DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE SIXTY-FIFTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 9 May 1983, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: 

Hr. DE SOUZA E SILVA (Brazil)

- Opening of the session
- Election of officers
- Adoption of the agenda
- Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

The CHAIRMAN: First of all, I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the confidence representatives have vested in me. I take my election to the chairmanship of this Commission as a tribute to the efforts of my country in the cause of disarmament.

It has become customary for opening statements to contain sobering references to the atmosphere prevailing in international relations, and particularly to the growing sense of alarm felt all around the world over the arms race and its adverse effects. The situation obtaining today is not substantially different from that of the past few years, except in the degree of intensity of the arms race, and it is indeed fitting that, at the start of this 1963 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, we reflect on the state of multilateral disarmament efforts and on the reasons why little, if any, progress has been achieved.

Individual delegations or groups of delegations may attribute different weight to some key factors, and the interpretation of political reality may vary widely in the perceptions held by all of us. Yet all delegations still gather around this table under a set of basic beliefs set forth in the most outstanding expression of common resolve ever achieved by the United Nations in this crucial field: the Final Document of the first special session devoted to disarmament. Only last year, the second special session ended in frustration. The only cause for relative optimism was the “unanimous and categorical” reaffirmation of the validity of the 1978 Final Document, an achievement of little more than rhetorical significance.
The reaffirmation of the validity of the Final Document and the accompanying pledge to respect the priorities in disarmament negotiations have produced no progress so far in disarmament efforts, in either the bilateral or the multilateral sphere. Furthermore, doctrines and objectives that stand at stark variance with those which were so recently solemnly reaffirmed provide, in several instances, the basic assumptions for current national policies. The Final Document of the first special session on disarmament stated unequivocally in its introduction that "the accumulation of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, today constitutes ... more a threat than a protection for the future of mankind." (resolution 5-10/2, para. 1)

Five years ago all Governments subscribed to this assertion. What has happened since then hardly needs to be emphasized: suffice it to point to the growing public concern in many parts of the world over the continued escalation in the deployment of weaponry of mass destruction. This situation is even more acute in those regions whose populations feel more directly threatened by the prevailing atmosphere of distrust and confrontation. From all corners of the earth pressing appeals are made from the public sector to those in a position to halt and reverse this dangerous trend. The threat of a nuclear war ranks foremost in the preoccupations of a large part of mankind which has forcefully demonstrated to its leaders its disagreement with concepts, policies and doctrines which predicate security and the preservation of peace upon the possession and accumulation of weapons of mass destruction with an ever-increasing destructive capability.

The United Nations has underscored this growing concern by adopting resolutions which remind those who play a decisive role in the shaping of events of their responsibilities in preventing the outbreak of a nuclear war. The question of the prevention of a nuclear war, which all of us recognized in the Final Document to be "the most acute and urgent task of the present day" (ibid., para. 18) has become the dominant concern, both in this Organization and in the public's mind.

On the initiative of the Group of 21, where non-aligned, neutral and other nations are represented, the Committee on Disarmament inscribed this year on its agenda, for the first time in its history, an item on the prevention of nuclear war. The delay in achieving a formulation that would accommodate differing views is illustrative of the difficulties that lie ahead of the international community.
in achieving the concrete and urgent measures that were already called for in the Final Document of 1976. Let us hope that no more time will be lost and that the Committee on Disarmament may tackle this all-important problem without any further delay.

The current inability of the multilateral machinery established by the Final Document to deal effectively with the relevant questions of disarmament can be ascribed not to any inherent structural shortcomings but rather to causes external to it. In its five-year history the Committee on Disarmament, the only multilateral negotiating forum, has yet to produce a single disarmament agreement. On the priority items of its agenda the Committee faces a situation in which it has been unable to establish adequate procedures to deal with them, since there seems to be a continuing resistance to recognize fully its negotiating role.

The Disarmament Commission, for its part, has met annually since 1976 under the mandate prescribed in paragraph 118 of the Final Document. As a deliberative body it is required not to negotiate but rather to make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament. During this period most of the items inscribed on the Commission’s agenda have been carried over from one session to the next without it having been able to make any noticeable contribution to their solution. However, the experience of its last four substantive sessions suggests that the Commission was able to make valuable contributions whenever the task assigned to it by the Assembly was formulated in precise and specific terms. In other cases the debate has remained confined to the general aspects of very broad issues.

