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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE REVIEW
OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT

STRENGTHENING OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS	
Costa Rica	2
Ireland	5

REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

COSTA RICA

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Costa Rica - a country whose devotion to disarmament has been demonstrated in its own institutional life and in its people's pacifistic attitude when it eliminated all references to the element of war from its Political Constitution, since its governmental security structure does not include the army as an institution and is limited solely to the personnel necessary to maintain order - enthusiastically supported all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations in this matter. For that reason, it applauded the initiative taken by Sweden at the thirtieth regular session of the General Assembly. It shares the concerns expressed in resolution 3484 B (XXX) and considers it opportune and necessary to carry out an evaluation and review of the role that has been played by the world Organization in the field of disarmament, seeking improvements which will not be any the less important for being procedural in nature, since it is evident that any system can be improved, particularly in the complex matter of disarmament.

(a) Possible new approaches for achieving more effective procedures and organization of work

Costa Rica shares the concern already expressed by many other countries with respect to the methods of work of the United Nations organs dealing with disarmament. One of them is the First Committee of the General Assembly. The study of items relating to disarmament in the First Committee can and should be rationalized with a view to making it more specific and effective, without prejudice to a broader examination of the matters under study. As has been justly observed, it is discouraging to note that in spite of the many resolutions adopted on a wide range of subjects, the practical result of these efforts does not seem capable of holding back the growth of armaments, which is intensifying and proliferating, both in conventional and in nuclear weapons. This point should be explored and negotiated in the course of the informal consultations that will be held during the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Committee.

As can be seen from the world situation with regard to armaments and their proliferation, notwithstanding the conclusion of treaties of unquestionable importance, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the impetus initially given by the United Nations to the problems relating to the control and limitation of armaments appears to have weakened since the first years of the Organization's existence. The Security Council has not concerned itself with the subject for a number of years, and unless a far-reaching political decision is taken, it does not seem likely that this situation will change in the near future.

Accordingly, it would seem advisable to seek a way of revitalizing procedures in order that the General Assembly, on the one hand, and the Conference of the

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Committee on Disarmament (CCD), on the other hand, may be able to deal adequately and effectively with disarmament questions. It is a fact, as has often been said, that the effectiveness of CCD is closely linked to the political will of the military and nuclear super-Powers to conclude agreements and negotiations that will bring decisive results and give rise to genuine changes in the present state of affairs. Recognition must be given to the efforts of CCD and the important role it has played in the preparation of texts for such important agreements as the partial nuclear test-ban treaty, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Convention prohibiting bacteriological (biological) weapons. The negative comments that have been made concerning its performance are largely attributable to the failure of two nuclear Powers, permanent members of the Security Council, to participate in its work; this prevents CCD, a body of relatively small membership in any event, from discussing far-reaching measures that will have decisive effects. It would be important to search, in the appropriate forum, for some formula that will offer a way out of this impasse.

Among the 25 resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its thirtieth regular session is resolution 3484 B (XXX). In that resolution the General Assembly expressed its concern at the fact that in recent years no significant progress had been made in the field of disarmament, and it recommended the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee, open to the participation of all Members, with a view to carrying out a basic review of the role of the Organization in that field. Several years ago, before the establishment of that Ad Hoc Committee, the General Assembly declared the Disarmament Decade in its resolution 2602 E (XXIV). Six years have now passed since the adoption of that resolution, and we are now in the second half of the Decade. This is one more reason for the Ad Hoc Committee to undertake effective and skilful work, holding consultations and negotiations with a view to achieving better co-ordination of the efforts that have been made in the field of disarmament and are being carried on by various organs established by the General Assembly for that purpose.

Costa Rica finds deep satisfaction in participating in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and hopes to co-operate with other countries in finding ways to achieve positive results in the improvement of the means available to the United Nations for achieving the objective aimed at by all its efforts. These include general and complete disarmament under effective international control; such control is indispensable if the machinery is to function on the basis of the confidence that such a guarantee gives to those participating in disarmament negotiations, in the full knowledge that the agreements arrived at will be respected.

