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Chairman:

Mr. RANA

(Nepal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

OBSERVANCE OF DISARMAMENT WEEK

The CHAIRMAN: In keeping with a tradition initiated at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the First Committee is holding this special meeting to observe Disarmament Week, which began on 24 October 1990.

I am pleased on this occasion to welcome to the First Committee His Excellency Mr. Guido de Marco, President of the General Assembly at the forty-fifth session. On behalf of the First Committee I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and also for the skilful manner in which you are carrying out the important responsibilities which have been entrusted to you.

I am also happy to welcome to the First Committee His Excellency Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Secretary-General of the United Nations. Your untiring efforts, Mr. Secretary-General, in promoting the purposes and principles of the United Nations and the cause of international peace have earned you the appreciation and gratitude of us all. Your timely and important initiatives in the areas of peace-keeping and peace-making in recent years have raised and renewed faith in the United Nations Charter. The United Nations is today poised to play its proper role in the shaping of an interdependent world.

The Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament proclaimed the week beginning 24 October - the day of the founding of the United Nations - as a week devoted to fostering the objectives of disarmament. At the second special session on disarmament, in 1982, the General Assembly, noting the usefulness of Disarmament Week, made it an integral part of the World Disarmament Campaign launched at that session. Governments and non-governmental organizations have been urged to make Disarmament Week the focus

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of efforts to increase public awareness of the dangers of the arms race, particularly the nuclear-arms race, thereby creating an atmosphere conducive to progress in disarmament.

Recent years have raised unprecedented hopes for meaningful and sustained progress in the fields of arms control and disarmament. With the end of the cold war, we are at the threshold of a new phase of history. For the first time since the Second World War serious efforts are being made to arrest the relentless escalation of the arms race. After the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles - the INF Treaty - of 1987, which, for the first time provided for actual reductions in nuclear weapons, the international community has welcomed the agreement in June 1990 between the Soviet Union and the United States on the framework of the strategic offensive arms reduction treaty and looks forward to an early conclusion of the agreement and its implementation. There is, of course, a long way to go. The process will have to cover all types of nuclear weapons, incorporating eventually those of the other nuclear-weapon States. But the prospects for sustained progress are indeed positive.

All of us feel greatly encouraged by the progress in the negotiations on the reductions of conventional forces in Europe (CFE). It is the hope of the international community that the conclusion of a CFE agreement and the summit meeting of the 34-nation Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), to be held in Paris from 19 to 21 November, will mark the beginning of a new era and system of security in Europe. We also hope that a CFE agreement will provide momentum towards further reductions in conventional arms and forces. Progress in conventional disarmament in Europe also calls for effective measures to curb the transfer of surplus weapons to other parts of the world.

(The Chairman)

Elsewhere there has been progress in promoting confidence in Central America through the Esquipulas process, which is to include, inter alia, the establishment of inventories of weapons and machinery and a system of monitoring and verification. The laudable achievements of the CSCE process and the encouraging progress in Central America underline the importance of a regional approach to matters of confidence-building and security. These positive trends deserve to be emulated in other parts of the world.

Equitable economic relations based on co-operation between industrialized and developing countries alone can provide a lasting framework for peace. Access to modern science and technology is crucial for the development of the developing countries.

(The Chairman)

At the same time the world community ought to focus greater attention on the elaboration of modalities for conversion of military economies to civilian economies. International co-operation in the area of conversion could assist in the adjustment process. It is hoped that the peace dividend could be invested for social and economic development, in particular of the developing countries.

The dramatic developments in bilateral and some regional arms limitations efforts have not, however, adequately permeated the multilateral disarmament process. The opportunity provided by the new climate of international relations must be seized to extend disarmament efforts beyond the nuclear and conventional arsenals of the great Powers and their allies. Disarmament, to be meaningful, has to be the joint effort of all nations. The United Nations provides an irreplaceable forum for this endeavour. As the Secretary-General has said in his report on the work of the Organization:

"The turn for the better in the field of arms limitation provides an impetus and a fresh sense of purpose to the disarmament machinery within the framework of the Organization." (A/45/1, p. 20)

The celebration of Disarmament Week can be an important instrument in building up strong public opinion in favour of strengthening the multilateral bodies that deal with arms limitation and disarmament issues.

I now have the pleasure to call upon the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Guido de Marco, to address the First Committee.

Mr. de MARCO (President of the General Assembly): Mr. Chairman, in the first place, may I thank you for your very kind words on my election as President of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The Assembly work also depends much on the work that the Committees of the General Assembly provide. There is such a definite not linkage but almost identity between the work of the Committees

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and the work of the General Assembly, and for this I have even more to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your great co-operation and the valuable advice you have given me since my election to the presidency of the General Assembly.

The year 1978 was the year that the General Assembly proclaimed Disarmament Week as "a week devoted to fostering the objectives of disarmament".

By doing so, the Assembly highlighted the concern of the international community over the dangers of a spiralling arms race. It acknowledged the urgent need to mobilize world public opinion

"in order to create an international atmosphere conducive to the implementation of further practical measures with regard to the cessation of the arms race and disarmament". (General Assembly resolution 33/71 D)

The importance of the resolution is twofold. It expresses the General Assembly's conviction that peace and security can be sought - and obtained - at progressively lower levels of armaments. It underscores the need to involve world public opinion on the issue.