In contrast with the less than constructive repetition of its report to the Assembly on the items carried over from each previous session, the Commission can point to concrete results on at least three specific subjects that were under its consideration. In 1979 it adopted by consensus the elements of a Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament; in 1980 it achieved agreement on the guidelines of the Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade. The subsequent failure to build upon those two contributions can, of course, be ascribed not to the Commission, but rather to changing attitudes towards the basic tenets previously agreed in the Final Document. In 1981 the Commission dealt only with carry over items, on which it could do no more than record conflicting views. Last year it was at least able to adopt the guidelines to the Secretary-General’s comprehensive study on conventional disarmament, now under way by an expert group.
At its thirty-seventh session, last year, the General Assembly adopted by consensus resolution 37/70 N, which introduced a new approach to the discharge of the deliberative functions of the Commission. The agenda to be adopted for this session will contain three items from previous sessions, as well as two new items assigned by the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly. All those issues should be treated in accordance with the guidelines contained in that resolution.

As the Commission reports this year to the General Assembly on the result of its consideration of each of the individual items, the parent body may find it advisable to assign the Commission new subjects in place of some of those to be dealt with at the Commission’s next session. It is my personal conviction that among the items on the draft agenda there are some which would benefit from a period of reflection on the part of Governments. Still according to the guidelines contained in resolution 37/70 N, some of the current items could be more concretely reformulated for consideration by subsequent sessions of the Commission.

In the same vein, I would encourage the Commission to use its imagination and ability so that its recommendations to the General Assembly have a more action-oriented form. As I see it, excessively broad formulations seem to be at the root of the Commissions’s inability to achieve concrete recommendations that would help the Assembly in its work.

We must recognize, however, that the new approach introduced by resolution 37/70 N cannot be implemented overnight. We must take advantage of the present transitional period as an interval of adaptation which will be needed by the Commission to gear up to a new and more constructive way of discharging its responsibilities.

Having in mind the recommendations of the General Assembly, I propose to organize the work of the Commission for this 1983 session accordingly.
ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The CHAIRMAN: As representatives may recall, the Commission elected the Chairman and four Vice-Chairmen at its organizational session in December 1982. The Vice-Chairmen were Czechoslovakia and Romania from the group of Eastern European States and the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden from the group of Western European and other States.

As a result of consultations, I am now able to report that the following nominations for Vice-Chairmen have been made by other regional groups: the African Group has nominated Sierra Leone and Tunisia and the Asian Group has nominated Bangladesh for the vice-chairmanship of the Commission. May I take it that the Commission wishes to elect the representatives of those countries to the vice-chairmanship of the Commission without a vote?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: In due course I hope that the Latin American Group will be able to nominate the remaining candidate for the vice-chairmanship.

The Commission will now turn to the election of its Rapporteur. Are there any nominations for the post of Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission?

Mr. DE LA FUENTE (Peru) (interpretation from Spanish): It is traditional for the Rapporteur of the last session of the Disarmament Commission to nominate the candidate for Rapporteur of the present session agreed upon by the various regional groups.

As is customary in such cases, my delegation had intended to enumerate the many merits of the candidate for Rapporteur. Unfortunately, we do not have all the elements of his curriculum vitae before us. I am fully convinced, however, that the support of his regional group is the best indication of his ability to carry out his responsibilities at this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

I am very happy to nominate, therefore, Mr. Abdul Mou'men Al-Atassi of the delegation of Syria for the post of Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission.
Mr. WASTUDDIN (Bangladesh): The delegation of Bangladesh would like first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship of this Commission, and we have no doubt that with your experience and your skill our deliberations will be well guided and will achieve fruitful results.

Bangladesh considers it a great privilege to second the nomination of the representative of Syria for the post of Rapporteur. This decision was taken at the meeting of the Asian Group, and we fully support it.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr. Abdul Hou'men Al-Atassi of the Syrian Arab Republic has been nominated as Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission. Since this is the only nomination, may I take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect him by acclamation?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: I invite Mr. Hou'men Al-Atassi to take his seat on the podium.

I wish to extend to Mr. Abdul Hou'men Al-Atassi, on my behalf and on behalf of the Commission, my warmest congratulations.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The CHAIRMAN: I should now like to invite delegations to turn to the provisional agenda contained in document A/CN.10/L.12. I should like to inform the Commission that a few weeks ago in Geneva I started consultations with our colleagues on the Commission, and especially with my colleagues on the Bureau. Those consultations were continued here in New York during the last few days of the past week. During those consultations, I did not hear any suggestions concerning the incorporation of new items in, or the elimination of items from, the provisional agenda, which is the same as the one distributed to the members of the Commission during its organizational session in December of last year.
Members will notice, however, that there are a few changes of language: one in item 5 (b), another in item 7 and a third in item 8. All of those changes are changes of language only, not of substance.

It is my understanding therefore that the provisional agenda contained in document A/CN.10/L.12 meets with the approval of the Commission. Does any member wish to comment on the provisional agenda?
Dr. AYEBAI (Nigeria): First, my delegation wishes to extend to you, Sir, its congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission for the current session.

