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Agenda item 64

QUESTION OF DISARMAMENT

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

1. In considering the question of disarmament at its twelfth session, the General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions, the essential parts of which have remained inoperative within the organizational framework of the United Nations because of the non-functioning of its specific disarmament machinery. The continuous efforts of the United Nations in this field, however they might be judged in terms of measurable gains, have, I believe, been worthwhile both on their own account and in paving the way for further determined efforts which the Organization must make in order to realize its expressed will and to promote the fundamental aims of the Charter. Accordingly, I have considered it desirable to take the initiative in proposing the inclusion of the disarmament question in the agenda of this session.

2. Taken as a whole, the disarmament picture is not altogether discouraging. Members will be aware of certain recent developments and initiatives that have taken place outside the specific framework of the Organization. I have welcomed them as providing an encouraging new approach to which the United Nations should respond by intensifying its own efforts in order to consolidate those initiatives into lasting gains. The results of the Conference of Experts which met this summer at the European Office of the United Nations have been warmly acclaimed by Members in the general debate. The experts, representative of two sides, came from the following countries: Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Poland, Romania, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. They reached agreed conclusions on the possibility of detecting violations of a possible

agreement on the suspension of nuclear tests on the basis of the installation of a defined control system. I have already submitted to Members the report of that conference (A/3897 and Corr.1, English only), which the Assembly may wish to take into account in considering the agenda item which I have proposed.

3. Even if the subjects largely would seem to be but marginal to the central problem, a technical approach to such subjects as leave room for study of a non-political nature, similar to that employed in the Geneva talks, would seem to provide possibilities for further progress in disarmament. I believe that all such possibilities should be fully explored. Steps in this direction, as the work of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and the Second International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy has demonstrated, might also lead to a steady and progressive exchange of information concerning military technologies and armaments. The lack of confidence between States in this respect hitherto has been one of the major causes of fear, suspicion and international tension. The General Assembly might wish to consider the value of endorsing the principle of openness of information in the armaments and allied fields as one which could contribute significantly to reduce international tension and promote progress toward disarmament. Furthermore, were Governments to be invited to endeavour to apply this principle progressively and in widening areas, consistent with the requirements of international peace and their own security, it might lead to still further encouraging initiatives similar to those to which the results of the Geneva talks have given rise and which also Members have noted with satisfaction. Limited though they were to an exchange of information on the technical components of a control system for the detection of nuclear explosions by various methods, the Geneva talks and the accord reached represent a first modest implementation of the principle I have stated.

4. In addition to giving consideration to the principle I have mentioned above and its possible effects, the General Assembly might also wish to define its attitude at an appropriate early stage toward the results of the Geneva Conference and the tangible prospects which they seem to have opened up. The position of the Assembly on this matter would, I believe, be of decisive significance, not only in regard to the direction of the forthcoming Geneva

negotiations, but also in regard to the future of effective and secure disarmament within the United Nations.

5. While the previous Geneva Conference took place outside the specific framework of the Organization, even as the forthcoming talks will, it dealt with an aspect of disarmament pending in the United Nations. Accordingly, and in view of the Charter responsibilities of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the participant sides had agreed to keep these organs informed of the results of the Conference through the intermediary of the Secretary-General. I was represented at the Conference in that capacity, and I was also glad to be able to provide it with the facilities of the United Nations and the services of its Secretariat. I expect that Governments participating in the coming talks would similarly wish to keep the United Nations informed of their progress and results. I also expect to be able to afford them such assistance as is possible within our available means.

6. The General Assembly would doubtless wish to do all it possibly can at this stage to encourage and assist the Governments that are due to meet in Geneva on 31 October to negotiate an agreement on the suspension of nuclear weapons tests and the actual establishment of an international control system to ensure its observance. While the experts at the last Conference had worked out the technical components of such a control system with a world-wide network of control posts and provision for inspection groups, the administrative requirements for its establishment and continuous operation are matters which, among others, still remain to be considered. They would involve the specific interests of a significant number of Member States and require their co-operation. Whatever form this co-operation might take, it might add to its efficiency and pave the way for future arrangements were it to be under the aegis of the United Nations. Both on practical and political grounds, an international control organ, which would need to be set up to implement the control system agreed upon, might better function were it to be integrated with the United Nations, thereby discharging its task under the authority of the Organization while retaining a wide freedom of initiative necessary for its operations. Such a body would need adequate resources and facilities to be placed at its disposal by Member Governments and other international agencies, which it would have to

co-ordinate in the interests of its own effective and economic functioning. In recognition of such a possibility consequent upon agreement being reached on the suspension of nuclear weapons tests, the United Nations, with its accumulated experience in the fields of international co-operation and administration and because of its ineluctable political and security obligations and interests, must be prepared to take upon itself the necessary responsibility and maintain a state of readiness in that regard.

7. The experience gained in the operation of such a control system would be invaluable preparation for implementing, with the least delay, further world-wide inspection and control systems as agreements are reached on other disarmament measures. As progress is made in this field within or outside the United Nations, the need to co-ordinate a variety of inspection and control systems into a proper relationship of balance with one another, as well as the need for central executive direction, will become even more apparent.

8. In the consideration of this item, I have also in mind the projected conference of two sides in respect of problems related to security from surprise attack. If agreements in principle are reached among the participants in regard to measures necessary to reduce the danger of surprise attack, they too should be implemented with the least delay. Such measures will involve a far larger number of countries than are immediately involved in a nuclear tests suspension agreement. Doubtless the United Nations will also be concerned with the outcome of that conference. While the attainment of balanced, world-wide disarmament through the United Nations must remain a primary objective of the Organization, it must welcome and be associated with all real progress in disarmament in whatever forum it is achieved.