Report by the Chairman of the Working Group

On behalf of the Working Group established by the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference, I have the honour to submit to the Committee document A/AC.167/L.5, containing the draft report prepared by the Group for consideration and possible adoption by the Committee, pursuant to United Nations General Assembly resolution 3183 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973.

The Working Group was given the task of preparing a draft report and holding consultations with the States possessing nuclear weapons, which, according to the terms of the resolution in question, had been invited to co-operate or maintain contact with the Ad Hoc Committee on the basis of the understanding that those States would enjoy the same rights as the States which were members of the Committee.

In the initial stage of its activity the Working Group felt that it would be desirable first of all to proceed as far as possible with the preparation of the draft report before entering on the second part of its task, namely, the consultations with the five States possessing nuclear weapons, so that it would be able to hold those consultations with reference to a preliminary document which could then be redrafted by the Group in the light of the results of the consultations.

This was the procedure which was followed. The Working Group concentrated at the beginning on determining what should be the content of the draft report, being guided in that endeavour mainly by the terms of operative paragraph 1 of resolution 3183 (XXVIII), which establishes that the purpose of the Committee is to examine all the views and suggestions of Governments on the convening of a world disarmament conference and related problems, including conditions for the realization of such a conference.

Thus the Group sought to reflect in the draft report the results of the examination of the views of the Governments, an examination which the Committee itself had already begun at its sessions in May and June, having before it the useful and accurate summary of views and suggestions prepared by the Secretariat,
the final version of which is contained in document A/AC.167/L.4. It became apparent that in reflecting the content of that document in the draft report the Working Group could not confine itself to selecting and reproducing textually certain parts of the views compiled by the Secretariat, since the task of reporting on the results of an examination necessarily implies that the reporter will elaborate in some way and at least relate to each other and compare the factual data constituted by the material to be examined.

Conscious of this responsibility, the Working Group endeavoured to reflect with the greatest possible fidelity the views examined, classifying and grouping them in accordance with an objective criterion which would make it possible to assess the real situation with regard to the views of governmental world public opinion on the important and delicate problem constituting the subject-matter of the examination. To that end the Group felt that it would be useful to summarize the opinions examined at three different levels of generality. One was more particularized: although it did not go so far as to include textual quotations - which would have made the draft excessively lengthy - it covered, in a fairly detailed manner, the considerable and wide variety of opinions put forward, to one effect or another, on the idea of a world disarmament conference. This is what in the course of our discussions we called the "provisional list of points" and it is contained in paragraphs 14-18 of the document we are now submitting to the Committee, under introductory sentences which correspond approximately to the terms used in resolution 3183 (XXVIII), namely, convening, conditions and related problems.

The second level of generality at which the Group has tried to reflect the examination of views is what we might call "general trends", set forth in the document under consideration in paragraph 13. Here the Group was dealing not so much with detail as with the significance of the various positions, the more general degree of emphasis placed on the basic factors involved in the problem posed by the idea of the world conference. This generalized approach makes it possible to group the entire spectrum of opinions in a small number - exactly six (in the version finally decided upon - of quite clearly differentiated approximations, or positions.

During its first session, from June to August, the Working Group likewise considered that a report on the results of an examination would be more complete if it also contained a general summary of the state of opinion of the international community, in a formulation sufficiently comprehensive to be faithful to reality but also sufficiently brief and concise to give an over-all view, bearing in mind that both analysis and synthesis are legitimate methods of inquiry when, as in this case, the terms of reference consist precisely in acquiring and transmitting knowledge of a concrete and specific reality - knowledge of the state of official world public opinion. This general statement was at first placed before the section relating to main trends, leading the report from the general to the particular. Later it was decided to begin with the main trends, go on from there to the list of points, and leave the general statement to the last.

