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Chairman: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 66

QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA: GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF AND ACTION ON DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

The CHAIRMAN: As representatives will recall, the question of Antarctica was included initially on the General Assembly's agenda at its thirty-eighth session, in 1983. At each succeeding session the General Assembly has been seized of the question of Antarctica, an issue that has assumed global importance for us and for future generations.

At the last session of the General Assembly delegations considered reports contained in documents A/45/458 and A/45/459 on various aspects of Antarctica. Having considered those reports, the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session adopted resolutions 45/78 A and 45/78 B.

In this regard, I should like to draw delegations' attention to reports of the Secretary-General contained in documents A/46/512, A/46/583 and A/46/590, which are before the Committee. These reports, as requested, were prepared within the scope of data and resources available to the Secretariat. They address the specific concerns raised in the resolutions I have mentioned.

(The Chairman)

As members of the Committee are well aware, the Antarctic and its associated ecosystems play a crucial role in the formation of the world's climate. While we have recently expanded our knowledge of the white continent, we are only at the dawn of appreciating its full significance for our lives and for the intimate and inseparable interdependence between Antarctica and the rest of the world. The Committee's deliberations in past sessions have made a significant contribution to the understanding of that vast and complex region. More than ever, it is clear that Antarctica should for ever be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, that it should remain free of armaments and military installations, and that it must not become a source of tension and discord.

Furthermore, I would like once again to draw the Committee's attention to the utmost importance of preserving the Antarctic environment, a goal for the achievement of which the international community should spare no effort. In this connection, I would like to note the recent signing of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which designates Antarctica as a "national reserve devoted to peace and science". As we expand the search for answers to the question of Antarctica, let me invite all participants in this debate to be guided by a spirit of conciliation, cooperation and mutual understanding.

I would like to state that we have at our disposal three days - in other words, a total of six meetings - during which the Committee should conclude its general debate, consideration of and action on draft resolutions under agenda item 66, "Question of Antarctica".

In accordance with the Committee's programme of work and timetable, the deadline for submission of draft resolutions under the agenda item is today, Monday, 18 November, at 12 noon.

(The Chairman)

I would also like to remind delegations once again that the list of speakers for the general debate on agenda item 66 will be closed today at 12 noon. I therefore urge delegations kindly to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible in order to enable the Committee fully to utilize the time and resources available to it.

Mr. REDZUAN (Malaysia): At the outset, I should like to extend my delegation's appreciation for your opening statement, Sir, which no doubt will guide the Committee's consideration of agenda item 66, "Question of Antarctica".

It has been nine years since the agenda item on Antarctica was first introduced, at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly, by Malaysia and Antigua and Barbuda. Since then we, together with more than 100 other countries, have repeatedly called for the participation of the entire international community under the United Nations umbrella to consider and decide on the future of Antarctica. Yet our efforts have not been met with a favourable response from the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. Now, at a time when the United Nations is promoting transparency, accountability and democratic practice in international affairs, it is indefensible for those Parties to have yet to invite the Secretary-General or his representatives to their meetings, and to have yet to deposit the documents of their meetings at the United Nations.

Over the years, the supporters of this item have made a clear case that Antarctica is a common heritage of mankind, that the protection of Antarctica is a common concern, and that the continent has a fundamental influence on the circulation pattern of the atmosphere and the ocean which constitute the elements that determine the Earth's climate and consequently our food and material productions.

(Mr. Redzuan, Malaysia)

The supporters have also underlined that, given the complex interrelationship of organisms in Antarctica's eco-system, any upsetting of this system of interrelationship would have a profound impact on the environment of the whole continent.

This year we shall again introduce a draft resolution which will maintain past calls for the participation of the whole international community through the United Nation system to draw up a comprehensive environmental convention on the conservation and protection of Antarctica and for the establishment of a nature reserve or world park to be negotiated with the full participation of the international community.

Six weeks ago in Madrid, the Treaty parties signed the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty as a measure to protect the environment of Antarctica against the destructive consequences of human activities on that continent. The Government of Malaysia welcomes this positive step. The provision in the Protocol on the banning of mining on Antarctica for 50 years is an important development, considering that three years ago, the same countries which signed the Protocol signed another Convention to open up the continent for mineral explorations. At least we can take solace in the fact that persistent cajoling by the international community, supported by non-governmental efforts, can influence thinking among the Consultative Parties and produce some positive results.

