

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



UNITED NATIONS
CENTRE FOR DISARMAMENT
DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL AND SECURITY COUNCIL AFFAIRS
Reference Library
GENERAL



A/CN.10/PV.9
14 May 1979

ENGLISH

DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE NINTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 14 May 1979, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. VELLODI

(India)

- Statement by the Chairman
- Adoption of the agenda
- Organization of work

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages, preferably in the same language as the text to which they refer. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also, if possible, incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, room A-3550.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN: Let me at the outset extend to all representatives a special welcome to this meeting, which marks the commencement of the substantive work of this body, which was established by the General Assembly at its tenth special session to provide a deliberative forum in the field of disarmament.

This day is particularly significant because, after a lapse of well over a decade, we are assembled here in a special forum of the United Nations whose function it is to consider and make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament. It is my earnest hope that we shall conduct our deliberations in a serious and responsible manner, fully conscious of the important and by no means easy task before us and the very short time at our disposal for the accomplishment of this task.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The CHAIRMAN: As representatives will recall, we gave the matter of our agenda some consideration at our second organizational session, in December last year. At that time we reviewed the resolutions adopted in the First Committee which had a bearing on the work of this Commission. In drawing up the provisional agenda the Secretariat has taken into account the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the deliberations of this Commission at its last session held in December. General Assembly resolution 33/62 called upon the Disarmament Commission "... to give priority consideration to the elements of a comprehensive programme of disarmament in its session to be held in 1979 and to exert its best endeavours to transmit its recommendations thereon, through the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session, to the Committee on Disarmament".

In accordance with that resolution, an item entitled "Consideration of the elements of a comprehensive programme of disarmament" has been included as item 3 on our provisional agenda.

Next, in accordance with the recommendation contained in operative paragraphs 2 (a) and (b) of General Assembly resolution 33/71 H, part II, two other items have been included, one relating to "Consideration of various aspects of the arms race, particularly the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, in order to expedite negotiations aimed at effective elimination of the danger of nuclear war", and the other to "Harmonization of views on concrete steps to be undertaken by States regarding a gradual agreed reduction of military budgets and reallocation of resources now being used for military purposes to economic and social development, particularly for the benefit of the developing countries, noting the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly". These two items appear as items 4 and 5 on our provisional agenda.

The next two items are communications. One was brought to my attention by the Secretary-General. It is a letter dated 1 February 1979, which the Secretary-General communicated to me in pursuance of General Assembly 33/71 L. This, as all representatives are aware, relates to the proposals contained in paragraph 125 of the Final Document of the special session. It appears as item 6. The other communication, which appears as item 7, is a letter dated

(The Chairman)

8 March 1979 from the Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid addressed to the Secretary-General. Both these letters have been distributed as documents of this Commission, under the symbols A/CH.10/3 and A/CH.10/4, respectively.

I should like to draw the attention of members to one particular point relating to item 7 the letter from the Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid. This letter, which is addressed to the Secretary-General, has been distributed as a document of this Commission, document A/CH.10/4, to which I have just referred. However, the report which was annexed to the letter from Ambassador Harrison - the report of the United Nations Seminar that was held - has already been issued as a document of the Security Council, under the symbol S/13157, and, in keeping with decisions of the General Assembly on the avoidance of duplication in documentation, reference to the report has been made in a foot-note in our Commission's document but the report itself has not been duplicated.

The next item relates to the "Adoption of the report of the Disarmament Commission to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly". Here again I wish to remind members that we are required to submit a report to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly. There is no possibility - and I have checked on this with the Secretariat - of the Commission being able to meet again between the end of this session and the beginning of the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, or even before the beginning of the work of the First Committee at the thirty-fourth session. In other words, we are therefore to draft and adopt our report to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly at this session, that is, by 8 June. Hence this item has been included in the provisional agenda.

Lastly, we have the usual item relating to "Other business".

At this point, I wish to ask members whether they have any comments on the provisional agenda as it appears in document A/CH.10/L.3. If there are no comments, I shall declare the provisional agenda formally adopted.

The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: Now that we have adopted our agenda for this session, we should consider the manner in which we should organize the work of this four-week session of the Disarmament Commission.

I have had detailed consultations on this matter with a fairly large number of delegations and, in particular, with my colleagues on the Bureau, and I wish to submit to the members of the Commission for consideration a programme for the next four weeks.

Members will recall that there was a very widely held view when we met in December last that we should avoid a general debate. I think that several members of the Commission referred to this when we met in December. At the same time, my consultations during the past few days have led me to believe that some delegations -- perhaps several -- might wish to make general statements relating to the specific items on our agenda, and in particular to item 3 on the comprehensive programme of disarmament. At the same time, there is a strong feeling among practically all the delegations with which I had consultations that we should begin substantive consideration of that item 3 as soon as possible.

