AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

Sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 31ST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 4 March 1976, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. HOVEYDA (Iran)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. SCALABRE (France) said that his Government had been one of the first to support the USSR proposal for a world disarmament conference, as it supported any effort towards effective disarmament. The fact that France was not a full member of the Committee had not prevented it from contributing to the Committee's work and joining in the consensus on its report. His delegation regretted the lack of progress made and hoped that Member States would be able to agree during the current year on the convening of the World Conference. However, as stated in the relevant General Assembly resolutions, there must be total agreement among all Member States on the conditions for convening such a conference and on the report to be submitted by the Committee to the thirty-first session of the General Assembly. Any disagreement would mean that certain Powers would not attend the Conference, which should be attended by all Member States if it was to be a meaningful exercise. No State could agree to disarm unless all did, particularly the most heavily armed Powers, because, as the representative of the USSR had observed at the previous meeting, that would compromise its security. His delegation would try to assist the Committee's progress and understand its problems.

2. Mr. LAY (Italy) said that his Government supported the convening of a world disarmament conference. It had always believed that the widest possible participation of Member States in such an enterprise would help to achieve general and complete disarmament under effective international control, which was the fundamental objective of the United Nations. His delegation was aware of the complexity of the problem and the need for adequate preparation of the Conference and identification of the specific topics to be discussed. The participation of all nuclear-weapon States in the preparatory work was essential if the Conference was to come to grips with the fundamental aspects of the problems involved. The Conference must not duplicate the activities of bodies already working in the field of disarmament nor must it become involved in sterile general discussions. The Committee's work thus far provided a basis for further progress towards the convening of the Conference, but there could be no valid achievement without the consent of all.

3. His delegation shared the hopes expressed by others for more positive progress in the reduction of arms and disarmament, but did not feel that it would be sufficient simply to accelerate preparations for the convening of a world disarmament conference. Undue haste might have negative repercussions and it was evident from the work of other bodies that existing differences had not yet been eliminated nor the arms race halted, particularly in the nuclear field. Thus a gradual approach should be adopted to the convening of a conference.

4. The conclusions in the Committee's report to the General Assembly (A/10028) reflected the different views on the convening of a world disarmament conference, but were positive in that they threw more light on the subject. The Working Group should now analyse the different elements which had emerged thus far with patience and realism. For the reasons he had given his delegation supported the programme outlined by the Chairman following consultations with the Bureau.
5. The divergence of views among Member States could not be overlooked, because solutions that were unacceptable to certain Member States would not work. There was therefore no alternative but to persist in an effort to convene a conference with the consent of all. In his delegation's view, the question now was not whether to take new steps towards the goal sought by all but rather how to take them. The first step would be for the Working Group to study the conclusions reached in 1975 with a view to bringing about further clarification and understanding of the problems involved.

6. In conclusion, he drew attention to the appalling annual world expenditure on armaments and the desperate need of so many peoples for a better standard of living and greater security. That situation must encourage Members to continue to work towards general and complete disarmament. His Government hoped that the Conference would be held because, with the participation of all States, it could provide a global solution to the problems of disarmament.

7. Mr. PUNTSAGHOROV (Mongolia) said that the current session of the Committee coincided with another important event of international significance, the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had stressed that one of the main principles of the foreign policy activities of the Soviet State was the struggle to end the arms race and bring about disarmament. That ideal reflected the aspiration not only of the peoples of the Soviet Union but also of the workers of the socialist countries and of people of goodwill on all continents. The fact that one of the militarily most powerful States in the world consistently advocated the solution of the problem of ensuring lasting peace and security reflected the very nature of the socialist social system. He was convinced that the spirit of the Congress and the practical measures taken by the Soviet State to implement the foreign policy line worked out by the Congress would have a positive influence on the further development of international relations and the affirmation of the principles of peaceful coexistence and would contribute to the solution of the vitally important problems now confronting mankind.

