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DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE FIFTY-SECOND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Thursday, 28 May 1981, at 11 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. MICHAELSEN

(Denmark)

- Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: I am happy to inform representatives that an agreement has emerged from a series of elaborate consultations with a large number of delegations regarding some aspects of the organization of our work. In particular the idea of establishing two working groups has been proposed and widely accepted.

One working group will deal with item 5 regarding the reduction of military budgets. The second working group on item 6 will have the following mandate:

"The Disarmament Commission decides to establish a working group to elaborate the general approach to the study on all aspects of the conventional arms race and on disarmament relating to conventional weapons and armed forces, as well as its structure and scope.

"In this task the working group will take appropriate account of various aspects of the arms race, particularly the nuclear arms race and the ongoing work aimed at elaborating, within the framework of and in accordance with the priorities established at the tenth special session, a general approach to negotiations on nuclear and conventional disarmament."

In view of this progress I feel that I am in a position to propose to the Commission the establishment of those two working groups. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to establish those two working groups.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: The second point in the organization of our work is the question of chairmanship. Wide consultations with a large number of groups and delegations have resulted in an understanding that the candidate for the working group on item 5 regarding the reduction of military budgets will be Mr. Kerem Mahmoud, our Rapporteur; and that the candidate for the second working group will be Ambassador Davidson Hepburn, our Vice-Chairman. I propose those two candidates for the Commission's approval and, if I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission approves their nomination as Chairmen of the two working groups.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: We are in the fourth day of the second week of the Commission's short session. In addition to this meeting, we have 13 others during which the working groups are supposed to finish their work and report back to the Commission.

With reference to item 4, it is the understanding that it will be discussed in a meeting or meetings of the Commission convened as a committee of the whole. With regard to items 7 and 9, the Secretariat will prepare draft papers to be discussed later by the Commission.

Also, I wish to appeal to the members of the Commission to allow the working groups to work simultaneously in order to utilize every meeting available to us, bearing in mind that they will have to report back to the Commission at least one day before the end of the session, namely, by noon on Thursday of next week.

If no representative wishes to comment on or raise objections to the programme of work that I have outlined, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt it.

It was so decided.

Mr. VENKATESWARAN (India): Mr. Chairman, while my delegation appreciates the constraints of time on the basis of which you have suggested that the two working groups should meet simultaneously, we nevertheless trust that the working groups will as far as possible be able to adjust their meetings in such a way as to minimize this overlapping. I think that the explanation you gave with regard to holding meetings in the morning and in the evening would go a long way towards making such an arrangement workable.

The CHAIRMAN: I hope that that procedure can be followed. Naturally, there is conflict between ideal conditions and the necessary work that we have to do.

Mr. SOUZA e SILVA (Brazil): Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much for your explanations and the ideas you have in mind for the organization of our work. At the same time, I should like to support the remarks just made by our colleague from India. Also, I wonder, Sir, whether you could tell us what the dates will be on which the committee of the whole can deal with agenda item 4. I think that it is important for us to have some idea in this regard, in order that delegations may prepare themselves accordingly.

The CHAIRMAN: With regard to the question put by the representative of Brazil, it has not yet been possible to fix those dates. However, I envisage that the meeting of the committee of the whole will be convened on Tuesday next. That is not final but I hope that I shall soon be in a position to fix a date so as to allow delegations to prepare for the discussion.

Mr. FLOWERREE (United States of America): My delegation is naturally happy that we have now arrived at the point where we can get on with our work.

We do however have some observations about the formulation that has been adopted for agenda item 6, and I wish to make it quite clear that my delegation has agreed to the formulation of the mandate for this particular working group in order to permit us to get on with our work. We believed and we still believe that the formulation given in the agenda under item 6 is a perfectly adequate expression of the task which the working group is expected

(Mr. Flowerree, United States)

to accomplish under the terms of General Assembly resolution 35/156 A. The introduction of language from agenda item 4, which is a separate subject, is not, in our view, appropriate. But, in a spirit of compromise, we have agreed on the incorporation of such language at the insistence of some delegations. We trust that its inclusion in the terms of reference of the working group will not divert the Group's attention from its mandated task of working out at this session the general approach to the scope and structure of the study on all aspects of the conventional arms race and on disarmament relating to conventional weapons and armed forces. That task will be difficult enough to accomplish in the few days remaining to us.