Our efforts now are aimed at maintaining this pressure, as there is still a need to voice concern on the Protocol, especially when the prerogative to decide on the rights and wrongs of anything concerning the continent are still in the hands of this very exclusive club. In this regard, it is worth noting that, under its article 23, the Protocol will not come into force until the

(Mr. Redzuan, Malaysia)

thirtieth day following the date of deposit of the instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by all States that are Consultative Parties to the Treaty. It remains to be seen whether all those Parties will ratify the Protocol. It would also be interesting to see how long it would take for the Protocol to come into force. Bearing in mind that it only requires one Party to the Treaty to rescind the Protocol by refusal of ratification - as happened to the Convention on the Regulation on Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities - the ability of the Protocol to protect the environment in Antarctica offers little assurance at the moment.

There is also the question of how effective the Protocol would be in protecting the environment in Antarctica. At a glance, the Protocol seems to be very comprehensive, with provisions for myriad activities and procedures that should be followed. However, on closer inspection, we could pinpoint gaps.

The Protocol put a 50-year ban on mining in Antarctica - a welcome step - but mining should have been banned for all time. A period of 50 years measured in a historical perspective is short and inadequate. Conditions in the provision regarding the modification or amendment of the Protocol are also not strong enough. Instead of a consensus, the Protocol requires the positive votes of three fourths of the Consultative Parties at the time of the adoption of the Protocol to overturn the mining-ban decision. This means that even though the number of those Parties may increase in 50 years, only a simple majority, which includes 16 of the original Treaty signatories, is needed to overturn the earlier ban.

Mining is not the only destructive human activity on Antarctica. There are other activities, such as whaling, fishing and tourism, which should have

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been covered by the Protocol. At present the issue of whaling and fishing in Antarctica is governed by the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). However, the management of that Convention is unsatisfactory. According to a publication by Greenpeace International entitled "A Realistic Dream for Antarctica", the CCAMLR fisheries management has yet to be properly implemented. Greenpeace reported that, while CCAMLR nations use loopholes in the Convention to block protection measures, fin-fish stock continue to decline past the point of commercial extinction. The Secretary-General's report (A/46/590) on the state of the environment and its impact on the global system concurred with Greenpeace on this point, stating that the total abundance of fish stocks had dropped dramatically.

On whales, the Secretary-General's report indicated that the numbers of fin, sei, right and humpback whales have been severely depleted and that there are no clear signs of stock recovery despite various conservation measures.

(Mr. Redzuan, Malaysia)

Tourism presents a particular danger to the environment in Antarctica in many ways that cannot be handled owing to the continent's fragile and sensitive ecosystem and the lack of safe and proper waste-disposal facilities. The Secretary-General's report on the state of the environment in Antarctica and its impact on the global system states that over the past six-year period, the breeding population of the Adelie penguin at Cape Royds has decreased by 50 per cent, a fact that was attributed to stress from repeated visits by tourists and personnel from a nearby scientific station (A/46/590, para. 23).

Although the Madrid Protocol lays down principles that should be adhered to in the planning and conduct of activities to ensure the avoidance of adverse effects, inter alia, on weather patterns, air and water quality and changes in the atmosphere and terrestrial, glacial and marine environment, it falls short of outlining a definite interpretation of what constitutes a violation of the said principles. At the same time, the Protocol is not clear on determining who is authorized to approve certain activities. For example, the Protocol leaves the matter of determining the environmental impact of activities to individual countries, which is a serious loophole. Indeed, in the same publication referred to earlier, Greenpeace International reported that recommendations within the Antarctic Treaty have been ignored in favour of logistical or economic concerns and often worded so loosely that one could be forgiven for believing that anything could be excused.

Judging by its name, the Committee on Environmental Protection, which is provided for in the Protocol, gives the impression that it has the power to approve or reject any activity brought to its attention. However, the Commitee's function is only to recommend that matters be evaluated by the

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Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings. As the country that will undertake the activity is also a participant at those meetings, political considerations may well take precedence over scientific ones. At the same time, it was not made clear whether the evaluation made by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings includes the element of granting or denying approval. Therefore, the Protocol really has no means of control over human activities in Antarctica except for the commitment, resolve and conscience of individual Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. As members all know, conscience is a fragile commodity that can always compromise commitment.

As to compliance, the onus is again on individual member countries to demonstrate the resolve, commitment and conscience to enact appropriate rules and regulations to ensure compliance with the Protocol and the principles contained therein. This includes conservation of Antarctica flora and fauna, waste disposal and waste management and prevention of marine pollution. There is no provision for a control mechanism, whether applied by the Consultative Parties or by any independent organisation, to oversee compliance with the provisions of the Protocol.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for the three reports he prepared for the General Assembly, contained in documents A/46/512, A/46/583 and A/46/590. We take note of the fact that the establishment of a United Nations-sponsored research station is a formidable undertaking in view of the Organisation's limited financial situation. However, this state of affairs does not preclude the possibility of the United Nations taking an active role in Antarctica in observation or inspection in order to ensure that no activities of a detrimental nature take place on the

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continent. Such action would require only a planned visit by the United Nations team, and would preclude the need for a United Nations-sponsored research station in Antarctica. Therefore, the Committee will seek in this year's draft resolution to keep the matter under review.

