DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 11 December 1981, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairmen: 

- Organizational matters (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

The CHAIRMAN: At the end of yesterday's meeting of the Commission some delegations expressed a desire to have some time for consultations on some of the items on our agenda, in particular the draft provisional agenda of the 1982 substantive session. At that meeting I had raised some issues in relation to that session — namely, the duration, whether or not to have a general debate, and the method of work. Those issues were referred to briefly in the belief that it is up to the Commission to take the appropriate decisions at its May session. I hope delegations have had an opportunity to consult among themselves on those issues.

Mr. ECONOMIDES (Italy): We have had some consultations on the organization of the 1982 session and it is my understanding that those consultations reached some results concerning two points.

First of all, concerning the organization of the session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, it could be suggested that at the beginning of the session a drafting group be established to deal with the report to the special session. All other items on the agenda could be dealt with in a committee of the whole or in a working group established for that purpose.

As far as the duration of the session is concerned, it is my understanding that the session should last two weeks, with the possibility of some additional days if that is necessary.

Those are the elements upon which I believe we reached agreement in the informal consultations and which I submit to the Commission.
Mr. Tinca (Romania): Of course my delegation would like to save the precious time of the substantive session of the Commission and not put it into a situation where it would have to deal at length with organizational methods. But it seems to us that we are not in a position to take a decision on all these questions, and I think that we have to leave this to the session itself next year. During the consultations various ideas were expressed. There is a sort of agreement on having a drafting group or something similar to it to deal with the report the Commission has to submit to the special session. Ideas were also expressed on having a committee of the whole or a working group to deal with all the other items. But, as I have said, we have to leave this question to the session itself.
Mr. DUARTE (Brazil): My delegation also understands that the consultations that have been going on since yesterday have produced at least some results. In view of the statements we have heard it would not seem advisable to take a formal decision on the modalities by which the agenda items, except the report to the second special session on disarmament, will be dealt with by the Commission. But perhaps it would expedite matters and make agreement at the session of the Commission itself easier if we could at least decide that there would be a working group, a drafting group, a subsidiary body - whatever we want to call it - that would deal with the report to be submitted to the second special session on disarmament. Perhaps we could also take a decision on the duration of the session, along the lines that the representative of Italy has suggested. Perhaps it would be useful to have those two questions out of the way before the substantive session begins. The remaining decisions will be taken at that session. In any case we shall have to elect the other officers of the Commission at the substantive session.

So perhaps we could expedite matters by taking right now the two decisions referred to by the representative of Italy, without prejudicing the other decisions that we have to take, including the manner in which the remaining items will be dealt with. At least, the understanding that has been expressed could be conveyed to the Commission in the form of an indication of widespread support, but not in the form of a formal decision as far as the remaining items are concerned.

Mr. SHUSTOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (interpretation from Russian): Mr. Chairman, our delegation considers that the exchange of views which you have helped to organize concerning the future work of the Disarmament Commission at its next session has been useful. Various opinions have been expressed concerning the best and most effective way of organizing our work. Those views will be of use to our delegation, for example, in that they will help us to reach our own conclusions as to the best way for us to organize the future work.
Unfortunately, we did not take part in the consultations that took place yesterday, but the whole series of ideas, such as for example, the one involving the setting up of a drafting group to prepare the report, seems to us to be entirely reasonable. At the same time, it would be particularly difficult for us to associate ourselves with any specific decisions. Various considerations and ideas must first be carefully pondered. We would wish to consult with delegations friendly to us, and with other delegations. There is time to do so before the beginning of the next session. If we have consultations before then and give careful thought to all of the organizational and procedural aspects, I think we shall be able to resolve the problems rather quickly at the beginning of the next session. Experience confirms that this kind of scenario is quite plausible.

Thus, in expressing the view of our delegation, we wish to say that we could not be involved in taking certain specific decisions at the present stage, although we are ready to take into account all reasonable views put forward at this time by the various delegations, which, as we see it, are dictated by a concern about the best way to organize the work of the coming session of the Disarmament Commission.

Mr. ESPECHE GIL (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): My delegation is quite flexible in all matters relating to the organization of our work, and we will not cause any problems. We consider the proposal made by the representative of Italy and the more recent statement by the representative of Brazil to be quite reasonable. If we have some time available now, we could use it to work on next year's agenda, since we know that we shall have only a short time available at the substantive agenda to work on a very long agenda.

My delegation is inclined to support the proposals of the representatives that I have mentioned, but we have also heard that some other delegations have reservations. If we could reach some sort of agreement at this meeting, I think this would be advisable. We still have this morning and all of the afternoon, and if it were necessary you yourself, Mr. Chairman, could hold the necessary consultations in order to take advantage of the time available to us now, so that when the Commission meets next year we could begin to deal directly with the substantive issues.
Mr. THORNE (United Kingdom): I should like to speak very briefly in support of the sensible suggestion made by the representative of Argentina.

As I understand it, he is suggesting that we might make use of the time which remains available to us today to try and have some further consultations, under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, to achieve some sort of agreement on guidance which might be given for next year's session. And I think that in this context the suggestions made originally by the representative of Italy and repeated by the representative of Brazil really do point us in the right direction. It seems to me that it should be possible for us to save rather a lot of time at next year's session if we can sort out some of these relatively minor issues now.

