PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
New York, 21 April-1 May 1987

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with General Assembly decision 41/422 of 4 December 1986, the Secretary-General of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development wrote, inter alia, to all parts of the United Nations system seeking any additional information which could be brought to the attention of the Preparatory Committee. The information received from the World Health Organization is given below.
1. The close relationship of health with the promotion of peace, international
security, détente and disarmament was reaffirmed by the World Health Assembly at
its thirty-ninth session which by its resolution WHA39.19 urged member States to
continue their efforts for the attainment of health for all, including the
preservation and promotion of peace; and to strive for the cessation of the arms
race, with particular regard to nuclear weapons, and for the utilization of the
resources thus released to finance national programmes related to health and
medical sciences.

2. The activities of the World Health Organization (WHO) related to General
Assembly resolution 39/151 E continue to focus on the implementation of World
Health Assembly resolution WHA36.28, which recommended that WHO continue the work
of collecting, analysing and regularly publishing accounts on activities and
further studies on the effects of nuclear war on health and health services.

3. In 1984, WHO published a report on the "Effects of nuclear war on health and
health services", which has been given wide distribution to governmental and
non-governmental bodies, organizations and individuals. The WHO Management Group
has now completed a second updated report, which deals with the following major
issues: the physical characteristics of nuclear explosions and their effects, not
only physical and climatic effects but also the acute effects of radiation on the
body; the threat of nuclear war as it is perceived, in particular the psychosocial
effects of this threat; the enormous problems in the management of casualties in a
nuclear war; the short-term effects on people's health, as well as the intermediate
and long-term health effects of the physical and social environment on survivors.
The report concludes that,

"It is tragic irony that, whereas the initial warning time in a nuclear war
has shrunk to hours and minutes, the detriment to health that it could cause
would persist for years, decades and generations.

"When treatment is ineffective, the only solution available to the health
professions is prevention. Prevention is obviously the only possibility in
case of a nuclear war."

4. This report will be presented to the World Health Assembly at its fortieth
session in May 1987.