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DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE SIXTY-EIGHTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 24 May 1983, at 12 noon

Chairman:

Mr. DE SOUZA E SILVA

(Brazil)

- Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 12.15 noon.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: On my behalf and on behalf of the members of the Bureau of this Commission I want to make the following statement.

The responsibilities you have entrusted to me as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for 1983 include that of ensuring the best possible conditions for the conduct of our work. I will not shirk those responsibilities. For this reason I have decided to share with the Commission my grave concern over the anomalous situation that has prevailed so far during this substantive session and to report on the efforts being made to correct it.

As you are aware, the general organizational pattern of this session does not differ from that of previous years. As it has done in the past, the Commission decided to establish a number of subsidiary organs - a Committee of the Whole, four working groups, plus a contact group - on the understanding that no more than two meetings would take place simultaneously. It also decided, as in previous years, that the subsidiary organs would work on a basis of equality. None of those decisions constituted an innovation in relation to the past experience of the Commission. The logistic needs, in terms of facilities and human resources, were therefore predictable.

Weeks before this session I started with the co-operation of my colleagues in Geneva and the assistance of the Secretariat to envisage practical measures for an adequate preparation of this session. My consultations with delegations and the Secretariat were later extended, in New York, so as to finalize the preliminary organizational work. As a result of this effort, in which I received full support from all delegations I had approached, the Commission was able to dispose expeditiously of its procedural arrangements and to devote early attention to the substantive tasks before it.

(The Chairman)

Although our administrative needs were planned far in advance and therefore could be easily foreseen, and despite my repeated requests, it soon became clear that the Secretariat of the United Nations had not taken the necessary measures to assign to this Commission the indispensable facilities, in terms of both space and personnel, for the accomplishment of the tasks decided by the General Assembly, including in two special sessions.

For two weeks now the Commission and five of its subsidiary bodies have been confined to two rooms only, and assisted by one single team of interpreters. Consequently, the Bureau of the Commission was forced to devise a system of split-time meetings, which curtails the total amount of working hours, so as to make the best possible use of inadequate material facilities and insufficient human resources. The good will of all delegations and the dedication of the officers and staff available have made it possible to start our work with this precarious arrangement. I am most indebted to them all.

Throughout the past two weeks, during which this anomalous situation has prevailed, I have constantly tried to impress upon the competent services of the Secretariat of the United Nations my growing concern and dissatisfaction. Last Friday, in the Committee of the Whole, the Bureau joined me in this expression. However, to this date our efforts have been to no avail, despite the fact that no other organ comprising the entire membership of the United Nations is currently in session. It was not even possible to secure an additional small room to be available for meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission.

This is certainly puzzling. In 1979, the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament recognized the urgency of multilateral efforts towards disarmament in an unprecedented Declaration and, at the same time, decided to strengthen the role and responsibility of the United Nations in this crucial sphere. Last July, at the second special session, all Member States reaffirmed the validity of the Final Document and its priorities. Following the second special session, the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly adopted last December, among

(The Chairman)

others, two important consensus resolutions: one aimed at streamlining the work of the Disarmament Commission so as to render its deliberations more effective; the other reorganized the Secretariat's own institutional framework on questions of disarmament and enhanced the status and expanded the resources of the former Centre for Disarmament

It is paradoxical that difficulties of an administrative character should appear when the Secretariat unit charged with disarmament questions has been given wider responsibilities precisely to meet the growing requirements of the machinery within the United Nations system. Therefore, it becomes incomprehensible that the express wish of all States Members of this Organization is not heeded by the Secretariat with a corresponding reflection in the administrative arrangements for the normal functioning of the Disarmament Commission, a subsidiary body of the main organ of the United Nations. One can only conclude that the officers of the Secretariat responsible for disarmament, and especially for conference services in the United Nations, are following priorities and criteria of their own, rather than those clearly decided and reaffirmed by the General Assembly.

I have convened this plenary meeting of the Disarmament Commission in order to place on record, in my capacity as Chairman of this body, my deep concern and growing dissatisfaction, and that of the Bureau, over this deplorable state of affairs so that the forthcoming thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly may be informed of these facts and take appropriate action.

