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

Second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 15 June 1976, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mrs. THORSSON (Sweden)

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

PRESENTATION OF REPORT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/AC.181/3) (continued)

REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS ROLE IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT, INCLUDING INTER ALIA THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC ITEMS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH RESOLUTION 3484 B (XXX)

POSSIBLE NEW APPROACHES FOR ACHIEVING MORE EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVING EXISTING UNITED NATIONS FACILITIES FOR COLLECTION, COMPILATION AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

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 PERIODICAL REVIEWS (A/AC.181/1 and Add.1, 2 and 3; A/AC.181/2; A/AC.181/3; A/AC.181/L.5) (continued)

1. Mr. SCALABRE (France) said that it was generally agreed that in the past 30 years only very limited progress had been made in the field of disarmament and that the basic cause was the lack of goodwill on the part of Governments and their mutual mistrust. Nevertheless, some of the blame for the situation should also be attributed to the inappropriateness of the ways and means adopted in the field of disarmament.
2. France's criticisms of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament continued to be valid and doubtless the Geneva Committee should change its procedures, methods and programmes by taking steps that would make it a more effective negotiating body more aware of its basic task, namely the achievement of genuine disarmament. A number of encouraging results had already been obtained in that direction; mention should be made, for example, of the plan drawn up in 1955 by the London Sub-Committee, which had been accepted in principle by all the great Powers. While the implementation of that plan had been hindered by the cold war and the inherent difficulties of control, current political conditions were highly favourable and technological progress had perhaps made it feasible to consider that plan anew and to solve the basic problem of arms control.
3. France would be glad if the Committee on Disarmament were to set as its chief objective the actual reduction, under international control, of all types of weapons. Should it prove impossible to modify that Committee's structure, however, France was prepared to participate actively in any other negotiating body whose structure and methods held out the promise of real progress. In that spirit, his delegation had welcomed the idea of convening a World Disarmament Conference in which all the militarily significant Powers would participate and, in particular, all the nuclear Powers, and which could define the objectives and the ways and means of achieving genuine disarmament.
4. The great majority of Governments were in agreement concerning the proliferation of items relating to disarmament on the agenda of the General Assembly, the repetitive nature of some of the resolutions it adopted and even the excessive number of such resolutions which only served to underline the paucity of results obtained. In its reply to the Secretary-General, the French Government had

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(Mr. Scalabre, France)

suggested that consideration should be given to the possibility of the Disarmament Commission of the General Assembly meeting before the latter's annual consideration of the disarmament items on its agenda. That Commission could in turn establish a sub-committee with a more limited membership. The functions of the Disarmament Committee would consist in preparing the work of the First Committee, considering the agenda items relating to disarmament, regrouping them with a view to avoiding duplication and even conducting an initial examination of draft resolutions submitted on the question of disarmament. Thus, the First Committee would have before it a simplified agenda which would have already received serious preliminary consideration. The report of the Disarmament Commission would not be binding on the First Committee but the latter would most likely take into account any proposed clarifications and would thus be able to conduct its deliberations in more orderly fashion and to produce a set of clearer proposals focused on the essential aspects of disarmament.

5. In the view of his delegation, the Disarmament Commission could also be assigned the task of centralizing all the United Nations efforts in the field of disarmament and of presenting to the First Committee proposals arising from such efforts. The various expert committees and the principal negotiating body itself would be under the authority of the Commission. It was true that such proposals would bring about a profound change in United Nations procedures and practices, but after so many years of stagnation it was time to consider whether radical reform should be undertaken.

6. A number of replies from Governments alluded to the desirability of reform in the field of information on disarmament. In the view of his delegation, while the Secretariat's role in that regard might be expanded and the means at its disposal increased, it was perhaps better to wait until there was more information to disseminate. It should be borne in mind that the entire question of information on disarmament was a highly delicate one.

7. In conclusion, his Government was fully prepared to co-operate in all activities relating to disarmament. The critical attitude adopted by the French delegation should be seen as the expression of its desire for so important a task to be properly oriented towards its basic objective within the framework of the United Nations.

8. Mr. ELIAS (Spain) said that the intention of his Government in referring in its reply to the Secretary-General (A/AC.181/1) to the possibility of convening a world conference on international security and arms control and reduction had been to put to the consideration of the Committee a formula which was sufficiently flexible to link disarmament with security and with its necessary prior stages, namely, arms control and reduction. Such a linking up could be done at the world disarmament conference or some other universal forum.