8. One of those problems was unquestionably disarmament. The continuing arms race and the stockpiling of increasingly more complex and more costly types of weapons was diverting enormous sums from peaceful and constructive goals. Military expenditures in the world had reached an astronomical level. The lethal force of the nuclear weapons stockpiled in the world was already equivalent to that of 15 metric tons of TNT per person. Despite that fact, research was continuing on new and even more destructive types of weapons. That situation threatened all mankind. Disarmament was therefore not an abstract question but a practical necessity. Although disarmament was an extremely complicated task, the general interests of all mankind necessitated the limitation and eventually the cessation of the arms race in order to open the way for general and complete disarmament under appropriate international control.

9. The current international situation was developing in a manner that was favourable to the cause of peace. Détente was taking hold and a dangerous
hot-bed of war in South-East Asia had been eliminated. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe had laid the foundation for a new stage in international relations based on the principles of peaceful coexistence. Also noteworthy were the various agreements aimed at slowing down the arms race and the Soviet-United States agreements on limiting strategic weapons and averting nuclear war. The conclusion of those agreements among States with different social systems showed that it was possible to achieve progress in the field of military détente.

10. It was precisely in that context that his country understood the idea of convening a world disarmament conference. The time was ripe for making practical preparations for such a conference. Experience had shown that the holding of world conferences on individual problems of global significance was extremely useful. The World Disarmament Conference would be the first representative forum in which the problem of disarmament could be considered in its entire scope and in whose work virtually all States could participate on an equal footing, including States which were not Members of the United Nations. The Conference should contribute to the formulation of effective measures to halt the arms race and bring about disarmament and should provide a stimulus to joint efforts aimed at achieving that goal. The success of the Conference would undoubtedly give an impetus to bilateral and multilateral negotiations and would play an important role in bringing about a further relaxation of tension and in strengthening mutual trust and understanding and the bases for lasting peace and security. The idea of holding such a conference had been under discussion in the General Assembly for five years and had received broad international support outside the United Nations. The interest of Member States in convening the Conference was shown by the establishment of the Committee and the renewal of its mandate. The Committee had done useful work in studying the views and proposals of Governments with regard to the Conference. Despite differences of opinion on some aspects of the question, there was sufficient convergence of views to enable the Committee to make progress. The idea of convening the Conference was supported by the overwhelming majority of States, including three of the nuclear Powers, one of which, the Soviet Union, had originally proposed the Conference. Nevertheless, the forces which favoured an escalation of the arms race and were trying to increase international tension were stopping at nothing to prevent the holding of the Conference. The Committee had a special responsibility in that regard: whether or not the Conference would be held would largely depend on it.

11. The need for all nuclear Powers and States with the greatest military potential to participate in the Conference was obvious. It was also highly desirable that all nuclear Powers should participate in the work of the Committee. However, the unwillingness of certain Powers to co-operate with the Committee at present should not lead it into an impasse. The Committee could continue its work even without the participation of those Powers in the hope that they would heed the appeal of the General Assembly and join it later. Thorough preparations would have to be made for the Conference, and that would take a certain amount of time. The practical preparations should be started as early as possible because the problem of disarmament was becoming more serious and more complicated with every passing year and enormous resources were continuing to be diverted from the economic and social needs of peoples. His delegation hoped that in the current year the ...
Committee would focus its attention on the practical aspects of preparing for the Conference. The Committee's report to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session should reflect the growing concern of States and world public opinion concerning the ever-escalating arms race. In summarizing the views of States concerning the Conference, the Committee should indicate the most important problems requiring solutions as a matter of priority.

12. His delegation had always been in favour of broadening the Committee's mandate so that it could draw up the provisional agenda and rules of procedure of the Conference and reach agreement on other organizational questions. The time had come to give the Committee not only research but also preparatory functions, and a recommendation to that effect should be made to the General Assembly.

13. The CHAIRMAN said that the statistics cited by the representative of Mongolia to the effect that the nuclear weapons stockpiled in the world were the equivalent of 15 metric tons of TNT per person dated from 1968. Since then, stocks of nuclear weapons had increased. In 1968 it had also been calculated that it was scarcely possible to guarantee 10 kilogrammes of rice per person in the world.