Having said that, I want to make it clear that my delegation fully recognizes that all our efforts in the disarmament field are taking place against the backdrop of the perils of nuclear war. But we do not wish to see the outline of a study on conventional disarmament burdened with a baggage of issues that relate to the problems of nuclear weapons unless these are directly relevant to the conventional disarmament problem. We could have taken such considerations into account perfectly well under the wording of item 6 of our agenda. We have now made our decision and let us get on with our work.

Mr. WAGENMAKERS (Netherlands): I should like to make a statement on behalf of the 10 States members of the European Communities.

Our delegations are pleased that agreement has been reached on the wording of the mandate for the working group on item 6 of our agenda. We are anxious to see work get under way on the substantive questions which have been placed before this session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

In the interest of the progress of our work, we have therefore now accepted the addition of language to the mandate of the working group on agenda item 6, but we should like it understood that we have done so in order to take account of the fact that the study on conventional arms will take place against the background of a high level of armaments in the modern world, including nuclear armaments, which naturally arouse great apprehension.

We wish to make clear, however, that, in our view, the mandate for the study itself should concentrate on the question of conventional weapons.

Mr. ESPECHE GIL (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to welcome the agreement that has been reached, which will allow us to continue our work, especially with regard to agenda item 6, and to do so now within an appropriate context.

Furthermore, my delegation at the beginning of this session said that it was quite prepared to co-operate and that certainly remains our intention, especially now that we are approaching the last week of our work. While it is true that ours is a small delegation, we shall endeavour to do our utmost to cover the work it has been decided will be dealt with within the two groups.

Nevertheless, we hope that the holding of meetings of the working groups simultaneously will be kept to a minimum, especially when decisions are to be adopted or drafting work to be done on the reports of the working groups in such a way that the meetings are separate. If we can do that, it will not only help our delegation but also ensure the participation of the largest possible number of delegations in both working groups and, hence, the widest possible reflection of the various points of view in the Commission.

The CHAIRMAN: I shall do my best to ensure that the functioning of the working groups can be as smooth as possible.

Mr. de SOUZA e SILVA (Brazil): My delegation was prepared to accept this compromise without any comment, but as we have heard some delegations expressing their points of view, for the sake of the record I should also like to express the point of view of my delegation.

The delegation of Brazil has reservations on the compromise which has been arrived at. For our part, we think that the working group should be set up in connexion with items 4 and 6 of our agenda, but in a spirit of compromise we have agreed to its being established on item 6, with the provisions that were included in that item and that mandate. So we trust that strict compliance with that mandate will be the rule that will govern the preparation of that study.

Mr. PEREZ NOVOA (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the information you have furnished on the way we shall be working in coming days on the various agenda items.

Actually, it is not fully clear to us what approach is to be taken on agenda item 9 at this session. We should of course like to have a little clearer idea about the proposal having to do with this very important item which has been on our agenda for some time, at past sessions of the Commission, and which we feel should certainly be completed at this session. As I say, it is not clear to us how this item will be taken up by the plenary Commission.

On another subject, my delegation agrees with the views put forward by the delegations of India, Argentina and Brazil concerning the advisability of the working groups' seeking ways and means of allowing participation by all delegations, in so far as their time-tables do not exclude such participation, as this has been a subject of concern for a considerable number of delegations since the beginning of the general debate.

The CHAIRMAN: As to the question of item 9, I have been informed by the Secretariat that it will prepare a draft dealing with that item; as soon as it has been distributed, it will be discussed in the Commission.

Concerning the questions about the organization of working groups, I hope, as I have said, that workable solutions can be found.

Mr. VENKATESWARAN (India): Since some comments have been made on the mandate of one of the two working groups that have been set up to study the approach to and scope and structure of the study on the conventional arms race, I like to point out my delegation's understanding that this mandate has to be treated in its totality; we do not believe it necessary to say that one aspect of the mandate should have preference over the others. I am sure that all delegations here will only raise points that are appropriate within the framework of this mandate, and that none of us would want to do anything inappropriate in this regard.