It is also my intention to take up these matters at the organizational meeting of the Disarmament Commission next December so that the 1984 substantive session does not suffer from the serious administrative shortcomings that are interfering with the normal functioning of our work this year.

Meanwhile, I must express my gratitude to all my colleagues of the Commission, and particularly the members of the Bureau and the Chairmen of the working groups, for having shown at all times their unfailing co-operation and support. It would indeed be most unfortunate if, for lack of adequate administrative organization, the Commission were prevented from dealing in depth with the substance of the items before it and from making as much progress as it could otherwise do. For my part, I will continue to do everything in my power to live up to the responsibilities that the Commission has entrusted to me.

(The Chairman)

Does any delegation wish to speak on this subject?

Mr. de la GORCE (France) (interpretation from French): Mr. Chairman, my delegation listened very closely to the statement you have just made and wishes to assure you of our full support. It is clear that the conditions that have been created at this session concerning facilities and the conduct of our debate are far from satisfactory. This is particularly surprising since, as you stressed, Mr. Chairman, no other body of universal composition is currently holding a session at Headquarters.

This is not the first time that my delegation has had occasion to raise the question of the ineffective organization of some of our work. Indeed, this occurred two years ago, as well.

We feel that the way in which the appropriate bodies of the Secretariat take account of our work requirements is clearly most unsatisfactory, and the necessary subordination of the Secretariat to the bodies which represent the States Members of the United Nations should be clearly stressed. These services are designed to meet our needs and give us satisfaction -- and not to place their own considerations ahead of them, which are generally not explained.

My delegation is thus willing to give its full support to any step that you, Mr. Chairman, may deem appropriate to take, particularly démarches to the Secretary-General himself, to draw his attention to the situation you have just outlined and denounced and to convey to him our dissatisfaction and our protests.

I think the Secretary-General should be duly informed directly of these circumstances. For our part we have no doubt that he will follow up whatever measures you, Mr. Chairman, may take in exercise of your authority and functions and with what I am sure will be the unanimous support of the Commission.

Mr. SILOVIC (Yugoslavia): My delegation wants to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership of this Commission. We wish to stress that the administrative and organizational conditions for the work of the Commission in its first two weeks have obviously not been satisfactory, and we fully support the statement that you have made on your behalf and on behalf of the members of the Bureau, for which we are grateful. We are grateful also for the initiative you have taken so far and for the steps you envisage taking during the tenure of your chairmanship.

We believe, as you have suggested, Mr. Chairman, that the General Assembly at its next session should be made aware of the situation in which the Commission has worked so that it can take appropriate measures. We want to place on record, therefore, the full support of our delegation for the words you have just addressed to us, and our full agreement with what has just been said by the delegation of France.

The CHAIRMAN: A representative of the Department for Disarmament Affairs has just asked to make a statement.

At this point I should like to recall that this matter which involves us today also involves more than one sector of the Secretariat. I have heard from more than one sector of the Secretariat on whom this responsibility rests. It is not my desire, nor is it the desire of the Commission, to get involved in these intra-Secretariat arrangements concerning the organization of our work. I should recall at this point too that according to the Charter of the United Nations, and as has been recalled by the representatives of France and Yugoslavia, the only responsible officer, for delegations to the United Nations, is the Secretary-General of the United Nations himself.

Hence I shall call on the representative of the Department for Disarmament Affairs if he is going to speak on behalf of the Secretary-General. However, if he is going to speak on behalf of his Department, or of the head of his Department, the Under Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, who is not present here because he has more important business to attend to - which, incidentally, seems to be a normal pattern now concerning the Secretariat and this Disarmament Commission - I would ask him to tell me personally, after I have adjourned the meeting, what he has to say, and if I consider it relevant to this issue I shall convey it to the Commission in due course.

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(The Chairman)

I am informed that the representative of the Department for Disarmament Affairs does not have authority to speak on behalf of the Secretary-General, so we shall proceed as I have announced.

If no other delegation wishes to speak, I shall adjourn the meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.35 noon