



General Assembly

UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT FOR DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS
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Distr.
GENERAL

A/CN.10/PV.71
1 December 1983

ENGLISH

DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE SEVENTY-FIRST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 1 December 1983, at 11 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DE SOUZA e SILVA (Brazil)

Adoption of the provisional agenda

Statement by the Chairman

Election of the Chairman and other officers of the Disarmament Commission

Review of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session relating to the Disarmament Commission

Draft provisional agenda

Other business

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The meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.

The CHAIRMAN: As members are aware, we have gathered today for a brief organizational meeting to deal with matters relevant to the Commission's next substantive session, particularly the election of new officers for 1984 and the provisional agenda of that session.

ADOPTION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA (A/CN.10/L.13)

The provisional agenda was adopted.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN: As the outgoing Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, I should like to share with members some brief reflections on the work of this body and on its role in the overall machinery for disarmament within the United Nations, as they apply to the organizational aspects at hand.

Experience has shown that the Disarmament Commission can be effective and that it has the ability to discharge its deliberative function in a constructive way. It is incumbent upon all of us, representatives of Member States, to work together for the accomplishment of these objectives. The most important task in this direction, from an organizational point of view, is the drawing up of a workable and objective agenda that will permit the Commission to work in an action-oriented fashion.

Delegations will have received my own suggestions for the draft provisional agenda for the 1984 substantive session. It is contained in document A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1. They will notice that the proposed changes concern item 3, to which I propose a comprehensive caput based on the relevant paragraph of the Final Document. Sub-items (a) and (b) reflect the gist of the current corresponding items in the agenda for last year. Under sub-item (a) the Commission might hold a useful discussion on what seems to have become the most acute and urgent question of the present day and, one would hope, arrive at a number of recommendations that would be useful for the work of the Committee on Disarmament on the prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters. Under sub-item (b) the Commission might wish to continue the task of devising specific action-oriented recommendations on the main questions of disarmament, both nuclear

(The Chairman)

and conventional, taking special notice of the guidelines elaborated in 1982 for the expert group on conventional weapons. The fact that an expert group is currently preparing a study on the basis of the guidelines agreed by the Commission should not be overlooked. The basis for the work under sub-item (b) is contained in the reports for 1982 and 1983 of the Commission itself.

The other items in the proposed agenda derive from resolutions adopted by the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly and from recommendations contained in the report of the Commission's own substantive session this year, over which I had the honour of presiding. Members will notice that I have not proposed formally any change in the wording of those items, since I have not wished to suggest modifications for what has been hitherto consensus language. But I do believe we should reflect more deeply on the wisdom of simply repeating that language ad infinitum.

I am thinking specifically of the items on the reduction of military budgets and on the nuclear capability of South Africa -- and I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not wish to detract from the importance and relevance of either question. I must say, however, in all candour, that for the time being the possibilities for immediate progress on both items in the Commission seem to be exhausted. Both have been misused as tools in the confrontation between East and West, and for the past few years have been used by some delegations of one side to attempt to embarrass the other, with little regard for the substance of the subject matter or for the seriousness of the intentions of the original proponents. I do not think that questions of such importance should be degraded to function merely as grounds for scoring debating points or dubious parliamentary victories. It is therefore my considered opinion that progress on both items, and the purposes pursued by their original proponents, would be better served if the Commission could agree on a pause in their consideration as from the 1985 session.

The item on military budgets might benefit from a period of consideration by Governments of Member States, which could reflect on the results achieved so far and contribute suggestions on the further treatment of the item. The item on South Africa, which has a direct bearing on the security of the African continent, would probably be more objectively considered if it were not scattered as it is among several bodies of the General Assembly. I am sure that the objectives of the

(The Chairman)

international community on both questions would be better served if the Commission could concentrate its attention on other issues under its purview.

That brings me back to the point I tried to make when I first assumed the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission, under the guidelines set by resolution 37/78 H. This is a deliberative body which comprises the whole membership of the United Nations, and its work will be the more effective if it can keep its yearly substantive agenda to a small number of items and if it can draw up concrete recommendations on each of them at each session. Once recommendations have been made, or once it has proved impossible to achieve meaningful common denominators, the Commission should turn its attention to other pressing problems in the field of disarmament. It cannot afford to become a stale, unproductive body which endlessly repeats itself in search of an illusive consensus on a set of immutable items in a fixed agenda.

As I said at the start of these comments, I make them in my capacity as the outgoing Chairman, in the sole interest of what seems to me to be the continuation of constructive, action-oriented work, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the First Committee on the work of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. It will be for the next Chairman of this body as well as for each individual delegation to contribute to the strengthening of the credibility of the Disarmament Commission so that it can discharge effectively the function for which it was created.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN AND OTHER OFFICERS OF THE DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to inform the Commission that I have been holding consultations with the different regional groups and their respective Chairmen. The results of those consultations are as follows.

With regard to the chairmanship of the United Nations Disarmament Commission for 1984, in accordance with the criterion of rotation adopted by the Commission, the Chairman of the Commission for 1984 should be nominated by the African Group. The African Group is still holding consultations concerning the nomination of its candidate. Once the African Group has taken a decision on that subject, it will announce it in due course.