Mr. MOUSSAOUT (Algeria) (interpretation from French): Mr. Chairman, I have asked to speak, for one thing, to congratulate you on having concluded the consultations which have allowed us to unblock the work of this Commission so that it can move forward on the basis of a compromise which seems to meet most of the concerns voiced during the general debate.

From another angle, I wish to make two comments in the same vein as those already made by some delegations. First, as to the groups working simultaneously, my delegation would have preferred to have only one working group, but our concern could not, of course, take precedence over that of all the other delegations. We feel it will be difficult to attend several meetings, in addition to which interpretation would be available for only one working group. A third difficulty is that the Commission will apparently be meeting in plenary session, which means that on some days there may be three simultaneous meetings which it would be difficult for my delegation to cover and to participate in.



(Mr. Moussaoui, Algeria)

I would therefore make the same proposal as many delegations have made before me: that we make an effort to avoid holding simultaneous meetings.

My second comment on the organization of work has to do with item 9. My delegation has already stressed the importance of this item to us and our concern for it.

The CHAIRMAN: With regard to item 9, I would refer to my previous answer. Concerning the question of three meetings at one time, I can assure members that there is no intention to hold three at once; that is out of the question.

Mr. AYEWAH (Nigeria): My delegation, is also satisfied that, late this morning, it was possible to achieve a breakthrough in the deadlock that seemed to hang over the mandate on item 6.

In the same vein as the statement made earlier by the representative of Brazil, my delegation requests that an indication be given now of the possible date on which items 7 and 9 can be considered by the Commission after the Secretariat has prepared the working papers. And, if I may therefore ask a precise question: where will the two items be discussed?

The CHAIRMAN: The Secretariat informs me that a paper on item 9 will be distributed on Monday; it is therefore suggested that the item be discussed in the Commission on Wednesday.

Mr. DIACONU (Romania) (interpretation from French): We too are happy at the compromise which has emerged. It could have been and should have been achieved a little earlier, we think. Having said that, we agree that an attempt should be made as far as possible to avoid simultaneous meetings, in particular on days on which the groups are to prepare their reports for the plenary Commission. But obviously we are already late with the work we have to do in discharging our mandate, and therefore we must make every effort to complete our work.

In the absence of any other matters to discuss here we might adjourn this meeting and use the remainder of this morning for the working groups so that they can organize their work and start working.

Mr. KIMISHANGA (Zaire) (interpretation from French): My delegation is very grateful for the efforts that you, Mr. Chairman, have made to help the progress of the Commission's work. I am grateful to you in particular for the efforts you have made in these recent days in the consultations you have been holding for the continuation of our work here.

We would agree with previous speakers in saying that we are happy with the outcome of the consultations and that the deadlock has been broken. We also welcome the compromise that has emerged regarding the establishment of the working groups. Like my colleague from Algeria, my delegation would have preferred a single working group to be established instead of two, but we should like to express the hope that the amount of overlapping of the two groups will be reduced to a minimum so that various delegations can participate in the discussions and the report may thus reflect as many points of view as possible.

My delegation has taken note of the answer that you, Mr. Chairman, gave the representatives of Brazil and Algeria regarding agenda item 9. We hope that that item will be incorporated in the debate next May, as you promised. We will be looking out for that, and we hope that we can continue to work at the same pace thanks to your co-operation, which has been highly effective.

Mr. TUAN (Liberia): Mr. Chairman, we wish to thank you for the efforts you made to bring about a breakthrough. But my delegation is very concerned about agenda item 9, which means a lot to us. You said that it would be discussed on Wednesday, but we would prefer that it be discussed on Tuesday and that discussion of it be continued on Wednesday, rather than its being discussed on Wednesday only.

The CHAIRMAN: The reason why it is proposed that item 9 be discussed on Wednesday is that it is suggested that item 4 be discussed on Tuesday. Unfortunately we are short of time so we have to economize regarding the days and meetings available to us.

