AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

Twelfth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 48th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York
on Monday, 10 September 1979 at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. FERNANDO (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN declared open the twelfth session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference. He reviewed briefly the history of the idea of convening a World Disarmament Conference and the mandate and past activities of the Committee. He noted that the idea of a World Disarmament Conference had received widespread support among States Members of the United Nations, with varying emphasis on conditions and other aspects of the convening of a conference. However, no consensus on the convening of a conference under present conditions had yet been reached among the nuclear-weapon States, whose participation in the conference had been deemed essential by most Members of the United Nations.

2. He stressed that the most effective assurance against the use or threat of the use of nuclear weapons was nuclear disarmament and the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the arms race was incompatible with the efforts directed towards the establishment of a new international economic order. He noted that the final document of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament had called for the convening of a World Disarmament Conference with universal participation and adequate preparation. Furthermore, the joint United States-Soviet communiqué issued on 18 June 1979 in Vienna had stated that the two nations supported a second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the convening of a World Disarmament Conference to be held at an appropriate time following that session with universal participation and adequate preparation. The recent Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries held in Havana had also expressed support for the proposal.

3. He noted that the Committee, in pursuance of its mandate, had requested him to maintain close contact with the representatives of States possessing nuclear weapons in order to remain informed of their respective attitudes. He reported that the representative of China had informed him that China's position had not changed. The representative of France had informed him that France was always ready to act in favour of real and effective disarmament. The French Government had accordingly supported the World Disarmament Conference project, which, it felt, could effectively contribute to the global disarmament process once all five nuclear-weapon Powers made known their support. It believed that, although the objectives of the 1978 special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and of the one to be convened in 1982 were not identical to those of the World Disarmament Conference, the work of those sessions must be taken into consideration.

4. The Soviet representative had informed him of the Soviet Union's view that the convening of the World Disarmament Conference would have great international importance. Such a forum specially devoted to one of the most urgent problems of the present day would be a further step forward in uniting the efforts of States in the field of disarmament and would supplement what had been expressed and agreed on at the recent special General Assembly session. The Soviet Union was convinced that the World Disarmament Conference could elaborate effective decisions which would provide a new incentive for all States to take practical measures on halting
the arms race. The universality of the Conference would ensure the joint participation of all countries of the world in the consideration of disarmament issues. The final document of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the recent recommendations of the United Nations Disarmament Commission showed that the idea of holding a World Disarmament Conference enjoyed increasingly broad support. The Soviet Union was of the opinion that the time had come to take specific steps to begin the thorough preparation of the Conference. With that aim in mind, it would be expedient to determine the date of convening the Conference and to establish a preparatory body for it. It would be both logical and timely to work out a positive solution to those problems. Furthermore, it would be in the interests of all those who sought disarmament in deeds as well as in words. The task of convening the World Disarmament Conference would be facilitated to a great extent by the adoption of the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly of a resolution entrusting the Ad Hoc Committee with the preliminary phase of the preparatory work for the Conference. The Soviet Union was prepared to approach such a proposal in a constructive manner. The Soviet Union had supported the idea of holding the first special session on disarmament and had taken a very active role in that session. It had also agreed to the convening of a second special session on the subject in 1982. However, it was the Soviet Union's view that the World Disarmament Conference would become a unique forum and have historic meaning. The Conference would make it possible to focus the attention of all Governments and of world public opinion on efforts to halt the arms race and to move forward towards real disarmament. The Soviet Union therefore considered that the second special session of the General Assembly on disarmament should be followed by the World Disarmament Conference and that the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly should contribute to the achievement of that goal.

5. The representative of the United Kingdom had informed him of that country's view that the Ad Hoc Committee should not undertake any substantive work until all the significant military States had indicated that in principle they supported the convening of a World Disarmament Conference and would be prepared to participate in its work. Although the United Kingdom recognized that, at an appropriate time and with careful preparation, the convening of a World Disarmament Conference would serve a useful purpose, it was not convinced that those conditions had been fulfilled.

6. The representative of the United States of America had informed him that the position of the United States on the matter of a World Disarmament Conference remained unchanged. The United States felt that it was premature to set a date and to begin preparations for the convening of such a conference. There seemed to be insufficient political agreement on the issues which would presumably be dealt with at the conference, and that lack of agreement would probably hinder efforts to reach specific arms control agreements.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (A/AC.167/L.17)

7. The agenda was adopted.
ORGANIZATION OF WORK

8. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, after the Committee had heard the views of delegations at its meetings on 10 and 11 September, the Working Group might meet on 12 September to prepare the Committee's draft report for submission to the General Assembly. The Committee might then meet again in plenary session on 14 September to adopt its report. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt his suggestion with regard to the organization of work.

9. It was so decided.

DISCUSSIONS AND OTHER MATTERS

10. Mr. SHUSTOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Soviet Union, together with the other socialist countries, consistently sought to slow the arms race and bring about the adoption of genuine practical disarmament measures. That could be seen from the important constructive proposals adopted at recent meetings of the States parties of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Disarmament negotiations in the post-war period showed that, despite all difficulties, Governments could with goodwill and determination, take specific steps aimed at slowing the pace of the arms race. A significant example was the treaty on the limitation of strategic offensive weapons which had been signed by the Soviet Union and the United States of America in Vienna in June 1979. However, despite such progress, the arms race continued. Enormous material and human resources, which were so necessary for economic and social development, were still being spent for military purposes. It was important to realize that as time passed, the development of the means of destruction might approach such dangerous levels as to create further obstacles to the conclusion of agreements on the prohibition or limitation of arms. It was therefore clear that there was at present no more pressing problem that the development and implementation of genuine disarmament measures. Furthermore, progress in the field of disarmament was the key to the solution of many other problems.