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Both the structure of the document and the content of each of its parts were the subject of conscientious and thorough consideration, which explains why the Group held no less than 32 meetings during its first session. At all times the Group was aware both of the limits of its mandate and of the difficulty of finding appropriate formulations for the different degrees of generality with which such detailed and numerous opinions should be covered in a document of reasonable size. This was especially true of the general statement, so much so that in the preliminary draft report the paragraph in question was marked with an asterisk and accompanied by a footnote stating that the Working Group would have to review that text, inasmuch as it was felt that the results of the consultations to be held would surely shed some light on the desirability and accuracy of this general formulation.

Thus the document was broken down into four parts: the introduction, which was prepared punctually by the Secretariat, giving the necessary background and an account of the meetings held; the main trends; the list of points; and the general summary.

When the first session was concluded on 16 August the consultations were held. To that end, and at the request of the Group, I had the privilege of personally submitting the preliminary draft to the Permanent Missions of the five States possessing nuclear weapons, while at the same time the document was circulated to the members of the Committee in the usual way.

The result of the consultations was the following:

(a) The People's Republic of China suggested that the order of the paragraphs on main trends should be changed so that the paragraph referring to the largest group of States would be the first, and the position of the remaining paragraphs would be determined by the number of States covered by each. It also suggested the deletion of the general statement appearing on page 8 of the preliminary draft, and that the wording of two paragraphs reflecting its views in the sections on main trends and the list of points should be changed.

(b) France had no suggestions or objections to put forward except for the opinion - which it indicated was provisional - that the concluding paragraph would make sense only if it reflected the need for agreement among the five States possessing nuclear weapons as to the convening of the Conference.

(c) The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics likewise had no objections, and although it felt that the contents of some parts of the preliminary draft could be improved, it confined itself to suggesting changes in the order of certain paragraphs.

(d) The United States of America suggested the inclusion of two new paragraphs in the list of points and the deletion of the paragraph containing the general summary.

(e) The United Kingdom's only suggestion was that the general summary, which it found unacceptable, should be deleted.

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The Working Group met again from 4 September to reconsider the preliminary draft in the light of the outcome of the consultations and to revise it where necessary. As a result of the new discussions, the preliminary draft has been amended as follows:

The paragraphs in the section on main trends have been rearranged in accordance with the criterion suggested by the People's Republic of China and appear in that order, under number 13, in the final version of the draft (the sixth of these paragraphs has been left in its original position at the request of the delegation of Mexico, which proposed it).

The fourth paragraph in this section has been marked with an asterisk and is accompanied by a footnote indicating that its wording is subject to the result of consultations. The reason for this is that the People's Republic of China wishes the phrase "especially those possessing the biggest nuclear arsenal" to be inserted in this paragraph immediately before the letter (a), while the Soviet Union is opposed to any amendment of the paragraph. That being the case, the Group was able only to agree to draw attention to the difficulty in the manner indicated, in the hope that more detailed consultations will lead to its solution.

In the section relating to views on the convening of the Conference, the paragraphs have been rearranged as suggested by the Soviet Union and the wording of the paragraphs currently in fourth and fifth places has been changed.

In the section on conditions for the realization of the Conference, the paragraphs have been rearranged as suggested by the Soviet Union, a new paragraph has been inserted in sixth place in response to a suggestion by the United States of America and the wording of the paragraphs now in fourth and ninth places has been changed.

In the same section, the paragraph now in eighth place has been marked with an asterisk and a footnote for the same reason as that mentioned earlier in connexion with the other paragraph so marked. The People's Republic of China does not wish its name to be mentioned here and wants the inverted commas enclosing the direct quotation of its opinion deleted. I should point out that this is the only passage in the draft report in which a State's opinion is reproduced in extenso and word for word and that it was included in response to a request from the Chinese Mission transmitted to the Working Group during informal talks which preceded the official consultations.

However, the Soviet Union feels that, since no country is mentioned at any other point in the substantive part of the document, owing to the nature of the document itself, if the desire of a State to have reference made to another State or States is accepted, the name of the State expressing that desire should also be mentioned. The United States seems to have a similar opinion. The Working Group was able only to draw attention to the difference of opinion resulting from the consultations.