(b) Ways and means of improving existing United Nations facilities for the collection, compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament issues

One important aspect, whose value should not be underestimated, relates to the work of the United Nations Secretariat in the dissemination of information on disarmament, making it more accessible and comprehensive in order to reach the general public rather than only sectors or groups of persons whose academic preparation enables them to assimilate the material produced by the Organization.

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Logically, if material accessible to the public is to be prepared and distributed, the Secretariat will have to be strengthened to achieve these ends. The Secretariat should also have means of increasing and making more thorough the collection, compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament subjects, in order to supply proper information to Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and world public opinion.

Costa Rica believes that the NGOs interested in the subject can make a very useful contribution. It shares the view of other countries that the lines of co-operation between the United Nations Secretariat and the NGOs should be closer and more systematic. It would be important for the Secretariat to supply the NGOs regularly with material relating to the various aspects of disarmament and for the NGOs, in turn, to distribute such material within their own spheres of action, promoting interest among their members and developing their influence with various levels of the communities in which they are active.

- (c) Ways and means to enable the United Nations Secretariat to assist, on request, States parties to multilateral disarmament agreements in their duty to ensure the effective functioning of such agreements

Costa Rica believes that it would be desirable for the United Nations Secretariat to assist, on request, States parties to multilateral disarmament agreements in the fulfilment of their obligations to ensure the effective functioning of such agreements. In addition, it considers it important for the Secretariat, through the appropriate Division, to issue annual reports on the situation concerning the status of multilateral international disarmament conventions and agreements, in the same way as the Division of Human Rights issues reports on the situation concerning the international covenants on human rights.

IRELAND

/Original: English/
/14 June 1976/

I. General

If little progress has been made in recent years in the area of arms control and disarmament, Ireland considers that the reasons for this have, in the main, been substantive rather than procedural. They derive in part from the complexity of the issues to be resolved, in part from the varying doctrinal approaches of the major Powers, and in part from the influences of larger political considerations which can determine both the level of interest in and the rate of progress towards disarmament and arms control at any given time. Whatever new procedural or institutional arrangements are reached, the substantive problems will remain, and, as heretofore, their solution requires, in particular, the active co-operation of all the nuclear Powers. At the same time, because technical negotiations on disarmament have increasingly shown a tendency towards stalemate and stagnation it is all the more necessary that the United Nations remain relevant and, to the extent possible, central to the international debate on disarmament, so that it can influence and give impetus to the negotiating process.

II. Possible new approaches for achieving more effective procedures and organization of work in the field of disarmament, thereby enabling the United Nations to exercise its full role in multilateral disarmament efforts

1. The General Assembly is currently the only forum open to all Member States for the in-depth review and debate of disarmament questions. Because of this, it would clearly be inappropriate to restrict the right of any Member State to raise at the General Assembly any disarmament question of concern to it or to advance any proposal which it considers important. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the disarmament content of the agenda of the General Assembly, and in particular of the First Committee, is becoming overloaded and correspondingly unmanageable. This has resulted in a dissipation of energy over a wide and often diffuse range of items at the expense of clarity and progress on the priority issues. Some refinement of the existing procedures of the First Committee is, therefore, called for if the Committee and the General Assembly are to give a lead in identifying the priority goals and in defining the broad principles which should guide progress towards agreement on them.

2. Working procedures of First Committee

With the aim of improving the working procedures of the First Committee, Ireland has the following proposals to offer:

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(i) The agenda

(a) This should allow for a coherent and structured debate of integrally related items. In the formulation of the agenda, specific categories of issues could be grouped together under a common agenda heading so as to encourage the debate to focus more clearly on their substance and on the interrelationship between them.

(b) Essentially the agenda should allow for a reflective discussion of key issues based on a mutually agreed and carefully balanced allocation of work as between Assembly sessions. For example, by common agreement certain issues could be debated biennially rather than annually as at present. This may, of course, require some modification of the present practice whereby items are automatically inscribed on the agenda through the provisions of the previous session's resolutions, and at the least that practice merits review.

(ii) Resolutions

(a) Where practicable, draft resolutions should be submitted well in advance of the commencement of the disarmament debate.

(b) Some attempt should also be made to reduce the number of resolutions tabled annually, so that delegations are afforded an opportunity to concentrate their attention on improving the content and form of resolutions.

