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

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1ST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 26 January 1976, at 3 p.m.

Acting Chairman: The SECRETARY-GENERAL

Chairman: Mrs. THORSSON (Sweden)

CONTENTS

Opening of the session
Adoption of the agenda
Election of officers
Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The SECRETARY-GENERAL, declaring open the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Disarmament, said that the Committee was beginning its important work in the context of a situation marked by world-wide expenditure on nuclear and conventional weapons reaching unprecedented heights, by the continued sophistication and perfection of nuclear weapons, and by the real possibility of a further proliferation of nuclear weapon technology.
2. The nuclear arms race posed an unparalleled threat to the very survival of life on the planet. The fact that the international community had, so far, lived through the nuclear age without a nuclear war was no guarantee whatever that such a catastrophe might not occur in the future. Not much imagination was needed to visualize what could happen if the nuclear arms race was allowed to continue unabated. The danger that that situation posed should not be underestimated.
3. Furthermore, the greater availability of so-called conventional weapons, which were becoming increasingly sophisticated and deadly, posed dangers to world peace and security that were of deep concern to him and to the United Nations. International trade in those arms had now assumed alarming proportions, and the international community saw already how both regional and international security was threatened by frequent outbreaks of armed conflict in localized areas.
4. In terms of economic and social considerations alone, the international community could not afford either the continuation or the intensification of the global arms race in the nuclear and conventional field. The world's natural resources were far from being limitless, and full use must be made of their potential to assist development efforts and those aimed at establishing a new world economic order. Unless the international community was prepared to put those resources to more productive use, the development aspirations and needs of hundreds of millions of people would remain unfulfilled. The tragic human consequences of such a failure would be incalculable.
5. From its very beginning, the United Nations had been involved in discussion, study and ongoing negotiations on multilateral disarmament measures. It had adopted numerous resolutions on different aspects of the subject, and it had created specific bodies in order to help in the search for progress. If that process had been slow and disappointing in comparison with the magnitude of the over-all problem, one could not blame the United Nations for a lack of effort. Rather, the reasons could be found in the enormity and complexity of the problems which still had to be resolved.
6. Although the United Nations did not provide the only machinery for effectively limiting the nuclear and conventional arms race, it was worth emphasizing that its membership included the major producers and purchasers of arms. As a result, it

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(The Secretary-General)

constituted an appropriate forum for real and effective negotiations to bring about genuine disarmament. The United Nations could also provide a global framework for the implementation of disarmament measures once the necessary agreements had been reached.

7. Of course, the task now facing the United Nations was an extremely difficult one. In today's world, it was of the greatest importance for nations to recognize that increased international security and mutual political confidence would lessen the need for armaments.

8. At the present stage, therefore, a new momentum was needed if the international community was to succeed in surmounting the obstacles that had impeded greater progress towards disarmament. The United Nations must effectively co-ordinate its efforts and intensify its search for more productive initiatives if it was to overcome feelings of suspicion and fear among nations. It was out of such considerations that, in the introduction to his annual report for 1975, he had stated: "... it is vitally necessary, in the interest of the welfare of humanity, and indeed of its survival, that in this thirtieth anniversary year the General Assembly itself should consider a basic review of the role of the United Nations in disarmament".

9. At its thirtieth session, the General Assembly had decided to establish the Ad Hoc Committee to carry out a basic review of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. Surely the world community would benefit from a review which was based on the essential facts at its disposal and took into account all the vital aspects of the complex subject of disarmament. One of the principal objectives should be to identify how the United Nations could facilitate the achievement of effective disarmament measures.

10. The Ad Hoc Committee would therefore have to face a number of very complex questions which would impose a heavy responsibility upon it. For his part, he wished to express his readiness to assist the Ad Hoc Committee in any appropriate way and took the opportunity to wish it every success in its important and difficult task.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

11. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to adopt the agenda.

12. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

13. Mr. YANGO (Philippines) nominated Mrs. THORSSON (Sweden) for the office of Chairman.

14. Mr. LONGERSTAEY (Belgium) seconded the nomination.

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15. Mr. CARRANCO AVILA (Mexico), Mr. MARTYNENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic), speaking on behalf of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and Mr. DRISS (Tunisia) supported the nomination.

16. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that, if he heard no objection, he would declare Mrs. Thorsson to have been unanimously elected Chairman of the Committee.

17. Mrs. Thorsson (Sweden) was elected Chairman unanimously.

18. Mrs. Thorsson (Sweden) took the Chair.

19. The CHAIRMAN thanked the members of the Committee, in particular the delegations of the Philippines, Belgium, Mexico, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Tunisia, for the confidence they had expressed in electing her to the office of Chairman. Her country was deeply devoted to the cause of disarmament, to multilateral efforts to that end and, consequently, to a United Nations that was strong enough to contribute effectively to those efforts. The task of the Committee was related to some of the fundamental objectives set out in the Charter of the United Nations. It was clear that an overhaul of the instruments at the disposal of the United Nations in the field of disarmament was both appropriate and urgent. The mandate of the Committee, as given by the General Assembly, called for it to suggest improvements in the United Nations infrastructure to deal with disarmament and did not include substantive disarmament issues. The work of the Committee should thus be seen not as competing with but, on the contrary, as supplementing and supporting other disarmament arrangements or initiatives.

20. The short time span available for the work of the Committee before the preparation of its report, requested by the General Assembly for its thirty-first session, required efficient planning and businesslike execution of work. She urged the Committee, therefore, not to engage in debates on matters of substance in the field of disarmament or to go into the substance of its mandate at the present stage; one reason was that the Committee should be careful not to prejudge consideration of those matters by Governments in accordance with operative paragraph 1 of resolution 3484 B (XXX).

21. She recalled that, during the discussions on that resolution, it had been suggested that the number of the Committee's officers be set at 10. She suggested that the Committee accept that recommendation and said that, if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee agreed to have 10 officers.

22. It was so decided.

23. The CHAIRMAN reported that there had been extensive consultations within the various regional groups concerning the officers but that no final decision had yet been taken. She suggested, therefore, that the Committee's discussion of the present item should be adjourned until the following meeting.

24. It was so decided.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

25. The CHAIRMAN reported that a number of delegations intended to submit a working paper providing guidelines for the organization of the Committee's work. The working paper was expected at a future meeting.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.