(The Chairman)

With regard to the vice-chairmanships, three regional groups have not yet indicated their candidates; the Latin American Group, the Asian Group and the African Group. Similarly, when those nominations are decided, their respective Chairmen will make them known formally to the Commission in due course. With regard to the other vice-chairmanships, the Group of Western European and Other States has held consultations and decided to nominate two candidates for the vice-chairmanship of the Commission for 1984. The Group of Western European and Other States has indicated that those candidates are the Federal Republic of Germany and Greece. The Group of Eastern European States has nominated as a Vice-Chairman of the Commission the German Democratic Republic.

If there are no other nominations, I shall declare the representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece and the German Democratic Republic elected Vice-Chairmen of the Commission for 1984.

It was so decided.

With regard to the election of the Rapporteur, it is the tradition of this Commission that the nomination is made by the current Rapporteur. I call on the Rapporteur of the Commission, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. AL-ATASSI (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Commission (interpretation from Arabic): It is customary in certain bodies of our Organization that the incumbent in a certain position nominates his successor for the following year. Therefore I have pleasure in proposing, for the next session of the Commission to be held in 1984, a nominee chosen by his regional group to assume the post of Rapporteur, the position I have held for the 1983 session of the Commission. The nominee for Rapporteur of the Commission for 1984 is Mr. Sergey Martynov, who is a member of the delegation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Martynov holds the post of Assistant Foreign Minister of the Byelorussian SSR. He is a graduate of the State Institute of Foreign Relations in Moscow. During his work in the Byelorussian Foreign Ministry since 1975, he has participated in the work of various international organizations, including sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as the European Economic Commission, the International Labour Organisation and other intergovernmental organizations. He has participated in the work of the General Assembly since 1979. He also participated in the work of the second special session devoted to

(Mr. Al-Atassi, Rapporteur)

disarmament in 1982, in other meetings of the session, as well as in the relevant sessions on disarmament. Therefore his experience throughout his career is extremely rich in the field of disarmament, and we believe that Mr. Martynov is well qualified for the position for which he is nominated: that of, Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission for the year 1984.

Mr. Chairman, in this regard, I cannot fail to express my admiration for your wise guidance and chairmanship. I have been very happy to work with you during the sessions of the Commission in 1983.

The CHAIRMAN: The Commission has heard the nomination of Mr. Martynov of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as Rapporteur for 1984. If there are no other nominations, I shall declare Mr. Martynov elected Rapporteur.

It was so decided.

REVIEW OF THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS THIRTY-EIGHTH SESSION RELATING TO THE DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

The CHAIRMAN: With regard to the review of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly relating to the Disarmament Commission, I shall read out the list of those resolutions which have a direct relevance to the Commission's work. I shall ask whether the Commission wishes to make comments on each of those resolutions in turn.

The first is draft resolution A/C.1/38/L.14, which was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 50 (a), concerning the report of the Disarmament Commission.

The second draft resolution A/C.1/38/L.26/Rev.1, the main paragraph of which is number 6, was adopted by the First Committee under item 50, entitled "Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session".

The third draft resolution, A/C.1/38/L.44, the main paragraph of which is number 5, was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 58, entitled "Reduction of military budgets".

The fourth draft resolution, A/C.1/38/L.68/Rev.1, the main paragraph of which is number 4, was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 46, entitled "Nuclear capability of South Africa".

I now call on the representative of Sudan who wishes to speak at this stage.

Mr. ELFAKI (Sudan) (interpretation from Arabic): Mr. Chairman, my delegation is pleased to see you presiding over the proceedings of this meeting and appreciates your holding it this morning. We hope it will be fruitful. We also thank you for your suggestions for the streamlining of next year's work. We trust that the Commission will successfully discharge its functions.

As an African State concerned with and keenly interested in the question of South Africa's nuclear capability we have taken note of your statement, Mr. Chairman, concerning paragraph 5 of document A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1. However, with all due respect for your views and rich experience, we share the concern of our brethren in the African States and reserve our right to deal with this issue whenever we deem it necessary.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank the representative of Sudan for his very kind words. I want to assure him that I certainly had no intention of imposing my views on the Commission - nor would I have had any authority to do so. My objective, which is to provoke a discussion on the subject-matter, is, I think, already beginning to be achieved, so I am doubly grateful to the representative of Sudan.

The fifth draft resolution, A/C.1/38/L.5, the main paragraphs of which are 3 and 4, was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 63 (d), entitled "Confidence-building measures".

The sixth draft resolution, A/C.1/38/L.54/Rev.2, the main paragraphs of which are 2, 3 and 4, was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 56, entitled "Relationship between disarmament and development".

Finally, we have draft resolution A/C.1/38/L.31/Rev.1, which was adopted by the First Committee under agenda item 50 (b), entitled "Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament". Under operative paragraph 2 of that draft resolution, the General Assembly would decide to consider, at its thirty-ninth session, in the light of the progress report on the subject to be submitted by the Conference on Disarmament to that session, the advisability of requesting the Disarmament Commission to further examine the question and to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly.