14. Mr. KANAZAWA (Japan) said that the Committee's mandate was clearly outlined in paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 3469 (XXX). The Committee must now begin to address itself to the real issues involved in the question of convening a world disarmament conference. From the conclusions in section III of the Committee's report (A/10028) it was clear that the scope and conditions of a world disarmament conference might vary according to the functions and objectives assigned to it. It was also clear, from paragraph 43 of the report, that irrespective of the task assigned to a world disarmament conference, it must be universal, adequately prepared and attended by all nuclear-weapon and militarily significant States. His delegation continued to believe that thorough preparation was vitally important, for once the decision to convene a world disarmament conference was taken that conference must not be allowed to fail; if it did, that would cause serious disappointment and generate doubts about the prospects for further progress. All the nuclear-weapon Powers must be invited and must participate at all stages of the Conference, including the preparatory stage. While understanding the position of those who maintained that the objections of certain nuclear-weapon States amounted to a veto of the wishes of the majority, his delegation felt that a world disarmament conference held without their participation would be meaningless.

15. Close contact must be maintained between the Committee and the nuclear-weapon States, particularly those which were not participating in the Committee's work. Although some nuclear-weapon States had repeatedly stated that they did not wish to be associated with the Committee, the problem must be faced squarely. The real problem was not so much that of the convening of the Conference as it was that of ensuring that it was held in conditions in which it would be useful and constructive, taking into account the underlying political realities of the nuclear-weapon States.
16. His delegation hoped to see real progress made and was ready to contribute to that goal, but first relations among States must improve. It continued to support the idea of a world disarmament conference, if and when it was deemed appropriate to convene it for certain fixed purposes, and if and when it had reasonable prospects of achieving concrete results. He hoped that the Committee would be able to help by trying to clarify the issues involved. His delegation would follow with interest the continuing contacts between the Chairman and the nuclear-weapon States as well as the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, which had begun its work recently. His delegation was also interested in the possibility of a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament questions. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the Committee would be able to achieve positive results, through consensus, so that progress could be made towards meaningful universal disarmament.

17. Mr. ELIAS (Spain) said that efforts to bring about disarmament in bilateral and regional forums should be supplemented by parallel efforts at a world disarmament conference. The obvious complexity of the task facing the Ad Hoc Committee could be attributed to three factors: the economic importance of the weapons industry, the political implications and consequences of the attitudes of various countries and the relationship between disarmament and security. He advocated a realistic approach: recognition that, although disarmament would not be easy to achieve, there was no reason to put off convening a world disarmament conference indefinitely, in view of the serious threat posed by the massive accumulation of armaments.

18. It must be borne in mind that a large majority of political leaders and of the people of all countries wished such a conference to be held and that patience and flexibility and understanding were essential in any discussion of viewpoints which, although at times apparently irreconcilable, were in fact perhaps less divergent than they might seem. Despite the difficulties associated with the establishment and functioning of the Ad Hoc Committee, he had confidence in the goodwill, seriousness and honesty of all the Governments represented. Some would no doubt continue to voice the opinion that the Conference should not be held because it might arouse false hopes. That was a misguided argument which, if stretched further, could be applied to bilateral discussions on strategic arms limitation, discussions on troop reductions in Europe, and perhaps even the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament.

19. He was pleased that 1975 had witnessed the emergence of more widespread acceptance of the idea that the Conference would not be an isolated event but would constitute a process which could evolve with the passage of time, and that it could hold a number of successive sessions in the course of which new ideas and new methods to make its work more effective would develop. Whatever difficulties might be involved in convening the Conference, it was far better to convene it than to opt for the alternative of no conference at all.

20. Drawing attention to the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee in its report to the thirtieth session of the General Assembly (A/10028), he said that in...
preparing the analytical study of the conclusions in that report and in presenting to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, its observations and recommendations on its mandate, the Ad Hoc Committee must take into account the necessity for the realization of certain pre-conditions, as referred to in paragraph 42, and the fact that the positions of the States possessing nuclear weapons on all aspects of the convening of the Conference remained unchanged, as noted in paragraph 44. An effort should be made to turn those two factors to advantage, rather than allow them to remain obstacles. It must also be recognized that disarmament and security were closely related and, when reflecting on the two obstacles to which he had referred, it must be kept in mind that the position of the great Powers and the requirement for pre-conditions were based on considerations of security. Although the strengthening of international security was a separate item on the agenda of the General Assembly, the study of those aspects of international security which were most closely related to disarmament must be taken into account if the Ad Hoc Committee's discussions were to have any significant impact.