Mr. AYEWAH (Nigeria): My delegation's view is that the 1982 session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission should be as productive as possible. We are also fully aware of the work schedule of the United Nations Disarmament Commission next year. But, aware of the time-frame that may be available to that particular session, my delegation feels that it would be quite useful now for us to be able to take some specific decisions on certain basic issues. I think particularly that it should be possible for us now to address ourselves meaningfully to taking a decision on the organizational aspects of our work.
My delegation agrees that there should be a drafting group that would concern itself with the Disarmament Commission's report to the second special session in 1982. But since there has been a divergence of views about the other aspects of our work, it might be useful now to have further consultations in order that delegations can reach substantive ideas on how to proceed.

Mr. KATCHOURENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) (interpretation from Russian): There is no doubt that all consultations are useful. But it is another question when decisions on the matters which are the subject of those consultations should be taken. It must be noted that not all delegations are represented at this meeting. For that reason alone, I think it would be premature to take any decision now concerning matters that may arise in the course of such consultations. The consultations may not turn out to be so simple - for instance, in the consultations dealing with the membership of the working groups, there would be the question of the election of the officers and the activities of the groups. Perhaps this would involve Vice-Chairmen, who have not yet even been elected. Also, questions may arise as to the number of members of the working groups and similar problems, which of course cannot be resolved in the absence of a significant proportion of the membership of the Commission.

Summing up, I should like to say that we support the proposal to hold consultations at present. As a result of those consultations, certain proposals might emerge on the basis of proposals already presented, thereby making it possible to formulate still other proposals on which decisions could be taken at the beginning of the session in 1982.

Mr. NAMBIAR (India): My delegation sees a great deal of merit in the comments made by the representative of Brazil. While we do feel that there is a need for a certain amount of consultation on some of the substantive points relating to the organization of work in respect of various agenda items, my delegation feels that it is possible for us now to arrive at a clear idea of how to organize the report of the Disarmament Commission to the second special session. This will, of course, have to be taken up straight away in the very short time we shall have available to us next year.
(Mr. Nambiar, India)

The representative of Brazil has suggested that we should be clear in our minds on at least how this particular part of our work should be organized—by, let us say, the setting up of a small drafting group which would go into this question as soon as the session gets under way next year.

The second question which he suggested should be clarified in the course of this organizational meeting was the duration of the session. We feel that this question could also be discussed fruitfully and decided upon during this organizational meeting.

As to the question of how to tackle the various other items on the agenda, quite clearly it would be difficult for us to arrive at a crystallized consensus on that. Perhaps we could leave it to the substantive session next year. However, with more discussion or informal consultations, it may be possible to arrive at a decision on the first two matters.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we have had a very fruitful exchange of views, which will help us to take the decisions required for the organization of our work in 1982. As I understand it, there are many delegations that wish to have more consultations. If it is agreeable to the Commission, we shall suspend the meeting now so as to allow delegations time for such consultations. I trust that some of the outstanding questions may be solved in order that we may come to an understanding on at least some matters, on which I feel delegations have very similar views.

Mr. DUARTE (Brazil): May I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that you conduct the consultations after the suspension of this meeting?

The CHAIRMAN: I am willing to take part in the consultations, naturally.

As there are no other comments, the meeting will now be suspended for consultations.
The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

The CHAIRMAN: Consultations among members of the Disarmament Commission have led to an understanding on several points.

Concerning the duration of the 1982 substantive session, it is planned that the session should last for two weeks, beginning on 17 May 1982, with the possibility of an extension of a few days if necessary. Members of the Commission know that the Secretariat has reserved the three weeks from 17 May to 4 June, which is the period between the session of the Preparatory Committee for the Second Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament and the start of the special session itself.

It was also my understanding that the Commission at its substantive session might decide to meet for a short time later on in order to discuss its report to the General Assembly's thirty-seventh session.

With regard to the organization of work, there was an understanding that a drafting group should be set up to deal with the preparation and drafting of the Commission's report to the General Assembly at its second special session devoted to disarmament.

Concerning other business, it was determined that further consultations will be needed. It was emphasized that consultations could be held during the session of the Preparatory Committee, and that this should make it possible to come to speedy decisions at the start of the Commission's substantive session.

With regard to the question of holding a general debate, it is my understanding that it was felt that as the meetings at the second special session devoted to disarmament will give delegations ample opportunity to give a broad outline of their views on disarmament questions, it would be helpful for general statements at the beginning of the Disarmament Commission's session to be limited. On the other hand, it was the feeling that if delegations wished to express their views in a general statement they should have the opportunity to do so.
(The Chairman)

Those are the results of our consultations. I have the impression that if the Commission could agree to these points which I have mentioned, then an essential set of problems would be brought closer to solution. I think that they could form a good basis for speedy decisions at the start of the next substantive session.

If the Commission agrees, the verbatim record of this discussion will be of use when delegations prepare for the substantive session in May.

If there are no further comments, may I take it that the Commission has concluded its consideration of this item?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: We have thus come to the end of our agenda for these organizational meetings. I should like to take this opportunity, as this is the last time that I shall be serving as Chairman of this Commission, to thank the other officers, the delegations and the secretariat - Mr. Alem and his assistants - for their co-operation and patience. I wish the Disarmament Commission all the best in the years to come. I also extend best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year.

The meeting rose at 17.10 p.m.