11. The significance of the problem had been stressed by the participants at the recent special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, who had stated that the problem of disarmament was universal, affected the vital interests of all peoples and States and must be jointly solved. In that connexion, the Soviet Union felt that one of the most effective and significant measures to enhance the mobilization of States' efforts to achieve disarmament would be the convening of a World Disarmament Conference. The idea of convening such a conference enjoyed widespread support, as could be seen from the final document of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the recommendations adopted at the recent session of the Disarmament Commission and the final document of the recent Havana summit meeting of the non-aligned countries. Furthermore, in the Soviet-United States communiqué signed on 18 June 1979 in Vienna, the two parties had urged that the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, to be held in 1982, should be followed by the convening of the World Disarmament Conference.

12. The Soviet Union had strongly supported and played a very active role in the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and had agreed readily to the idea of holding a second such session. Nevertheless, the convening
of the World Disarmament Conference would provide a universal forum of historic significance and a vital additional impulse for disarmament negotiations. Governments could prepare and propose new initiatives.

13. The time had come to take specific steps aimed directly at preparing the Conference. His delegation was convinced that it was now possible to fix the date for the Conference and establish a preparatory body. The Committee should make specific recommendations on the subject to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

14. Mr. Sokalski (Poland) reviewed the historical background of the idea of convening a World Disarmament Conference, which, he pointed out, had been consistently favoured by the socialist and non-aligned States. Those two groups of States, for ideological reasons or because of socio-economic considerations, set the highest value on bringing about a truly universal process of real disarmament, which would be beneficial to all without exception. The tragic suffering of the Polish people during World War II made his countrymen especially anxious to eliminate all instruments of warfare and destruction and to support any effort to achieve general and complete disarmament, in particular the idea of a World Disarmament Conference. They were glad to note that the overwhelming majority of Members of the United Nations shared the same conviction. However, the Conference had not yet been convened - not for lack of interest or for any other valid reason but simply because certain States, wishing to camouflage their real attitude towards disarmament, had chosen to block the convening of the Conference. Despite those difficulties, important headway had been made in preparing the Conference. The indispensable deliberative and negotiating infrastructure had been significantly broadened, as could be seen from the recent special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the discussions in the First Committee at the thirty-third session of the General Assembly and the recent substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Further encouraging signs had been the results of the recent session of the Committee on Disarmament and the extremely important Soviet-United States treaty on the limitation of strategic offensive weapons.

15. Steady progress in disarmament would require States to accept in good faith a number of motivational factors: respect for the principle of undiminished security of all States and the renunciation of attempts to gain unilateral advantage; renunciation of the use or threat of force; refraining from actions adversely affecting disarmament efforts; willingness to display a constructive approach to disarmament negotiations and political goodwill to reach agreements; cessation of qualitative improvements of weapons and of development of new instruments of warfare; the universality of disarmament, particularly the participation of all nuclear Powers in the process; the accession of all States to existing international agreements aimed at limiting the arms race and achieving disarmament; acceptance of verification agreements as required by the nature of specific disarmament agreements; readiness to make resources released in the process of disarmament available for the purposes of development and social progress.

16. Real and effective disarmament combined with the political goodwill of States constituted one of the most important elements in the process of preparing
societies for life in peace, and the World Disarmament Conference should be seen precisely in that context. His delegation had therefore been gratified to note that the joint Soviet-United States communiqué issued in June 1979 at Vienna contained explicit supportive reference to the World Disarmament Conference. On the basis of that reference and other recent references in favour of the Conference, including especially those made at the Havana summit meeting of the non-aligned countries and in the report of the Disarmament Commission, there was good reason to support the idea that the Committee should become the preparatory body for the Conference. His delegation was ready and willing to join in working out mutually acceptable conclusions to that effect for inclusion in the Committee's report to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

17. Mr. KOSTOV (Bulgaria) drew attention to the recent successful conclusion of the strategic arms limitation talks and to the treaty on the subject signed in Vienna in June 1979. The peace-loving international community had given its unqualified support to the agreements reached in Vienna and expected with justifiable concern that the treaty would be ratified and implemented in a strict and effective manner. The treaty would improve the international climate and open new possibilities for curbing the stockpiling of nuclear weapons and for ensuring their qualitative and quantitative reduction. As was evident from the final communiqué signed at the Vienna meeting, discussions had been held on fundamental questions of international security and disarmament and — a point of particular importance for the work of the Committee — support had been expressed for the convening of the World Disarmament Conference with universal participation, with adequate preparation and at an appropriate time. He also drew attention to the work of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, of the Disarmament Commission and of the recently established Committee on Disarmament. It was unfortunate that the opponents of disarmament continued to allocate additional funds for the creation of new types of weapons and for the improvement of existing ones and that the military budgets of some countries continued to grow. By contrast, the communiqué adopted at the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the States Members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization held in Budapest in May 1979 contained a number of practical proposals for achieving disarmament.

18. With regard to the Committee's report, his delegation felt that it must take into account the provisions of the final document of the special session devoted to disarmament, in particular paragraph 122, which unambiguously called for the convening of the World Disarmament Conference in the near future with universal participation and adequate preparation. The World Disarmament Conference was the only forum which could organize and channel the efforts of all States towards the achievement of practical measures in the field of disarmament. It was now high time for the Committee to include in its report specific recommendations on the commencement of preparatory activities for the Conference. His delegation therefore supported the idea that the General Assembly, at its thirty-fourth session, should set a date for the Conference and establish a preparatory body for it.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.