I should also like to take note of the Secretary-General's report on the state of the environment in Antarctica and its impact on the global system (A/46/590). The report brought to light some serious problems regarding the environment in Antarctica. Our draft resolution this year (A/C.1/46/L.50) will therefore contain a request that the Secretary-General monitor and gather information on the state of the environment in Antarctica and submit an annual report to the General Assembly.

This year's draft resolution will seek once again to remind all members of the international community to ensure that all activities in Antarctica are carried out exclusively for the purpose of peaceful scientific research, to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of the Antarctic environment, and to benefit mankind as a whole.

The draft resolution also reaffirms the need to promote public awareness of the importance of Antarctica to the ecosystem and requests the Secretary-General to explore the possibility of providing the relevant materials on Antarctica through the Department of Public Information. This action will ensure that Antarctica's significance to the world environment is correctly and widely disseminated in order to garner more support from the public and the international and non-governmental organizations regarding the need to protect Antarctica from further human encroachment. To this end, I should like once again to call on the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties

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to deposit information and documents covering all aspects of Antarctica with the Secretary-General to ensure that the information disseminated by the Department of Public Information is extensive and accurate.

In conclusion, I should like to appeal to the Consultative Parties to respond to our call for cooperation and establish a relationship with the United Nations system. The Parties could start the process by inviting the Secretary-General to the meeting and depositing the documents of the meeting so as to make their activities more transparent. They should cease to ignore the voice of the vast majority of Members of the United Nations on this issue. They should also demonstrate some flexibility, particularly in the discussion of items concerning the polar regions at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including items on climate change, ozone depletion, conservation of biological diversity, global aspects of marine pollution, and natural use and development of living marine resources. The Conference process provides an opportunity for interfacing between the Antarctic Treaty Parties and the rest of the world in dealing with Antarctica, and this opportunity must not be lost. Indeed, Antarctica cannot be separated from the rest of the world when we talk about global environment and the Earth Charter.

Mr. ASHE (Antigua and Barbuda): Since this is the first time at this session that the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda is speaking in the First Committee, let me congratulate you most heartily, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship. I am most confident that you will continue to guide the deliberations in this Committee with the great skill and fortitude that you have demonstrated thus far.

(Mr. Ashe, Antigua and Barbuda)

My delegation was pleased to learn of the signing on 3 October 1991 of the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection by the 26 voting members of the 30-year-old Antarctic Treaty. The stated objective of the Protocol is to protect Antarctica's environment against the destructive consequences of human activities on that frozen and unspoiled continent. The agreement bans all mining and oil exploration in Antarctica for 50 years.

In this regard, the Protocol is significant and deserves our appreciation and acclaim, particularly in view of the fact that three short years ago, many of the same signatories of the Protocol had signed another agreement to allow mineral exploration on Antarctica. The agreement to which I am referring is the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA).

(Mr. Ashe, Antigua and Barbuda)

This change of heart can be viewed as a belated response by the States that are Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, in acceding to one of the many concerns expressed by the non-Treaty States, and we continue to urge that mining and oil-exploration on Antarctica should be banned completely. The provision of the Protocol that enables 19 of the 26 Consultative Party States to overturn the ban after 50 years is cause for considerable concern among the group of non-Treaty States. My delegation calls on the Consultative Party States to reconsider that provision to ensure that the agreement of all 26 States is needed before the 50-year ban on mining and oil exploration can be lifted. My delegation is of the firm view that Antarctica's virginal tundras, unpopulated and undisturbed, ought never to be violated.

But mining is not the only potentially destructive activity on Antarctica. The Secretary-General's report noted that

> "The types of negative environmental impact resulting from tourism are essentially correlated with human activities in Antarctica." (A/46/590, para. 23)

The report cited a study that revealed that a 50 per cent reduction in population of the penguin rookery has occurred. This severe reduction in the number of penguins was

> "attributed to stress from repeated visits by tourists and personnel of a nearby scientific station." (ibid.)