9. His delegation considered the suggestions contained in the working paper submitted by the Swedish delegation (A/AC.181/L.5) to be useful and to constitute a basis for work which could effectively guide the Committee. With regard to the suggestion in section A, paragraph 3, pertaining to the agenda of the First

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(Mr. Elias, Spain)

Committee, his delegation believed not only that all items relating to disarmament matters should be regrouped but also that consideration should be given to the possibility of amalgamating a number of items which had thus far been considered separately under the heading "Strengthening of international security".

10. With regard to the recommendation in section B, paragraph 5, his delegation believed that such a broad heading might have produced more far-reaching recommendations and that, in accordance with the provisions of Article 26 of the Charter and resolution 41 (I) of the General Assembly, it was perhaps not out of place, when reflecting on the relationship between the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies, to consider as well the possibility that the Security Council might once again assume its responsibilities for the drawing up of plans for the regulation of armaments.

11. It was recommended in section F, paragraph 9, of document A/AC.181/L.5 that the capacity of the United Nations Secretariat for in-depth studies of relevant disarmament matters should be considerably strengthened; in that connexion, his delegation believed that it was not enough to strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat but that it was also necessary for the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies to provide the Secretariat with guidelines concerning the form and orientation which should be given to the studies in question. Thus, for example, it should be recalled that there was no definition of disarmament, which was an abstract and nebulous concept, and that the causes of the arms race and the lack of political will had never been studied publicly. Moreover, it was not known which was the predominant factor impeding disarmament. In the circumstances, his delegation proposed that priority should be given to the study of the underlying causes of the arms race, including a technical assessment of the possibilities for converting industries of war into industries of peace.

12. As to the compilation and dissemination of information on disarmament questions - a point raised in part II of document A/AC.181/L.5 - he felt that the wording of the heading should be elaborated upon to read: "... in order to keep all Governments, as well as world public opinion, properly informed on progress or lack of progress in the field of disarmament", since world public opinion should be kept informed of the failures as well as the successes along the difficult path towards disarmament.

13. Finally, with regard to the suggestions made by the Chairman and the delegation of Saudi Arabia concerning the establishment of working groups within the Committee, his delegation was in favour of the establishment of an open-ended working group in which all interested countries could participate.

14. Mr. EINHORN (United States of America), referring to the procedural and organizational changes which might improve the effectiveness of the United Nations in the field of disarmament, said that his delegation believed that it would be a mistake to over-estimate the potential contribution of those procedural and organizational reforms in themselves to progress in arms control and disarmament. The principal impediments to the achievement of disarmament agreements were differences of view on critical substantive issues rather than institutional factors.

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(Mr. Einhorn, United States)

15. Nevertheless, his delegation did not deny that there was room for improvement in existing United Nations procedures and machinery in the field of disarmament. It was therefore prepared to participate constructively and with an open mind in the work of the Committee, which it hoped would lead to recommendations for changes that would genuinely improve current practices. It should be borne in mind, however, that the objective of making the United Nations a more effective body was not necessarily served by assigning it additional functions, enlarging staffs or asserting new authority; in some cases it was necessary to make sure that existing forums, institutions and procedures were being used properly and to maximum effectiveness.

16. Mr. ARTEAGA ACOSTA (Venezuela) said that the lack of progress in the field of disarmament was not due to the machinery established in the United Nations. The determining factor was rather the lack of political will. That lack of will with respect to the substantive aspects of disarmament did not, however, mean that certain procedural defects in the appropriate bodies should not be corrected. His delegation therefore warmly welcomed the proposal submitted by Sweden at the most recent session of the General Assembly, which reflected a latent aspiration of many States Members of the United Nations.

17. On the basis of communications sent to the Secretary-General in accordance with resolution 3484 B (XXX) and the statements made at the current session, certain matters regarding which short-term measures could be adopted could already be identified, such as questions relating to the working methods of the First Committee, the relationship between the General Assembly and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, the preparation of studies on disarmament by the Secretariat and improving the dissemination of information in that area. That would all involve a restructuring of the Disarmament Affairs Division in the Secretariat.

18. His delegation would like to stress its particular interest in reaching an agreement to make the work of the First Committee more effective and in introducing important reforms and improvements in the dissemination of information on the armaments race, so that a duly informed international public opinion might thus exert influence on the respective Governments. It was also necessary to establish closer and more systematic co-operation with non-governmental organizations concerned with disarmament questions. Finally, his delegation wished to observe that it agreed for the most part with many of the suggestions which appeared in the working paper submitted by the delegation of Sweden.

