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. In particular, I wish to thank Ambassador Carlos Ortiz de Rozas for nominating me to this post and for the very kind and somewhat over-generous references he made to my modest contribution to the work of the United Nations. In assuming the responsibilities you have entrusted me with, I wish to assure all of you that I shall endeavour to carry them out in such a manner as to enable the Disarmament Commission to respond positively to the circumstances which necessitated the establishment of this important subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. I trust that in this task I shall have your confidence and co-operation.

(The Chairman)

The presence among us this afternoon of the Secretary-General - who unfortunately has now to leave - is not only a recognition of the important and primary role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament but also a reflection of the deep interest in and at times great anxiety over problems of disarmament and related matters which he has evinced. On behalf of all of you, and on my own personal behalf, I wish to express to him our deep gratitude for having honoured us with his presence and for the significant and important statement he made while opening this first session of the Disarmament Commission.

I am also gratified and happy to note the almost overwhelming representation of delegations at this first meeting and, in particular, the participation of all the nuclear-weapon Powers. This is indeed a happy augury for the commencement of the work of this deliberative body of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.

When the proposal was first made to have a deliberative body in the United Nations to deal with problems relating to disarmament doubts were expressed in some quarters both on the need to have such a body and about the relationship between this body and the negotiating forum in Geneva. The fact that the special session decided, without reservation on the part of any Member State, to establish a Disarmament Commission as successor to the Commission originally established by resolution 502 (VI) reflects the unanimous view that there is need to have the two bodies, one deliberative and the other negotiating, which can and should function in a complementary and co-ordinated manner without giving rise to confrontation on jurisdictional and other issues.

We have a great task ahead of us. The issues, while they are complex and difficult, are real. The arms race is insane and irrational. It was Bertrand Russell who said that the possibility of human survival on the earth till the next century is only about 50 per cent. All of us jointly must strive to remedy the situation by confronting and overcoming the forces that are responsible for the arms race. The Disarmament Commission and the newly constituted Committee on Disarmament provide us with the necessary forums for initiating and taking appropriate measures aimed at removing the threat to the very survival of mankind posed by the unprecedented and ever-escalating accumulation of weapons of mass destruction. Peoples of the world expect this from us and we cannot and should not fail them.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The CHAIRMAN: I should now like to turn to item 3 on our provisional agenda, which is the adoption of the agenda. If I hear no objection I shall take it that the Commission agrees to adopt the agenda as contained in document A/CN.10/L.1.

The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMEN AND RAPPORTEUR

The CHAIRMAN: The next item on the agenda is the election of officers. In this connexion I wish to call the attention of the members to paragraph 118 (b) of the Final Document of the tenth special session devoted to disarmament which reads:

"The Disarmament Commission shall function under the rules of procedure relating to the committees of the General Assembly with such modifications as the Commission may deem necessary and shall make every effort to ensure that, in so far as possible, decisions on substantive issues be adopted by consensus;". (General Assembly resolution S-10/2)

(The Chairman)

The election of officers in General Assembly Committees is covered by rules 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly which reads, in part, as follows:

"Each Main Committee shall elect a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. In the case of other committees, each shall elect a Chairman, one or more Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. These officers shall be elected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, experience and personal competence."

In this regard I wish to report to the Committee, as a result of consultations which I and the Secretariat have had, that it would appear there is general agreement that the Commission should have a total of 10 officers - a Chairman, eight Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur - and that each regional group should have two members as officers of the Commission.

I am told that, unfortunately, consultations are still under way within certain groups for the nomination of candidates as officers of the Disarmament Commission. I understand that the Asian Group and the African Group proposed to meet shortly to finalize their nominations. Nominations from the other groups have already been received by the Secretariat. However, since we cannot proceed with the election of the officers of the Commission until all the nominations have been received, I propose to adjourn this meeting now in the hope that the two regional groups which have yet to give the Secretariat their nominations will be able to meet and consider the matter between now and tomorrow.

May I make a personal appeal to those two groups to get together if possible this afternoon? I have been requested by the Chairman of the Asian Group to announce that the Group will meet immediately after the adjournment of this meeting.

Mr. ORTIZ de ROZAS (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): Before you adjourn the meeting, Sir, I should like to raise one question. I am not sure whether this Commission is going to work on the basis of summary records

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or verbatim records. If it is to be summary records, I should like to propose that the Secretary-General's statement and your own opening statement be reproduced in extenso.

The CHAIRMAN: I understand from the Secretary of the Commission, Mr. Corradini, that arrangements have been made for verbatim records of meetings of the Commission, therefore the statements made by the Secretary-General and myself will appear in extenso.

I should like to repeat my personal request to the two regional groups which have yet to consider their nominations to try and expedite this and if possible to inform the Secretariat of them not later than tomorrow morning. Provision has been made for meetings of the Commission for the whole week, but I should not like to delay the consideration of the other items on the agenda because of the delay in making nominations. I sincerely trust that the African Group also will find it possible to meet and to inform the Secretariat of its nominations.

It is my intention that the Commission should reconvene at 3 o'clock tomorrow when we shall proceed with the other items on the agenda, if that is acceptable to the Commission.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.