In the section of the Secretary-General's report that dealt with marine living resources and associated biota, the dramatic reduction in the population of whales, krill and fish stocks that has been observed reinforces the wisdom of the bans and catch limits that were adopted by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctica Marine Living Resources in 1989 for certain

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species of fish. The report lamented the fact that vast numbers of seals, birds and

"other non-target species [were] caught and killed incidentally during fishing or by lost and discarded fishing gear." (ibid., para. 37)

Much to the dismay of the group of non-Treaty States, the Protocol raises as many questions as it was intended to answer. Chief among our many concerns is the lack of adequate safeguards to ensure enforcement of the Protocol's provisions and its overall effectiveness. It is not possible to determine, for example, what action constitutes a violation of any of the principles of the Protocol, and there is no governing body to decide whether or not activity potentially harmful to the environment can be undertaken by a State that is a Consultative Party to the Antarctic Treaty. The end result is that those States have retained complete freedom to decide all matters pertaining to Antarctica; the signatories of the Protocol police themselves.

In this regard, the clause of the Protocol that allows a Consultative Party State to undertake assessment of the environmental impact of a particular project is especially self-serving. The Committee on Environmental Protection established under the Protocol has not been empowered to approve or decline any potentially harmful activity. As envisaged at present, the Protocol has no means of control over human activities in Antarctica; that has been left to the commitment, resolve and conscience of each Consultative Party State.

It seems, therefore, that the Protocol does not really provide a functioning mechanism to protect the fragile terrestrial, glacial and marine environment of Antarctica. Moreover, the Protocol does not envisage a meaningful role for the United Nations and its member institutions such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in matters of great importance to

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that continent's environment; the agreement does not satisfy the call of the non-Treaty States for openness and non-discrimination, since only the Consultative Parties to the Treaty can participate in meetings of its environmental Committee.

The Consultative Parties have ignored United Nations General Assembly resolutions requiring that the Secretary-General of the United Nations or his representative be invited to their meetings. The Consultative Parties have thus succeeded in effectively keeping the United Nations and a large segment of the international community uninformed of developments within the Committee and on the Antarctic Treaty itself.

The expertise of the United Nations and its member organizations is needed, particularly in the areas of scientific research in Antarctica and the protection of the Antarctic environment. Antarctica offers unique opportunities for research in a variety of disciplines which contribute to understanding global changes. These include ozone depletion and the possible effects of ultraviolet rays on biota; the increase in greenhouse gases and their connection with our climate; the ice-sheets' effects on sea-level changes; and the important role of the Southern Ocean on the atmosphere, the carbon dioxide cycle and global atmospheric circulations.

From a scientific standpoint, therefore, the environmental protection of Antarctica is of utmost importance. Its near-pristine nature is an essential component of its importance as a scientific laboratory and its special value to the world. It demands a strong United Nations presence. My delegation calls on the States that are Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty to permit the establishment of a United Nations research station and to bring an end to the proliferation of a large number of research stations. In 1983,

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when the question of Antarctica was first brought before the United Nations, there were 34 stations in existence. In 1989 there were 57 bases operated by 20 nations - an increase of 23 bases in only six years. The cumulative impact on the Antarctic environment of so many research stations is considerable.

My delegation is of the firm belief that the United Nations is the most appropriate body under whose control Antarctica should fall. We have repeatedly requested that, as such, the Secretary-General of the United Nations be allowed to play a dominant role in decisions affecting Antarctica. United Nations supervision of scientific programmes under way at present in Antarctica would end the unnecessary duplication and the generation of much waste of resources that occurs. To have research undertaken following international dialogue and negotiation would help to minimize the adverse impact of scientific activities on the continent, while improving relations and spreading knowledge among Member States of the United Nations.

We all agree that many environmental problems transcend national boundaries and narrow national interests, necessitating a coordinated effort among States. We agree further that the success of national and global environment programmes requires mutually reinforcing strategies and the participation and commitment of all levels of society - government, private citizens, non-governmental organizations, industry and the scientific community must all contribute. The time is ripe for universal, concerted effort in dealing with the various issues pertaining to Antarctica, particularly those pertaining to the environmental degradation and its impact on the global environment.

With the discovery of a growing hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica in 1985, the international community was forced to pay more attention to

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existing practices, and to limit the production of ozone-destroying gases, such as chlorofluorocarbons. Since that time, we have realised that Antarctica is a monitor of the health of the global environment. Owing to its remoteness, it contains the data on past climatic conditions recorded in its ice-cover and is therefore an irreplaceable standard for the measuring of levels of pollutants and global climate change. In addition, the Antarctic acts as a giant laboratory for much science that cannot be conducted elsewhere.

The continent of Antarctica is also the world's largest wildlife sanctuary. It is home to over 100 million birds, including seven species of penguins; it has six species of seals and is the summer feeding grounds for 15 species of whales; its seas are among the most biologically productive in the world, supporting one of the Earth's unique, highly adapted, and specialized ecosystems. Indeed, the Antarctic Ocean is rich in planktonic species, which provide a foundation for the marine ecosystem. The convergence zone, where the cold waters of the Antarctic sink below the warmer waters of the Pacific, provides the environment for explosions of life and nutrients which are carried thousands of miles to other parts of the Earth.