Mr. TUAN (Liberia): I agree with you, Sir, but item 9 means a great deal to us. It deals with human suffering and a threat to southern Africa. Since that is so, even though item 4 is very important, it could be incorporated with item 9 for discussion on Tuesday.

Mr. GRINBERG (Bulgaria): My delegation also is happy that an agreement has been reached on how to organize our work. At the same time I should like to join those who have expressed some concern regarding the possibility of having overlapping meetings of the working groups. In view of what has been said about the size of delegations, I should like to draw the Commission's attention to the fact that probably many of us will be engaged also in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, which is to start next week. My delegation would hope that if there is overlapping of meetings it will be only an exception rather than a rule. I hope that we will be in a position to attend all the meetings of the working groups because of the importance of the items that are to be discussed.

Mr. R. KHAN (Pakistan): We also are happy that a compromise has been reached and that it is now possible for us to embark upon the Commission's substantive work. We deeply appreciate your personal efforts, Sir, which enabled us to reach this compromise.

Since some comments have been made in regard to the mandate of one of the working groups and the organization of the work of the two working groups, my delegation also will briefly express its views on those two points.

As to the first, the mandate assigned to the working group on the elaboration of the general approach to the study of all aspects of the conventional arms race is very clear, and it is composite. It focuses on the task of elaborating a general approach to the study on all aspects of the conventional arms race, and at the same time it does not overlook the organic link between the nuclear and conventional aspects of the arms race and the priorities assigned to the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament.

As regards the organization of work, we of course also agree with many of the delegations that have suggested that as far as possible overlapping of the work of the two working groups should be avoided. We should also like to support the suggestion of our Romanian colleague that as soon as possible we finish the exchange of views now under way so that, perhaps, we can informally discuss the work of the two working groups and they can start their work in the afternoon.

Mr. ZAKI (Egypt): Mr. Chairman, my delegation appreciates your personal efforts to solve the stalemate that we have encountered. We should also like to associate ourselves with the stand expressed by various delegations in supporting the agreed plan for the work of our Commission. In the light of the limited time available to us we wish the Commission to get down to work and to spare no effort until its work is concluded.

Mr. SHUSTOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (interpretation from Russian): Our delegation would like to express its agreement with the compromise which has been reached in establishing the two working groups. We agreed on the understanding that, in the group where items 4 and 6 of the agenda will be discussed, the work would be organized in such a way that there would be no detriment to the discussion of either the one or the other item. Otherwise, the consideration of those two important items might be distorted and would be at variance with the provisions of the Final Document or the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Regarding the organization of our work, the Soviet delegation understands the concern of some delegations that the simultaneous meeting of the two working groups might for many delegations hamper the due substantive consideration of the agenda items. In the light of that, I think it would be a better idea to hold consecutive meetings of the working groups. On the first day the first working group could meet. Then after lunch the second working group would meet, and so on. I am just thinking aloud and trying to obviate a situation in which the two groups would meet simultaneously.

Regarding item 9 of the agenda, my delegation is prepared to take it up as a separate item, but perhaps we should think about discussing that item in the working group which will be taking up agenda items 4 and 6. There is some logic to that, but we are prepared to hear the opinions of other delegations about this.

In conclusion, I think the matter of when to start the meetings of the working groups should be considered now and, so as not to speak yet again, I should like to state that my delegation would be in favour of having those meetings start tomorrow morning. We have had procedural discussions for quite a long time and, now that we are getting down to substance, we need some time to prepare for serious discussion. We need more consultations and we are therefore inclined to the view that the working groups should start their work tomorrow morning.

The CHAIRMAN: I should like to thank members of the Commission for their many suggestions on the organization of work. Naturally, contradictory views have been expressed: some want the working groups to start at once, while others want a delay. We shall have to find our way in that regard.

My suggestion would be that, in order to get the groups started, they should meet this afternoon; so the group on military budgets should meet at 3 p.m. and the group on item 6 should meet at 4.30. Then I hope that through co-ordination between the chairmen of the working groups and myself that we can find a system which, although I cannot promise that it will be ideal for everybody, will be as nearly ideal as possible, taking into consideration the very short time left to us, since we have spent a good deal of time on procedural questions.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.