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In the section on the main objectives of the Conference, the paragraphs have been rearranged in accordance with a suggestion by the Soviet Union, and two new paragraphs have been inserted in sixth and seventh places at the proposal of the delegations of Mexico and Argentina.

In the section on organizational aspects, there has been a slight change in the wording of paragraph (c) and a new paragraph, designated paragraph (d), has been added at the request of the United States of America.

The main change made in the preliminary draft before converting it into a final draft is the deletion of the last paragraph, containing a brief general summary.

Of the five States consulted, three expressed opposition to that paragraph, one supported its retention, with certain reservations, and one had no definite opinion, but also expressed reservations.

The People's Republic of China felt that the final paragraph of the preliminary draft exceeded the Working Group's mandate in that it set forth a conclusion, the terms of which were, moreover, unjustified.

In an initial reaction, France, while not raising any formal objection, felt that the paragraph would be pointless in its original form since it did not include the essential element, which was the need for participation by the five nuclear-weapon States.

The Soviet Union considered that the contents of the paragraph could be improved upon, but was prepared to accept it. In its opinion, there was in any case a need for one or more final paragraphs.

The United States of America was of the opinion that the paragraph should be deleted from the draft and its wording left to the Ad Hoc Committee should the latter consider it desirable, since the paragraph was intended to be a highly condensed summary of a wide range of differing opinions.

The United Kingdom was unable to accept that paragraph, as it did not agree with its contents.

The Working Group gave careful consideration to those views and, although the predominant feeling in the Group was that it should make every possible effort to find an acceptable formula for a general summary, to which end it worked and held exhaustive discussions on a number of possible alternatives, it was not able to reach agreement on any of them and decided to delete the paragraph in question and simply to replace it by the words "closing paragraph(s)"; as they appear, in square brackets, in the text circulated, so that the Committee can, if it considers it necessary, draft that closing paragraph or paragraphs in an appropriate form.
The texts of the various alternatives considered by the Group before it decided on the deletion of that paragraph are available to delegations for their more complete information. It should be noted that the Group also considered the possibility of including one of those alternatives in the report at some other point, rather than at the end.

The delegations of Argentina and Mexico also submitted for the consideration of the Group two paragraphs which I should now like to read, and which will be subject to further consultations and the opinions which may be expressed in this Committee.

The first reads as follows: "A WDC should attach importance to the maintenance of an effective, expert and experienced body of limited size, of about 30 members, with the participation of all nuclear-weapon States on a footing of absolute equality, to carry out multilateral arms control and disarmament negotiations."

The second reads: "A WDC could focus the desires of mankind for disarmament on a world-wide stage attended by statesmen on the highest level and thus emphasize the demand of world public opinion for disarmament."

Finally, and again on the initiative of the delegations of Mexico and Argentina, the Working Group has authorized me to transmit to the Ad Hoc Committee on its behalf the suggestion that there should be continued application of methods and means used until now for helping to clear the way towards the initiation of the preparation for convening a WDC. To that effect, members of the Ad Hoc Committee who are to maintain contact with the nuclear Powers could explore informally the possibility of reaching agreement on the solution of some, at least, of the disarmament problems most frequently mentioned in debates, and consultations between the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee and the Permanent Representatives of the five nuclear Powers with a view to reaching a general agreement on the question of convening a WDC should be kept on a permanent basis.

It only remains, Mr. Chairman, for me to pay a tribute to the skill, enthusiasm and spirit of conciliation displayed by all my colleagues in the Working Group without exception, who thus brought honour on their respective Missions, and to the excellent co-operation I received from the Secretariat and the administrative staff, and to express the hope that our work will prove to have been useful, so that the draft we are submitting to the Committee will be the basis of a consensus whereby the Committee will fulfil the responsibility vested in it by the General Assembly and fulfill the latter's hopes.

Thank you.