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Antarctica is mankind's last terrestrial frontier, and therefore the idea of the continent as a world park - referred to earlier by the representative of Malaysia - is viable. More and more, the renewed interest in this idea gives some hope for the future of Antarctica. A world park would undoubtedly provide for necessary environmental protection and ensure that wilderness values were paramount. Scientific research would be coordinated, and the Antarctic continent would become an area of peace free of nuclear and other weapons and all military activities. That would, most certainly, be best handled through the agencies of the United Nations.

We believe that the time has come for greater participation at the United Nations on matters pertaining to Antarctica by the States not Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty. My delegation again calls for a comprehensive environmental convention on the conservation and protection of Antarctica and its dependent and associated ecosystems. We believe that such a convention can certainly be encompassed within the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Brazil in June 1992.

Antarctica must be preserved as the common heritage of all mankind. We believe in the stated principles of the Charter of the United Nations and therefore will continue to call for the direct involvement of the Secretary-General or his representative in developments pertaining to the Antarctic continent. The survival of the human race, we are told, depends on the survival of Antarctica. We shall therefore continue to insist that it should be brought under the umbrella of the United Nations. We are optimistic.

As we debate the future of what has been described as our "last continental wilderness", as "a remarkable bastion of purity and silent beauty"

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and as "a wonderland of global significance", let each of us endeavour to retain the purity and beauty that is Antarctica.

Mr. CAMARA (Guinea) (interpretation from French): It was only logical, Sir, that you should have been elected to the sensitive post of Chairman of this Committee dealing with political and security matters, on account of your outstanding diplomatic skills and the rich historical and cultural experience of your homeland, the friendly country of Poland. The invaluable assistance of the other officers of the Committee has helped you thus far to guide our work in an effective manner. It is for those reasons that I warmly thank all of you and assure you of the support and cooperation of the delegation of Guinea.

Notwithstanding the existence of zones of instability created by resurgent nationalism or by internal political dissent, our consideration of the important subject of Antarctica is taking place in a climate of growing tranquillity and converging views.

Just as Prometheus seized fire, peoples throughout the world are seizing the light of freedom, human rights and democratic values. Yesterday's truths are now being questioned, and governments built on intolerance are collapsing. Such positive trends towards peace must logically help us to advance on the long road towards a solution of the problems of the Antarctic.

The existence of the vast region some view as the seventh continent was confirmed only in the latter half of the eighteenth century by the explorer James Cook, who was followed by other pioneers. Subsequent history was marked by attempts to divide Antarctica into zones of influence. The scramble for control was not stopped until the signing of a Treaty, at Washington on 1 December 1959, by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan,

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Norway, the Union of South Africa, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

The Antarctic Treaty entered into force on 23 June 1961. To my mind, the Treaty's most interesting feature is that it disregards all territorial claims and is the first international legal instrument which, in accordance with its articles I and IV, reserves a region of the Earth for purely peaceful activities.

The basis of the Treaty regime consists in non-militarization, non-nuclearization and the right of inspection. Those principles have sheltered Antarctica from the arms race and from the threat of nuclear war, so that it became an exceptional sphere of cooperation at a time when the cold war was still going on.

Yet it must be emphasized that the Treaty has certain limitations which call its durability and effectiveness into question.

The first is its restrictiveness. Contrary to the views of the Consultative Parties, the Treaty is not open. By setting rigid conditions for participation, such as the requirement of scientific and financial capacity, the Treaty marginalises developing countries that lack the necessary material resources, personnel and technology. The situation favours a small group of States which can freely take decisions behind closed doors and carry on activities after periodic meetings devoted to exchanges of information, consultations and recommendations.

The second limitation relates to shortcomings in the right of inspection. The regime governing the right to inspect stations, installations, ships, aircraft, cargo, ports and personnel is also discriminatory. The Treaty makes provision for deciding to carry out

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inspections, but only Consultative Parties have the right to designate observers for such inspections. Thus they exercise autonomy that puts them beyond the reach of action by any international body.

The third limitation is the presence of South Africa. Some representatives have justified it on the basis of South Africa's status as an original signatory of the Treaty. My delegation does not welcome participation in Consultative Party meetings by a regime which, notwithstanding its measures in recent years towards abolishing the apartheid system and its recent accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has not yet completely rid itself of apartheid. We distrust such a regime.