Those are the relevant resolutions adopted by the First Committee of the thirty-eighth session concerning the Disarmament Commission.

As there are no statements concerning those draft resolutions, we shall proceed to our next item, the draft provisional agenda for the 1984 session of the Disarmament Commission.

DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA

The CHAIRMAN: As I said in my introductory statement, it will be noted that I tried to make a suggestion concerning what is now item 3 of the provisional agenda in document A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1. If I may advert to the reasons for my suggestion, the Commission will note that in our previous agenda sub-items (a) and (b) were under item 4. We had two sub-items, but we did not have an item. There was no caput for that item. Therefore, what I am suggesting is that we consider the recommendation to the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission next year, with a caput put in for those two sub-items, which should be drafted in so far as possible in a neutral way, and which suggest consideration of the various aspects of the arms race.

With regard to sub-item (a), I merely tried to rearrange its wording without touching on its substance. With regard to sub-item (b), I thought that since we have a Group of Experts dealing with this aspect of the question, which is conventional disarmament, the Commission should not overlook it and there should be a reference - not to the study itself, because it is still under preparation - to the resolution that established the Group of Experts and the respective guideline.

I do not think I am suggesting a precedent, because as the Commission will recall, we used to have on our agenda, with regard to the African continent and South Africa, two items which were merged at the last session of the Disarmament Commission, and my idea was to try to improve the agenda. We have to recommend a draft agenda to the substantive session of the Commission next year. We are not going to adopt an agenda; we are just making a recommendation. Therefore, I solicit the opinions of members of the Disarmament Commission on the draft provisional agenda that I have circulated in document A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1. After we have heard the different opinions, we might then take a decision.

I remember the difficult time we had three or four years ago when we adopted this item on nuclear and conventional issues of disarmament, and it was with great difficulty that we arrived at the consensus language. I have always found the language of this consensus a little ambiguous. It is therefore my intention to make it a little clearer while reflecting the concerns of the delegations which have been more active in the formulation of this item as it stood, and still stands, in the Commission's agenda.

Mr. CARASALES (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): Mr. Chairman, my delegation considers most appropriate the proposals you have made in connection with the draft provisional agenda for the Disarmament Commission's 1984 substantive session (A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1), distributed this morning. From a cursory analysis it would seem that the appropriate changes have been introduced; hence my delegation finds this draft provisional agenda completely acceptable.

Mr. NORMAN (United States of America): At this point I should like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the work you have done on the provisional agenda which is before us. We appreciate your efforts and in due course will be studying the language that you have proposed. We will, however, need more time to look over what you have provided, and reserve the option of returning to the previous language.

Mr. de LA GORCE (France) (interpretation from French): Mr. Chairman, I should like to express to you my sincere thanks for the presentation of this draft provisional agenda. Indeed, it is an effort at clarity, which is certainly very desirable and welcomed by us all.

However, I should like to reserve my delegation's position on item 3 (a). It is clear that the question must be raised and deliberated in the Disarmament Commission. We should have liked - I think you, Mr. Chairman, referred to it - the formula that we negotiated this year in the Committee on Disarmament, whereby the issue of the danger of nuclear war would be covered in its entirety and in what we consider to be its normal context - in conjunction - with other related question. That was the comment I wished to make at this stage.

As for the rest, your presentation, Mr. Chairman, seems to us quite satisfactory. We note that, anticipating the vote in the General Assembly, you were kind enough to foresee an agenda item 7, entitled "Consideration of proposals concerning the relationship between disarmament and development". We note that in 1984 the Disarmament Commission will undoubtedly have an especially difficult task to perform and agree with you that we should not lose sight of last session's experience - and, to a certain extent, disillusionment - with regard to the time that can be devoted to some of these items and the distribution of the various tasks that we must undertake.

The CHAIRMAN: Representatives have heard that the delegation of Argentina would be happy to have this draft agenda recommended to the Commission next May and the views of the representatives of the United States and France in which they expressed the wish to have more time to study the new formulation. In light of those two reservations, I think we should revert to the Commission's original agenda.

Item 3 of the draft provisional agenda in document A/CN.10/1983/CRP.8/Rev.1 would read as in the Commission's agenda for its 1983 substantive session.

We shall have to make an adjustment to the present agenda of the Commission's substantive session. Item 4 in CRP.8/Rev.1 on the reduction of military budgets should remain as is. Items 5, 6, 7 and 8 in CRP.8 should remain as they are.

With those modifications, if I hear no objection I shall take it that the Commission decides to recommend this draft provisional agenda to its 1984 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: We have thus disposed of the main business before this meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to announce that in an exchange of letters with me the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences suggested that the Commission's sessions should be shortened for organizational matters concerning the United Nations itself. Bearing in mind what was decided in the Final Document in 1978 - that

"The Disarmament Commission shall report annually to the General Assembly and ... will meet for a period not exceeding four weeks ..."

(resolution S-10/2, para. 118 (c))

and also bearing in mind our experience these last few years, including this year - I took the liberty on behalf, of the Disarmament Commission, to reply to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences that it would not be possible for us to shorten our substantive meetings.

Since there is no other business, I declare this organizational meeting closed.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.