19. Mr. EDMONDS (United Kingdom) said that, although there were significant differences between the working paper submitted by the delegation of Sweden (A/AC.181/L.5) and the views of his own delegation, which appeared in document A/AC.181/1, they did have certain points in common, and his delegation therefore shared the view of the delegation of Spain that the working paper submitted by Sweden could provide the basis for the Committee's discussions. Those discussions should not, in his view, be aimed solely at improving the working methods of the First Committee.

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20. Mr. BUENO (Brazil) said that it would be questionable to attribute the lack of progress in disarmament to the current negotiating machinery or to the lack of better methods of work. That was only one aspect of the question and it should be remembered that the impulse which was lacking in disarmament could come only from a number of Governments which possessed nuclear arms. His delegation, while fully aware of the implications of the current lack of political will and the fact that important parties were not participating in the Committee's discussions, felt that it was necessary to devise new means to entice States to regard the United Nations as the adequate forum for conducting disarmament negotiations. Furthermore, it felt that the specific proposals submitted by the delegation of Sweden aimed at improving United Nations machinery could serve as the basis for the Committee's discussions.

21. Mr. MEERBURG (Netherlands), referring to the communication sent by his Government on strengthening the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament, which appeared in document A/AC.181/1/Add.1, said that the establishment of an international disarmament agency, as suggested in that communication, should be made conditional upon the achievement of a disarmament agreement providing substantial verification arrangements. The establishment of a disarmament agency would therefore at the moment be premature. The Committee should, however, take the occasion to prepare recommendations for less extensive arrangements, such as eventually granting the Secretary-General, within the framework of possible future arms control agreements, fact-finding power subject to appropriate guidelines. In that connexion, the staff of the Disarmament Affairs Division should not automatically be strengthened, since its size would depend upon the actual tasks assigned to the Secretary-General. Therefore, his delegation, while persuaded that the working paper submitted by Sweden was a satisfactory basis for the Committee's debates, had certain reservations with respect to the last paragraph of that document.

22. Mr. BANDARANAYAKE (Sri Lanka), supported by Mr. YANGO (Philippines), Mr. ONKELINX (Belgium), Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) and Mr. ARAIM (Iraq), proposed that the working paper submitted by the delegation of Sweden (A/AC.181/L.5) be accepted as the basis for the Committee's discussions.

23. The CHAIRMAN said that, if there were no objections, she would take it that the Committee agreed.

24. It was so agreed.

25. Mr. YANGO (Philippines) said that his delegation which had fully supported General Assembly resolution 3484 B (XXX), firmly believed that disarmament was possible and that what was lacking was the exercise of political will on the part of Governments. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that, in order to strengthen the role of the United Nations, it was necessary that United Nations action be based on accurate and adequate information; that the structure and procedures of the negotiating machinery should be reviewed; that the relationship and distribution of functions among different central and regional bodies in the disarmament field be more clearly defined and that there be continuous follow-up of existing agreements.

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(Mr. Yango, Philippines)

26. The Secretary-General's report pointed to the increased volume of work in the First Committee in the field of disarmament and made it clear that those tasks had to be rationalized and systematized. The Philippine delegation therefore supported the recommendations in paragraph 3 of the working paper submitted by the delegation of Sweden (A/AC.181/L.5). The holding of review conferences on a regular basis and with an expanded United Nations role, in connexion with multilateral and regional disarmament negotiations, should help to ensure compliance with disarmament commitments.

27. His delegation from time to time received the summary records of the meetings of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament but found that they were usually incomplete. He trusted that in the future all CCD documents would be made available to all Members of the United Nations on a regular basis before the First Committee began its work in that field. The importance of the dissemination of information on disarmament issues could not be overemphasized. His delegation therefore supported the idea that the United Nations publish annually or every second year a report on important aspects of arms and disarmament. It also supported the recommendation that United Nations facilities for information on disarmament issues should be strengthened and that the United Nations publish approximately three times a year a disarmament periodical in the official languages of the Organization. He agreed that the personnel of the Disarmament Affairs Division should be increased and said that his delegation was prepared to support the establishment of a United Nations centre for disarmament.

28. With respect to the recommendation made by the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries held in Lima the previous year, his delegation would have no objection to the convening of a special session of the General Assembly on disarmament if that was the wish of the majority of the States Members of the United Nations.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

29. The CHAIRMAN suggested that at future meetings, when the speakers' list was exhausted, the Committee should constitute itself into a working group of the whole to study carefully the questions before it. If there were no objections, she would take it that the Committee agreed with that suggestion.

30. It was so agreed.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.