Guinea hopes that a multiracial egalitarian society will soon be established in South Africa and that the country will live up to its commitments on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, so that it can take its proper place in the comity of democratic nations. In the meantime the report of the Secretary-General (A/46/512) of 30 September 1991 indicates that the position of the Consultative Parties remains unchanged on this matter.

In the light of those shortcomings, the international community is basing a new perception of the question of Antarctica on the global interests of all States without exception and on the need to establish a definitive legal status for Antarctica, an important zone of peace.

The first measures to redress the situation came from the General Assembly. When it first considered the question, in 1983, it adopted resolution 38/77, in which it requested information and affirmed that Antarctica should be declared a protected world park.

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The Organization of African Unity, at the meeting of its Council of Ministers held at Addis-Ababa from 10 to 17 July 1985, and the Non-Aligned Movement, with its Harare Declaration of 1986, demonstrated clearly the importance they attach to the subject and to the role of multilateral action in preserving that common heritage of mankind.

It is because of that international regime that Antarctica is of interest to my country, which, as a State Member of the United Nations, bears a share of the responsibility.

Today the international community has a body of useful data provided both by the Consultative Parties through the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research and other forms of scientific activity and by the work of natural scientists and researchers such as Jacques Cousteau of France, Daniel Vignes, Mr. Fabrizio and Alfred Van Der Essen.

(Mr. Camara, Guinea)

They have given a fantastic, detailed description of Antarctica's potential. We know, for example, that in addition to coal and traces of silver, gold, tin and iron, Antarctica has many undiscovered mineral resources. But their uncontrolled exploitation, not subject to monitoring, would be highly detrimental to international security and the environment, because of the fragility of the ecosystem.

That is why the General Assembly has, with good reason, repeatedly appealed to the Consultative Parties prospecting for, and extracting, mineral resources to halt their activities.

My delegation welcomes the encouraging results of the meeting of the Consultative Parties held in Madrid on 4 October this year. At this historic meeting the Parties signed a protocol on the protection of the environment, and it has been annexed to the existing Treaty, although three years earlier in Wellington, New Zealand, there had been another ceremony, the signing of a convention under which the continent was to be opened up to mineral exploitation.

The Madrid Protocol makes Antarctica a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. It provides for the establishment of a mandatory overall regime to guarantee that activities by the Parties in Antarctica will be carried out in such a way as to protect the environment and the ecosystems there.

The 31 States Parties that signed the Protocol undertook to take the necessary measures to secure its entry into force as soon as possible. In the mean time, the Parties are to act, to the fullest extent possible in accordance with their legal, constitutional procedures, to ensure that the provisions of the Protocol and its annexes apply to their activities in

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Antarctica. Before it enters into force, however, the Protocol will have to be ratified officially by the Governments of the 33 Parties.

The Protocol, which provides for a 50-year moratorium, may be revised, but I think that it would be very difficult for it to be repealed, since more than 19 parties would have to change their minds for that to be done.

My delegation agrees with Peter Wilkinson, leader of the first Greenpeace International Campaign, and James Martin Jones, of the World Wide Fund for Nature, that the Protocol is an important turning-point, a great victory for the ecological movement and a solid foundation, provided words are matched by action. The Protocol represents a clear desire by the Consultative Parties to strengthen the 1959 Treaty.

Another noteworthy event was a second meeting of the Consultative Parties, held in Bonn from 7 to 18 October this year, which established a comprehensive legal regime prohibiting any activity harmful to tourism.

My delegation congratulates France, which has undertaken to send to Antarctica each year an expedition to monitor waste-management, clean-up operations at the old bases and tourism, which are beginning to present a danger to the penguin and seal colonies.

In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 41/88 B and 42/46 B, the major efforts that I have mentioned need to be strengthened by acceptance by the Consultative Parties of a regime for exploitation of the minerals under the thick icecap. That regime must be negotiated on a just, equitable basis, in the interests of the whole of mankind.

The First Committee has repeatedly emphasized the consequences of human activities detrimental to the climate, ecology and fauna. I shall not take up time on those matters; I would simply recall that Antarctica's ecosystem is

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fragile. Because it has the lowest temperatures on Earth, and because of the intensity and speed of the winds there, as well as the fact that it is totally bare of vegetation, it is the most isolated, the most hostile and the least inhabited continent, despite the fact that it covers an area of 14 million square kilometres, mostly - 90 per cent - glacial. It is in fact the watertank of the world, with 75 per cent of water reserves.

Over-fishing by certain Powers gives rise to fear that stocks of krill, a sort of shrimp on which many species feed, will become exhausted.

The ecosystem may also be threatened by scientific research, the establishment of oil wells, toxic-waste dumping or the wrecks of ships carrying industrial products. Such shipwrecks have occurred in recent years.

