DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE EIGHTY-FOURTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 6 May 1985, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. AHMAD (Pakistan)

- 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 11.15 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

The CHAIRMAN: Allow me to begin by stating how pleased and privileged I feel to welcome members to the 1985 session of the Disarmament Commission. I am extremely grateful to all members of the Commission for the confidence that they have reposed in me and the honour that they have done to me and my country in electing me to the presidency. It shall be my unremitting endeavour in discharging my responsibilities to come up to the very high standards of professional skill and dedication set by my predecessor. In undertaking my duties I feel reassured by the good will expressed during my informal contacts and the kind words of encouragement that I have received.

As compared with its session last year, the Disarmament Commission convenes this year under more propitious conditions. The bilateral dialogue between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which was suspended towards the end of 1983 was resumed in Geneva in March this year. It is a matter of satisfaction that the talks are aimed at preventing an arms race in space and terminating the arms race on earth. These talks and any progress achieved within their framework can contribute significantly towards the reduction of international tensions.

While appreciating the resumption of the Soviet-United States dialogue, we cannot ignore the importance of the multilateral disarmament efforts. The need for such multilateral disarmament efforts stems not only from the unprecedented accumulation of horrible weapons of mass destruction but also from the fact that if a war were unleashed with these weapons it would not remain confined to the adversaries involved but would lead to the extinction of civilization as we know it. It is in this context that I perceive the very vital role that the Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament have to play.

The Conference on Disarmament, during its six years of existence, has unfortunately not been able to produce a single disarmament agreement. Despite this failure we cannot afford to lose hope. We may even draw some encouragement from the fact that the Conference, after protracted discussions, has agreed this year to a mandate for an ad hoc committee on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.
(The Chairman)

The intensity of the work aimed at a convention banning chemical weapons is another positive sign. Serious discussions on issues of the highest importance – namely, a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, measures to prevent the outbreak of a nuclear war and nuclear disarmament – continue, however, to elude us. Primary responsibility for progress in these areas lies with the nuclear-weapon States, especially those which possess the largest nuclear arsenals. We must break out of the existing impasse, and do so quickly, if we do not want the multilateral disarmament process to lose all credibility.

I believe that the Disarmament Commission can play a highly positive role in restoring at least some of the loss of prestige and meaningfulness that the multilateral disarmament process has suffered during the past few years. This can best be done by successfully concluding our deliberations on at least some of the items on our agenda during this session. This, I believe, is well within the realm of possibilities and our competence.

As a result of the informal consultations that I have undertaken before the commencement of this session I have realized that there are items on our agenda on which the measure of disagreement is not too wide. I believe I can say that I have now been in the disarmament business long enough not to expect any spectacular breakthroughs, but I feel that our deliberations on two of the items which have been on our agenda since 1979 – namely, those pertaining to the freezing and reduction of military budgets and South Africa's nuclear capability – can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion this year. The Working Groups on these items have traditionally been presided over by two highly resourceful and exceedingly competent diplomats. In order to bring consideration of these items to fruition all we need now is to approach them with sincerity of purpose and in a spirit of accommodation.

The other item that has been on the agenda of the Commission ever since its inception – namely, agenda item 4 – enjoins us to consider the various aspects of the arms race, particularly the nuclear-arms race and nuclear disarmament. The language of the agenda item is of an all-encompassing nature. Agreement already exists on some of its elements, whereas there are other parts on which there is for the present little possibility of a consensus. On this agenda item, therefore, our endeavour should be to narrow the areas of disagreement.
We have three new items on our agenda this year. It is my hope that we will be able to deal with these items too in a satisfactory manner and that we will be able to agree very quickly on the format under which these items will be handled. It remains my strong belief that discussions of formats or procedures must not be allowed to impede substantive consideration of the issues before us.

Before I take up the remaining business for this morning's meeting, may I just remind delegations that as far as agenda item 9 is concerned the Commission must complete its review and appraisal of the implementation of the Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade at the current session.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The CHAIRMAN: As members will recall, at its organizational session in December of last year the Commission was not able to complete its Bureau of eight vice-chairmen in view of the ongoing consultations among African States about their Group's nominees. However, we did elect six vice-chairmen at that organizational session - the Islamic Republic of Iran from the Asian States, the German Democratic Republic and the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic from the Eastern European States, Bahamas and Mexico from the Latin American States and Greece from the Western European and other States - and a Rapporteur, Mr. Arturo Laclaustra of Spain.

I have been informed that the African regional group is still in the process of consultation regarding its nominees. I hope that in due course the African Group will be able to nominate its candidates for the vice-chairmanships.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The CHAIRMAN: If I hear no objection I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the provisional agenda (A/CN.10/L.16).