I wish to remind members once more that we are required to submit our recommendations on this item to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This is in accordance with paragraph 118 (a) of the Final Document and the resolutions of the General Assembly.

(The Chairman)

Furthermore, since we shall have no possibility of meeting again before the commencement of the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, and because of the time constraints thus imposed on us, we have to complete our work on the implementation of the mandate given to us by the Assembly in regard to the comprehensive programme and finalize our recommendations to the thirty-fourth session of the Assembly before we finish this session on 8 June.

Because of these very severe time constraints, we agreed in the Bureau that we might devote the rest of the time available to us this week - that is, eight meetings during the four days from tomorrow through Friday afternoon - to a general exchange of views; and that thereafter we might set up an informal, open-ended working group, which would commence its meetings on Monday, 21 May, for a detailed examination of item 3 of our agenda.

As far as the general exchange of views is concerned, while there obviously cannot be any restrictions on the scope and contents of the statements that representatives may wish to make, it is my sincere hope that in view of the very severe time constraints we face, members will make every effort to relate their statements, as far as possible, to item 3 of our agenda.

The general exchange of views, together with the final document of the special session on disarmament and the replies received by the Secretary-General to his communication of 16 January on the question of the elements of the comprehensive programme of disarmament - reproduced in document A/CN.10/1 of 19 April 1979 and document A/CN.10/1/Add.1 of 7 May 1979 - as well as the voluminous documentation we have had in the past on the subject of the comprehensive programme of disarmament, will provide the source material for the substantive work of the working group.

I should like to suggest also for the Commission's consideration that any delegation wishing to submit, either individually or jointly with others, additional documentation in the form of working papers relating to the comprehensive programme - that is, to the work of the working group - do so before the end of the current week so that it will be available to the working group when it meets on Monday.

(The Chairman)

If the suggestion regarding the working group is acceptable, the idea is that it would meet for about two weeks to complete its task, which essentially would be to prepare the draft of our report to the General Assembly on item 3. The results of the deliberations of the working group would be taken up in the plenary Commission during the last week of the session - namely, the week beginning 4 June.

There are other substantive items on the agenda apart from item 3, on the comprehensive programme of disarmament. It is difficult for me to envisage at this stage to what extent the Commission will be in a position at the current session to deal with these items in detail. In any case, this is a matter we shall have to consider as we go along, since in my opinion it would depend to a great extent on the progress we make in the consideration of item 3.

Those were the suggestions I wished to put to members from the Chair. Essentially they are these: First, that we have a general exchange of views between tomorrow morning and Friday afternoon - with the rider that speakers will try to focus on item 3, relating to the comprehensive programme of disarmament, but not necessarily excluding consideration of other issues. Secondly, that from Monday, 21 May, we establish an informal, open-ended working group to take up specifically item 3. The working group would try to complete its work within two weeks and come back to the plenary Commission with draft recommendations which the Commission would consider and formalize before including them in its report to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

As I said, I have had the benefit of the advice of my colleagues on the Bureau. We have discussed these suggestions, but I should like to submit them to the full Commission, and I should be very grateful to hear any comments that members might wish to make on them.

In the absence of any comments, I shall take it that the suggestions that have emanated from the Bureau regarding our programme of work are accepted - subject, of course, to modifications that we might consider in the plenary Commission as we go along.

(The Chairman)

I should like to add the following points.

First, a question was raised during the meeting of the Bureau whether we should have only one working group or more than one. I believe it was the general feeling in the Bureau that we should in any case begin with only one working group. Some delegations have manpower problems. There are other important meetings taking place in the building. A resumed session of the General Assembly is coming up later in the month. So I believe it was the consensus in the Bureau that, as I have said, we should in any case start with only one working group, on item 3, and then see as we go along, depending on the progress or lack of progress, whether other informal forums are needed to consider other items.

Another matter which came up was whether the plenary Commission and the working group should meet concurrently. That naturally brings up the question whether, after this Friday afternoon and prior to 4 June, we should have any plenary meetings at all. It is my view that on this we should have a fairly flexible position. I do not think we should exclude the possibility of having plenary meetings as and when they are needed. It may well be that even next week - perhaps on Thursday afternoon or Friday afternoon - it might be useful for the plenary Commission to hear about progress in the working group on the consideration of item 3. There may be other reasons for holding plenary meetings. Therefore, I repeat that I would not like to exclude the possibility of holding plenary meetings during the next two weeks. But I think we should leave this point for the time being, on the understanding that if occasion demanded it we could have plenary meetings.