With regard to scientific activities, my delegation is keenly interested in the initiative to create a United Nations-sponsored station in Antarctica, which is referred to in the Secretary-General's report (A/46/583) of 25 October this year.

Studies have shown that intensive industrial activity would cause an accumulation of carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere and harm the ozone layer. Another report of the Secretary-General (A/46/590) notes ozone decreases in 1987, 1989 and 1990 of up to 50 per cent of the 1956-1978 average for October, with decreases of up to 95 per cent locally.

Antarctica's future role in communications, both by air and by sea, is also worth noting. Antarctica is truly a bridge between Africa, Latin America and certain countries of Oceania. A conflict over control of the sea routes would inevitably result in long delays.

The need to save the planet from an ecological disaster requires close international cooperation for the collective management of Antarctica, the

(Mr. Camara, Guinea)

common heritage of mankind. Only such forward-looking thinking can consolidate the basis of peace and establish lasting security by the preservation of a regional and world "landscape" - the environment.

Addressing the First Committee last year, Ambassador Peter Wilenski of Australia spoke at length of the measures envisaged by the Consultative Parties in that regard. Recent developments support those measures.

However, there are still disagreements because of the non-democratization of Antarctica - that is, lack of the establishment of true cooperation under the direction of the most appropriate multilateral body, the United Nations, on a basis of transparency and equality.

The tendency of the Consultative Parties not to take part in the vote on draft resolutions, through the absence of a consensus, may cause feelings of deadlock and frustration.

I wish to conclude by saying that the task of peace and cooperation undertaken under United Nations auspices, following the spectacular improvement in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, gives real reason for hope of a prosperous world.

Therefore, let us all together, hand in hand, as if in a joyful dance, use our collective genius, our dynamism and our sense of fellowship to build a new, just and lasting security order.

Mr. GRAF ZU RANTZAU (Germany): I wish to express to you, Mr. Chairman, my delegation's appreciation of the helpful and encouraging words you addressed to the Committee at the beginning of today's meeting.

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

In speaking here today on behalf of all States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty, I am following in the footsteps of my colleague from the Australian delegation. Once again, the States Parties will refrain from making separate statements.

It has been clear since the question of Antarctica was first injected into the United Nations General Assembly that consensus is the only constructive basis for considering Antarctic issues. Each year since 1985, however, consensus has eluded us. It has eluded us because we have been faced with draft resolutions over which there was no possibility of achieving consensus. The reason is simple - the purpose of the resolutions has been to call into question an important and effective Treaty system to which many United Nations Members are party. Meanwhile, each year, the Antarctic Treaty system continues to demonstrate its capacity to resolve in innovative fashion the political, scientific and environmental issues that face us in other parts of the planet. This year in particular, there have been important accomplishments by the Antarctic Treaty system.

For 30 years, the Antarctic Treaty has united countries active in Antarctica in a uniquely successful agreement for the peaceful use of a continent. Scientific research conducted by the States parties, and the co-operation between them, have shown the world that nations can work together for their mutual benefit and for the benefit of international peace and cooperation. Antarctica is the largest unspoiled landmass on Earth, and States parties to the Treaty have committed themselves to the study of it and to the protection of its unique environment. The Antarctic Treaty is an example of how nations can successfully work together to preserve a major part of this planet for the benefit of all mankind as a zone of peace where the environment is protected and science rules supreme.

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

The Antarctic Treaty was signed by 12 Governments in 1959 at a time when other parts of the world were the arena of international tensions. The Governments of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, all of which had conducted scientific research in Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year, 1959, agreed that the unique opportunities Antarctica presented to science should not be jeopardized by disputes between them. The Treaty, which entered into force on 23 June 1961, ensures that in the interest of all mankind Antarctica will for ever continue to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and will not become either the scene or the object of international discord.

The Antarctic Treaty contains far-sighted provisions for achieving its objectives. Inter alia, it prohibits measures of a military nature, nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive wastes. The Treaty guarantees freedom of scientific research and promotes international scientific cooperation. It provides for the exchange of detailed information about activities in Antarctica and allows observers complete freedom of access to all areas of Antarctica to ensure that the provisions of the Treaty are complied with by the States Parties. Thanks to these safeguards, the Treaty has been successful in achieving its objectives.

The strength of the Antarctic Treaty continues to grow, and the 40 Parties to the Treaty now represent 70 per cent of the global population. We encourage the accession of more States to the Treaty in the future. In accordance with article IX of the Treaty, representatives of the parties meet regularly to exchange information, to consult on matters of common interest, and to formulate and recommend to their Governments measures in furtherance of the objectives of the Treaty.

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

In 1964, the Treaty parties adopted the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora. Subsequently, two separate conventions - the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Seals and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources - entered into force.