After looking through the provisional agenda in document A/CH.10/L.12, my delegation would like to draw the Commission's attention to item 6, which, in its original version, read: "Letter dated 8 March 1979 from the Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid addressed to the Secretary-General in document A/CM.10/4". My delegation recalls that, when the Permanent Commission met last December, it looked particularly at the question of item 6. We should like to note that, on the basis of those consultations, it is now possible to reflect sufficiently on the subject-matter as now contained in document A/CH.10/L.12 of 9 May 1983.

The CHAIRMAN: If there are no other comments on the provisional agenda, I shall take it that the Commission adopts the agenda for its 1983 substantive session.

The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: As representatives may recall, the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session requested the Disarmament Commission to deal with various subjects in resolutions 37/95 A, 37/74 B, 37/99 B and 37/100 D regarding, respectively, reduction of military budgets, the nuclear capability of South Africa, the report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, and confidence-building measures. Furthermore, the General Assembly recommended that the Commission should continue consideration of items already inscribed on its agenda, as is the case of item 4.

During my consultations the view was expressed that the principle of equal treatment of all substantive items should be observed and that there should be no more than two meetings held simultaneously. On that understanding the following working groups or subsidiary bodies of the Commission could be
established to deal with various substantive agenda items and flexibility would be shown in allocating time to those groups during the course of their deliberations.

In this connection I have asked the Secretariat to circulate document A/CH.10/1983/CRP.1, which is now before the representatives. I should like to stress that I am not asking for its adoption but that it be taken as an indication or a tentative programme of work for the Commission which may be adjusted as the need arises and according to the experience we shall gain in the course of our deliberations.

The following are the working groups and the agenda items allocated to them: Working Group I would deal with item 5 on the reduction of military budgets; Working Group II with item 6 on the nuclear capability of South Africa; Working Group III with item 7 on the report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues; and Working Group IV with item 8 on confidence-building measures.

With reference to another subsidiary organ of the Commission, the Committee of the Whole will receive the reports of the four working groups and deal with any other business deemed necessary. It is also my intention to allocate to it the consideration of item 4 until it decides otherwise. There are two reasons why consideration of item 5 will start in the Committee of the Whole: first, we have no formal proposals or documents on which to begin work in the working group for item 4; and, second, we should wait for the proposals that may come. I understand some delegations are preparing working papers on item 4. We should wait until we have received those proposals and suggestions and then, as the Committee of the Whole may decide, establish a subsidiary body - a working group, a contact group or a drafting group. I think it would be premature at this stage to take a decision on their treatment or the subsidiary organ that would take charge of item 4.

If there are no other suggestions or comments, I suggest that we start the organization of our work by establishing those four working groups and begin consideration of item 4 in the Committee of the Whole. In that way we can dispose of the five substantive items on our agenda.

It was so decided.
The CHAIRMAN: I should like to announce that, on the basis of my consultations, the following have been nominated as chairmen of working groups: for Working Group I, the representative of Romania; for Working Group III, the representative of Sweden; and for Working Group IV, the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany.

I understand that, as has been the case in previous years, the Chairman of the Commission will also serve as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole.

May I take it that the Commission decides to approve those nominations?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: Members will have noticed that the chairmen of those three working groups come from delegations which, with regard to their respective items, have shown the most interest or have taken initiatives or sponsored them, either in the General Assembly or in the Commission.

I still do not have the name of the delegation which will provide the Chairman for Working Group II. It is my understanding that, for the sake of fair geographical distribution in the Bureau and the working groups, the Chairman of Working Group II should come from the African Group. Further consultations will be needed, and I hope that in due course, and very soon, I will be able to announce to the Commission the nomination for the chairmanship of Working Group II.

Mr. AYEWAH (Nigeria): My delegation simply wants to put on record its own appreciation of what the Chairman has just said in relation to the chairmanship of the various working groups. Of course, we subscribe fully to the principle of equitable geographical distribution, but we also think that on issues before the United Nations it is also possible to look at areas or competencies, where they exist. In other words, besides looking at a specific geographical region, it is possible also to look at a specific individual within the United Nations system. My delegation hopes that the Commission will consider this premise in its ultimate choice of a chairman for Working Group II.
The CHAIRMAN: I should like now to draw the Commission's attention to the question of the general debate and general statements. The Commission has decided, as in previous years, to approve an agenda without an item specifically entitled "General debate". But, also as in previous years, delegations that wish to make general statements are free to do so in plenary meetings.

For the sake of the organization of our work, I should like delegations to announce their wish to make general statements as soon as possible: if the Commission agrees, it is my intention that those delegations that wish to make general statements should inform the Secretariat by 5 p.m. today, 9 May, so that, once we know the number of delegations that will be making general statements, we shall be able to prepare our programme of work for this week and get down as soon as possible to substantive work in the various working groups.

If I hear no comments concerning that arrangement, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.