21. In the light of the foregoing, his delegation would be guided by the following considerations as the Ad Hoc Committee's work proceeded: firstly, polemical aspects should be subordinated to practical considerations with a view to finding practical solutions that would facilitate future work on disarmament; secondly, the Conference should be carefully prepared as a matter of urgency and should be viewed as a dynamic, developing process, and thirdly, questions relating to security must be discussed along with disarmament measures.

22. The CHAIRMAN invited the representative of the German Democratic Republic to speak.

23. Mr. NEUGEBAUER (German Democratic Republic) said that his country had always supported all genuine initiatives for arms limitation and disarmament and was a party to all relevant agreements. Because it was situated between the two most powerful military alliances, the Warsaw Pact countries and the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, measures to bring about arms limitations and disarmament were of particular importance to it.

24. The question of convening a world disarmament conference had been dealt with each year by the General Assembly and the Ad Hoc Committee since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2633 (XXVI), and the overwhelming majority of States supported its speedy convening. The urgency of holding such a conference was also recognized by broad social forces in many countries, as had been evident at the World Congress of Peace Forces held in Moscow in 1973 and the European Symposium of War Veterans held in Paris in November 1975.

25. Section I of the report of the Ad Hoc Committee to the thirtieth session of the General Assembly (A/10028), presenting the views of States on the objectives of a world disarmament conference, provided the basis for the conference agenda.
26. Given the record expenditures for armaments, it was increasingly urgent to proceed with the preparation and convening of such a conference. The arms race and enormous expenditures on weaponry were partly responsible for the prolonged economic crisis prevailing in a part of the world and posed a serious obstacle to the economic and social progress of the developing countries. The process of political détente must be reflected in the military sphere; for that reason it was all the more urgent to prepare and convene a world disarmament conference.

27. Despite all the existing difficulties, the conditions for the successful preparation and holding of the Conference had improved. The process of political détente had been further advanced, as could be seen from the results of the Helsinki Conference, which had made a decisive contribution towards improving the political climate between States with different social systems and had had a positive effect on the attitudes of States regarding disarmament. Furthermore, three permanent members of the Security Council, which were also nuclear Powers, were now participating in the work of the Committee. His country consistently advocated the speedy convening of the Conference since it would offer an opportunity to deal in a comprehensive way with the problems of arms limitation and disarmament. However, two States still opposed such a Conference. One State felt that the time was not yet ripe for it. In view of the fact that the question had already been considered at five sessions of the General Assembly, he wondered what more needed to be done to create all the requisite conditions for the Conference, which was desired by the vast majority of Member States. Another State even set pre-conditions for a conference. In his delegation’s opinion, that was an attempt to block the holding of the Conference. It was necessary to discuss questions openly at the Conference and problems should not be selected arbitrarily with a view to formulating pre-conditions. Only the Conference itself could settle the questions at issue. The Members of the United Nations should no longer permit two States to obstruct the implementation of the important resolutions which had been adopted on the subject. It had been possible to hold world conferences on many other subjects and he did not see why a world disarmament conference should not be possible. To yield to the opponents of such a conference would mean yielding to the enemies of disarmament.

28. The Committee had been given a weighty responsibility and he was fully aware of the difficulties involved. However, the only way it could accomplish its task was by convening the Conference quickly. The Conference would be an appropriate forum for making genuine progress in the field of disarmament and it alone would be in a position to call upon all States to increase their efforts for the limitation and eventual termination of the arms race and for general and complete disarmament. Progress was being made in international relations and should be strengthened. Détente should be made irreversible by putting an end to the arms race and achieving disarmament.

29. With a view to convening the Conference as soon as possible, the Committee should, in accordance with its mandate, make an analytical study of the conclusions contained in its report to the thirtieth session of the General Assembly and submit proposals concerning concrete preparations for the Conference.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.