The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: I should now like to turn to the question of the organization of the work of this session in order to deal with the substantive items inscribed on our agenda. In this connection I wish to recall that a number of informal consultations, with the participation of a large number of interested delegations, were held during the month of April and earlier this month. As a result, general understanding regarding some aspects of the organization of the work of this session has been reached. I wish to put those ideas before the Commission for its consideration.
(The Chairman)

The first relates to the general exchange of views. In view of the limited time available to the Commission it is the general feeling that there should be no general debate. However, delegations can make general statements on any or all agenda items in the plenary meetings if they so wish. In this regard I would like to urge those delegations that wish to make general statements to inscribe their names on the list of speakers with the Secretariat. The deadline for such inscription is 1 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, 7 May.
If there is no objection I shall take it that the Commission wishes to proceed in this manner.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: As members may recall, the General Assembly, at its thirty-ninth session, had requested the Disarmament Commission to deal with various subjects in resolutions 39/64 A, 39/61 B, 39/151 G, 39/151 I and 39/148 Q regarding "Reduction of military budgets", item 5; "Nuclear capability of South Africa", item 6; "Review of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament", item 7; "Curbing the naval arms race", item 8; and "Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade", item 9. Furthermore, as regards the question concerning various aspects of the arms race, particularly the nuclear-arms race and nuclear disarmament, contained in agenda item 4 (a) and (b), the Commission had at its last session agreed to continue consideration of this issue.

As a result of the informal consultations I have held, I should like to place before the Commission for its approval the following: First, the Committee of the Whole would at the initial stage deal with item 4 (a) and (b) regarding the nuclear-arms race and nuclear disarmament and a contact group could be set up on this subject later. The Committee of the Whole would also consider the report of the Disarmament Commission as well as other business deemed necessary. Secondly, we could establish a working group, Working Group I, to deal with item 5, regarding the freezing and reduction of military budgets. Thirdly, we could also establish a working group, Working Group II, to deal with item 6, regarding South Africa's nuclear capability.

As for the chairmanships of these subsidiary bodies, I should like to inform the Commission that according to my consultations the following arrangements could be made: Working Group I would be chaired by the representative of Romania.

Regarding the chairmanship of the Committee of the Whole I understand that, as was the case in previous years, the Chairman of the Commission will take up that Chairmanship.

If I hear no comments I shall take it that these arrangements are acceptable.

It was so decided.
The CHAIRMAN: Concerning organizational arrangements for the other items on our agenda, I should like to inform the Commission that I propose to continue my consultations with interested delegations. I hope that we shall very soon be able to arrive at agreements on how to deal with those items as well as on the chairmanship of the Working Group that has been established to deal with the question of South Africa's nuclear capability.

Another matter pertaining to the organization of our work and which I have mentioned in my informal contacts with delegations concerns the number of meetings that can be arranged at a given moment. The Secretariat has informed me that it will be possible to arrange two formal meetings with interpretation facilities concurrently. However, four rooms will be available should delegations wish to hold informal meetings without interpretation. We have not yet prepared a timetable of work but we hope to do so as soon as the general picture concerning the organization of work becomes clearer. This timetable will of course be flexible; it will be indicative and can be adjusted or modified in accordance with the requirements of the Commission.

Regarding documentation for the current session, I wish to point out that last year's report of the Disarmament Commission to the General Assembly, document A/39/42, will serve as the basic document for consideration since it contains a number of major proposals on the subjects to be considered this year.

I am also informed by the Secretariat that additional documents will become available soon containing replies from Governments regarding agenda items 7, 8 and 9. Some of these replies arrived rather late and it was not possible to incorporate them by the beginning of this session.

As was the case in previous years, non-governmental organizations are welcome to participate in the work of the Disarmament Commission as observers.

Are there any comments on the organization of work?

Mr. EKANEY (Cameroon): Mr. Chairman, my delegation welcomes you to New York. We are very proud to see you chairing the deliberations of this Commission. It is a very important Commission and I think that the fact that you are carrying out the functions of Chairman demonstrates the respect in which you and your country are held. We wish to assure you that we will collaborate with you effectively in the discharge of your duties.
I listened very attentively, Sir, to your comments on procedural matters and my delegation agrees with what you said about the adoption of the provisional agenda. However, in my delegation's view the Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, composed of all the Members of the Assembly. It is not a subsidiary body of the Conference on Disarmament and, while my delegation attaches the utmost importance to the work of the Conference, we do not believe it to be appropriate for the results of informal consultations carried out among a selective group of the 40 members of the Conference in Geneva to be presented as a binding understanding relating to the work of the Disarmament Commission. We therefore believe that consultations on the work of the Conference should take place afresh, independently, within the United Nations Disarmament Commission, and should not be based on whatever may have taken place in Geneva or elsewhere.

My delegation would like to know why the previous method of work in the Disarmament Commission - namely, assigning specific items to working groups - is being subjected to a change at the current session. I make this point because I note that, while the principle of the formation of two working groups has been accepted, no decision has so far been taken on the rest of the items, which are of the utmost importance. Given the short time available to this Commission, I think it is incumbent upon the Chairman to make sure that such negotiations are undertaken without delay.