(c) If a more systematic and reflective approach to the agenda were followed, this would, in itself, assist in reducing the number of resolutions arising at each session.

(d) Whereas issues which are unrelated in their substance clearly do require separate resolutions, the possibilities could be explored of combining closely related questions within a single common resolution.

(e) Greater efforts should be made to secure broad agreement on the resolution tabled.

3. Report of CCD

The report of CCD has, in the past, provided a useful focal point for the disarmament debate in the First Committee. At the same time, Ireland considers that the present format of the report could be improved, so as to provide Member States with a more analytic and detailed statement of the stage reached in the negotiations at Geneva and the issues involved.

In future, the report might not only cover in broad fashion the main issues at each working session of CCD but could also identify the reasons for lack of progress on any given area, the positions taken by the main negotiating States and offer a common assessment of the prospects for concrete agreement on the outstanding issues. This would allow the General Assembly to reach its own

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independent evaluation of the extent of progress made on the main items under consideration. The aim, in general, should be a healthy interaction between the work of the General Assembly and that of CCD.

4. Studies and reports

Given the highly technical and increasingly specialized nature of negotiations on arms control and disarmament and the growing complexity of the issues to be solved, it seems desirable that the First Committee have before it, as a matter of practice, detailed analytic reports and studies relevant to the main agenda areas. These could, in certain cases, be prepared by the Secretariat, particularly where they relate to activities conducted within the broad framework of the United Nations. Increasingly, however, in the preparation of research papers, the Secretariat should be given the authority to call on the assistance of specialists from the Member States or on the assistance of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations active in the field of arms control and disarmament. Such reports and studies could, moreover, be developed and updated from session to session.

III. Ways and means of improving existing United Nations facilities for collection, compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament issues, in order to keep all Governments, as well as world public opinion, properly informed on progress achieved in the field of disarmament

1. The United Nations has essentially a twofold informational role on disarmament questions. The first is that of ensuring that the Member States have access to up-to-date, detailed and specialized information on all aspects of disarmament. In this regard, Ireland has drawn attention (sect. II, para. 4, above) to its interest in the regular and systematic preparation of reports and studies helpful to the disarmament debate at the General Assembly. The second and no less important role is that of ensuring that public opinion remains informed of and involved in the international debate on disarmament. Resolution 2825 C (XXX), in particular, serves as a useful starting point for the development of the role of the United Nations in this second area.
2. Clearly, such reports and studies as are placed at the disposal of the Member States could also usefully be made available to the general public. At the same time, in addition to specialized studies and reports, public opinion also requires more general and more basic information on the main issues in disarmament. Such information could be furnished, perhaps, in periodical form on a regular and low-cost basis and should be given the widest dissemination by the Member States through normal outlets.
3. In addition to regular publications on disarmament, conferences and seminars could be organized under United Nations auspices on various aspects of the disarmament problem. The existing facilities and resources of specialized United Nations bodies could be utilized for this purpose.

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4. Ireland also looks forward to any concrete proposals which the Secretary-General may wish to make on the strengthening of the informational role of the United Nations in the matter of disarmament.

IV. Ways and means to enable the United Nations Secretariat to assist, on request, States parties to multilateral disarmament agreements in their duty to ensure the effective functioning of such agreements, including appropriate reviews

1. The United Nations Secretariat, within the limits of its resources, has already made a useful contribution to international efforts in the area of arms control and disarmament. That role, moreover, will inevitably be augmented as wider and new responsibilities devolve to the United Nations on disarmament questions. Indeed, in the short term, if a qualitative improvement can be agreed in the present informational activities of the United Nations, this will, in itself, involve a strengthened and more active role for the Secretariat. In addition, as a means of developing the central role of the United Nations in the process of disarmament, the Secretary-General could undertake depository functions in respect of international agreements on arms control and disarmament and, increasingly, a supervisory function in regard to their implementation.

2. Ireland would also favour the appointment at an early date of a senior official to serve as special co-ordinator of United Nations activities in the field of disarmament. The creation of such a post would strengthen the over-all involvement of the United Nations in disarmament questions and enable the Secretariat to respond adequately to the challenge of the new responsibilities assigned to them.