On 3 October 1991 in Madrid, the parties adopted the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The Protocol, which is an integral part of the Antarctic Treaty, designates Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science in recognition of the continent's global importance. It establishes a comprehensive, legally binding regime to ensure that activities undertaken by Treaty Parties in Antarctica are consistent with the protection of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems. It stipulates that activities relating to mineral resources other than scientific research shall be prohibited.

A key element of the regime is the detailed environmental impact assessment procedures annexed to the Protocol. Further annexes cover the conservation of fauna and flora, the prevention of marine pollution, and waste disposal. Negotiations for a fifth annex on the management of specially protected areas were concluded at the Consultative Meeting in Bonn in October 1991. Strong measures on compliance, response action, inspection, and environmental monitoring are included, as is provision for binding third-party dispute settlement.

Thirty-one States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty signed the Protocol on the date of its adoption and have committed themselves to taking the steps necessary to achieve its earliest possible entry into force. In the meantime, Parties will ensure that the provisions of the Protocol are applied to their activities in Antarctica as quickly as their legal and constitutional

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

processes allow. The adoption of the Protocol in 1991 was a fitting tribute to the thirtieth anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty and demonstrates the Parties' resolve further to strengthen the Treaty. The Protocol is further evidence that the Treaty Parties are aiming at the conservation of Antarctic resources. It is a testimony that the Treaty Parties are fully alive to the environmental concerns shared by all delegations.

The Antarctic Treaty Parties are fully committed to scientific research in Antarctica. Since the 1950s, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research has played a prominent role in developing cooperation between Antarctic scientists. Antarctica is a pristine laboratory of world-wide significance and has enabled researchers to detect and monitor for the benefit of all mankind such global environmental phenomena as the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming and sea-level changes. Other areas of scientific research that benefit from the unique opportunities offered by the environment of Antarctica are expanding rapidly. The States Parties have ensured that the results of these important research efforts are freely available.

The Antarctic Treaty Parties are of course aware of the significance of Antarctica for global environmental issues and have therefore provided detailed information for the preparatory process of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including information on the recent conclusion of the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection and the far-reaching annexes to it. The Antarctic Treaty Parties consider that singling out Antarctica as the only specific regional issue for consideration by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is inappropriate.

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings have also consulted and cooperated with other international organizations, including a number of United Nations specialized agencies, which have shared their expertise and information, as appropriate.

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

These organizations include: the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the International Hydrographic Organization, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, the Committee on Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the International Whaling Commission, and the United Nations Environment Programme.

The results of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, held in Bonn from 7 to 18 October this year, underline the high degree of cooperation among the States Parties and their dedication to the sixth continent. As usual, upon completion of the report on the Meeting, a copy will be forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Regarding the request that the Secretary-General undertake a study on the establishment of a United Nations-sponsored station in Antarctica, I should like to refer to the Secretary-General's report of 25 October 1991, in which it is pointed out that

> "In addition to the technical aspects, political, legal, organizational, administrative and financial considerations would also have to be addressed before the question of whether to establish a United Nations-sponsored base can be considered." (A/46/583, para. 15)

The Secretary-General concludes:

> "Seen against the background of the already existing system of international cooperation in the field of Antarctic scientific research, both at the level of direct cooperation between Governments and at the

(Mr. Graf Zu Rantzau, Germany)

level of the specialized agencies of the United Nations and a large variety of international governmental and non-governmental organizations, the issue of the establishment of a United Nations-sponsored station in Antarctica presents a formidable endeavour. Therefore, the execution of such a project would constitute a complicated exercise." (ibid., para. 17)

The Antarctic Treaty Parties have established a number of scientific stations in Antarctica that are designed for different purposes. All play a part in the cooperative research effort that is integral to the Antarctic Treaty system. Treaty Parties recognize the importance of scientific cooperation in investigating Antarctica's contribution to global climate and atmospheric conditions and, to that end, have committed themselves to a decade of international Antarctic scientific cooperation. For both economic and environmental reasons, they favour greater cooperative use of existing logistic facilities over the creation of additional stations and have in fact undertaken to do so in the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

To all those Members of the United Nations interested in the future of Antarctica and in developing scientific activities there, we reiterate our invitation to accede to the Antarctic Treaty and to take advantage of the existing institutions and experience of the Antarctic Treaty Parties. This, we submit, would be a constructive and responsible approach to the question of Antarctica.

The CHAIRMAN: I wish to reiterate that, in accordance with the Committee's programme of work and timetable, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions under the present agenda item is 12 noon today; and that the list of speakers in the general debate on the item will be closed at 12 noon today also.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.