The question of a review of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament is a specific agenda item. A resolution on this subject was adopted by consensus at the General Assembly's thirty-ninth session. The Assembly requested the Disarmament Commission to deal with this item as a matter of priority at the Commission's substantive session in 1985, that is, at our present session.

In our view, not to establish a working group on the subject would be tantamount to not implementing the full spirit and essence of resolution 39/151 G. My delegation does not wish to be associated with any attempt at the non-implementation of that resolution. Furthermore, it should be noted that the resolution specifically requested the Disarmament Commission to carry out a comprehensive review of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. In our view, such a comprehensive review can best be undertaken within the framework of a working group.
I have made this statement to indicate how seriously we regard agenda item 7. We hope that during informal consultations on the subject it will be made very clear that my delegation is in favour of forming a working group on that item.

Finally, I should like to draw the Secretariat's attention to the fact that, despite the statement made earlier about documentation, full documentation on agenda item 7 has not yet been made available to this Commission. This is a new item and it is therefore important that representatives be given the opportunity to study all its implications. The carrying out of an extensive review required that delegations be given that opportunity even before arriving for the session, and it is regrettable that the Secretariat did not distribute these documents prior to the commencement of the deliberations of the Commission.

Mr. NANNA (Nigeria): As this is my first formal statement at this session of the Disarmament Commission, Sir, I should like to join others who have spoken before me in welcoming you to New York and in congratulating you on your unanimous election to the chairmanship of this Commission for this session. There is no doubt that, with your impeccable qualities, you will be able to steer the affairs of the Commission to a successful conclusion.

I wish to make some brief remarks concerning agenda item 9, "Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade". I would recall that in paragraph 2 of its resolution 34/75, of 11 December 1979, the General Assembly directed this Commission to prepare at its 1980 substantive session elements of a draft resolution entitled "Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade". In accordance with that resolution, this Commission adopted by consensus its recommendations on those elements, as contained in its report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session. This Commission's recommendations regarding those elements reads in part:

"In addition, the General Assembly will undertake at its fortieth session, in 1985, a review and appraisal, through the Disarmament Commission, of the progress in the implementation of the measures identified in this Declaration." (A/35/42, para. 19)

That recommendation was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 35/46, of 3 December 1980, and was included in the annex to that resolution, which was the Declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade. The paragraph which I have just read out became paragraph 25 of the Declaration, and there is no need for me to read it out again.
Thus, it has been recommended that this Commission undertake a review and appraisal of the Declaration and submit recommendations to the General Assembly at its fortieth session, which will take place this year. That recommendation of this Commission having been adopted by the General Assembly, it seems to my delegation that this responsibility, which the Commission felt it would be able to discharge, has now been assigned to the Commission by the General Assembly. To our mind, it is therefore imperative that this Commission undertake that review and appraisal at this session and make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly for consideration at its fortieth session. The Chairman well stated in his opening remarks that this task has to be concluded at this session of the Commission.

While an exchange of views in our debate will give representatives the opportunity to indicate areas of progress or lack of progress as regards the implementation of the Declaration, we feel that it would be more appropriate for a subsidiary body of this Commission to examine the views of member States and put together the Commission's recommendations to the General Assembly. It is our view that this Commission cannot fail in its assignment, having made such a recommendation to the General Assembly.
(Mr. Nanna, Nigeria)

If, therefore, a subsidiary body is most appropriate, I do not see how these views can be put together in the plenary meeting. That is the main reason why we have suggested that this subject would be better taken care of by a subsidiary body of the Commission, in accordance with the established practice. However, we do not feel that we need labour the point.

Mr. Konstantinov (Bulgaria): At the outset, Sir, I congratulate you on assuming the post of Chairman of this very important United Nations body. From personal knowledge of your high diplomatic expertise, I am sure that you will carry out your task with the necessary skill.

I listened to your explanations with regard to our programme of work, Mr. Chairman. I understand that that programme is not yet finalized, but is still the subject of consultations. As my delegation attaches particular importance to the curbing of the naval arms race—item 8 of our agenda—I hope that that issue will be given the necessary and proper attention as an important issue on the agenda of this year's session.

The Chairman: As the representative of Bulgaria has pointed out, the organization of the Commission's work with regard to all the items on its agenda is not yet complete. I propose to continue my consultations to arrive at an agreed manner in which to deal with some of the items on which agreement has not yet been reached.

I have noted the statements that the representatives of Bulgaria, Nigeria and Cameroon have made with regard to agenda items in which they have a special interest. I assure the representative of Cameroon that I have never regarded the Disarmament Commission as a subsidiary body of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. I have not brought any binding agreements from Geneva as regards the organization of our work. I did not confine my consultations in Geneva to the 40 States that are members of the Conference on Disarmament. Therefore, the representative of Cameroon should harbour no such reservations or doubts.

The agenda that we have adopted contains the items which the General Assembly sent to the Commission. The manner in which we deal with those items will be decided by consensus by the members of the Commission. I am in the process of investigating that manner. I assure the representative of Cameroon that, whatever the decision, it will be a consensus decision of the Commission.

The meeting rose at 12 noon.