(The Chairman)

There is another point that I wish to bring to the Commission's attention before we go on to the next item on our agenda. It is a very important issue that relates to the participation of the non-governmental organizations in the Commission's work. I think members will recall that the non-governmental organizations participated very actively in the work of the tenth special session of last year, and I believe that all of us have benefited a great deal from their participation. The non-governmental organizations' role in this field of disarmament is of course very important in terms of mobilizing public opinion and, therefore, I personally feel that we should make facilities available for the non-governmental organizations to be associated with the work of the Disarmament Commission. I would suggest that the nature and extent of that participation, or some of its details might perhaps be considered first by the officers of the Commission who would then report to the Commission.

In the meantime, I have already held some discussions on this with the officers of the Commission, and there is general agreement that certain facilities should in any case be extended to the non-governmental organizations right away, that is, from tomorrow morning when we start the general exchange of views. These facilities which would be similar to those extended to the non-governmental organizations at the tenth special session are essentially the following. First, since the non-governmental organizations will be in a position to make available to the members of the Commission various types of literature of which they have an enormous amount, a table should be provided for them outside the conference room on which the literature could be displayed for the benefit of the representatives who come here. Secondly, the Secretariat and the Centre for Disarmament would distribute to the members of the Commission a list of the communications received by the Centre from the non-governmental organizations. Thirdly, the Centre for Disarmament would also arrange for interested representatives to be able to consult the communications which will be kept in files in the Centre. Lastly, we should provide in this room space for representatives of the non-governmental organizations to sit and observe the proceedings of open meetings of the Commission. Those are the facilities that I personally feel

(The Chairman)

we should extend immediately to the non-governmental organizations and I am quite certain that representatives who are present here will support me in this.

Another point on which I should like to consult with the officers of the Commission concerns the possibility of statements by the non-governmental organizations in the Commission. I should like to consult also with the members of the Commission to see how the making of such statements might be facilitated, if possible.

I sincerely hope that representatives will have no objection to the procedure that I have mentioned for the participation of the non-governmental organizations; and I repeat that we do attach great importance to the role of those organizations in this field.

We shall begin our exchange of views tomorrow morning.

Mr. FISHER (United States of America): In view of the schedule to which we have all agreed according to which a good deal of the time will be spent in the working group, I am wondering what was contemplated with respect to the physical presence of representatives of non-governmental organizations in the room during meetings of the working group.

The CHAIRMAN: I was not referring to meetings of the working group; I was referring to the plenary meetings. We shall have the general exchange of views from tomorrow until Friday, inclusive. I was referring specifically to those days of the open meetings of the Commission as a whole.

Mr. FISHER (United States of America): I am sorry to labour the point, Mr. Chairman, but the working group, as we see it, will be composed of almost the same people who are here, and it is going to take up probably at least 50 per cent of our deliberative time. I am merely putting out the suggestion that it might be possible to have at least the physical presence - I am not arguing for the speaking rights - of representatives of the non-governmental organizations in the working group as well as during the plenary meetings, since their composition is practically the same.

The CHAIRMAN: I must confess that I have not had an opportunity to discuss the point raised by the representative of the United States with the officers of the Commission and I should like to consult with them on it, since the working group does not begin its work until Monday of next week. I shall also find out from the Secretariat the practice that was followed in the working groups at the special session.

Mr. FISHER (United States of America): I am not pressing for a decision now, Mr. Chairman. The procedure that you have suggested is quite acceptable to the United States.

The CHAIRMAN: I should like to suggest that, since the general exchange of views is to begin tomorrow morning and we have only four days or eight meetings, delegations wishing to participate in the exchange of views should indicate their desire to the Secretary of the Commission as soon as possible. I understand from the Secretary that there are already 11 names - not all of them for tomorrow - of delegations which have indicated their desire to speak. I believe that we have some speakers for tomorrow, morning and afternoon, so we are in a good position to start the general exchange of views even tomorrow morning.

However, since we must complete this part of our work by Friday evening - I realize that this might not be a very attractive proposition, but I have no alternative - I suggest that we close the list of speakers for the general exchange of views by 5 p.m. tomorrow. I am quite certain that those delegations that wish to speak can make up their minds by tomorrow afternoon.

(The Chairman)

Now that we have generally agreed on the programme of work and in particular the setting up of the working group, I am sure that we shall have time, perhaps during the course of tomorrow, to hold further consultations among delegations about some of the details of the working modalities in the working group, including the question of the Chairman of the working group and so on. I am sure that we shall come back to this, perhaps tomorrow afternoon.

Once again I appeal to delegations in the general exchange of views as far as possible to relate their statements to agenda item 3, it being clearly understood that there is no restriction whatsoever to their referring to other issues on the agenda. I intend to make a brief statement at the beginning of tomorrow's meeting giving my own interpretation of the mandate of the Disarmament Commission, as far as the comprehensive programme is concerned.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.