In the ensuing 12 years, Disarmament Week was observed against the alternating backdrop of hope and frustration. Progress in disarmament was often elusive, but efforts continued to edge it slowly, yet steadily, forward. Notwithstanding the tension and turbulence that at times seemed to paralyse such efforts, the international community always persevered with determination and patience.

Over the last 12 months, international relations have undergone tremendous change in several key areas. The world community has witnessed the end of the cold war and the emergence of a super-Power partnership. The cruel East-West confrontation has been replaced by fruitful East-West co-operation. A generation of mutual trust has culminated in the dismantling of barriers and the unification

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of Germany within the framework of a more secure Europe. The process of democratization is also leaving its mark in other regions in Central and South America, Africa and Asia.

All these changes increase expectations. Their positive impact on arms limitation and disarmament is already evident. The recent breakthrough in the United States-Soviet negotiations on reducing conventional forces in Europe is a case in point. It is expected that a conventional arms agreement will be ready for signature before the next summit of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in November this year. The dawning of a new security system in Europe is imminent.

It is my fervent hope that the progress achieved so far will be matched in other ongoing multilateral efforts towards disarmament, in particular the early conclusion of a chemical weapons convention.

Just as we are heartened by these positive developments, we are faced with a new regional conflict that threatens to destabilize global security and jeopardize the lives and well-being of millions of innocent people.

The events in the Gulf region are a vivid and painful example of the explosive nature of regional conflicts and their spill-over effects on global stability. As super-Power confrontation recedes and the halting and reversal of the nuclear-arms race become a reality, it has become obvious that an effort which parallels that which in the past mobilized world public opinion on the danger of the nuclear-arms race must be undertaken to halt and reverse the stockpiling of conventional arms and weaponry on a regional level.

Regional conflicts have sown death and misery among millions. There is an urgent need to resolve such conflicts - open or simmering - not by means of force,

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but through the building of trust and confidence among nations. In this respect, the success of the CSCE process should be considered as a model for other regions of the world.

The firm, unanimous response of the international community to the invasion and annexation of Kuwait underlines the vital role of the United Nations in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In a growingly interdependent world community, the relevance of the United Nations in bringing nations together to tackle problems in the political, economic, social and environmental spheres has come into sharper focus.

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The same need for common action holds true for disarmament. Bilateral arms control negotiations must be complemented by multilateral and multifaceted efforts. In this respect, the United Nations has a pivotal role in all relevant areas, including confidence- and security-building, arms transfers, conversion and verification.

At the recent World Summit for Children we were reminded of our grave responsibility to our children and to coming generations. They are entitled to a safe and peaceful world, a world that is not plagued by poverty, burdened by debt or endangered by a deteriorating physical environment; a world that is free from the scourge of drug-trafficking, free from terrorism, and free from violations of human rights. Above all, children are entitled to a world that is free from armaments and from the threat of war.

A step forward in disarmament is a step forward in the survival of mankind.

The Romans believed in the principle si vis pacem para bellum - if you wish for peace, prepare for war. This principle has been subjected to great criticism, and, in my view quite rightly, because it justifies the arms-race escalation which is only a step short of war. Many have changed the Roman principle into "si vis pacem para pacem" - if you wish for peace prepare for peace.

But one should distinguish between pacifism and preparing for peace. Preparing for peace involves not only a forma mentis regarding peace but also, in some instances, that peace itself be defended. One has to find a just balance between optimism and pessimism, linking idealism with a realistic approach in any situation.

Precisely because of this reality, taking a meaningful step towards disarmament is not easy. It requires a spirit of pragmatism and compromise, a

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willingness to confront the substantive issues and address specific issues that stand in the way of progress. It requires a commitment to a new philosophy, the philosophy that was so well articulated in the preamble to the General Assembly resolution in December 1978, wherein it is stated that:

"the old concept of armed national security to which the peoples of the world are conditioned has become obsolete [and] is giving way to new concepts ... that ... require the full partnership of peoples". (resolution 33/71 N).

This is the spirit in which I believe Disarmament Week should be observed.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Guido de Marco, for his kind words and his very thoughtful statement.

I have pleasure in calling now on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: First, Mr. Chairman, I should like to thank you for the very generous and encouraging words you have addressed to me.

The annual observance of Disarmament Week provides an opportunity to take stock of our efforts to promote the cause of arms limitation and disarmament. This year, I am addressing the First Committee at a time when signs of progress are more hopeful than ever in the past, though the shadow of regional conflict darkens an otherwise bright picture.

The fears and assumptions which brought about the creation of two major military blocs are now seen as the features of a confrontational past. A saner concept of security is taking hold, at least on the global level. As a result, the arms spiral is not only being halted but beginning to be reversed. The Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles - INF Treaty -

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was a first step, which I hope will soon be followed by an agreement in Europe on drastic reductions of conventional armaments and military capabilities and by the expected agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States on substantial cuts in strategic offensive arms.

Yet enthusiasm at this turn of events must be tempered by a sober assessment of the tasks before us. The issue of nuclear weapons and their continued testing remains a divisive one, as the recent Fourth Review Conference on the nuclear non-proliferation Treaty has shown. While the need to strengthen the Treaty has not been questioned, it is of paramount importance that a viable régime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons extending beyond 1995 be agreed upon by the international community. It is my hope that the widespread community of views existing on this issue will be extended to the thorny question of the cessation of nuclear testing. I have repeatedly underlined the desirability of a comprehensive test-ban treaty and I urge that all sides seek to make progress on this sensitive and heretofore intractable question.

The high priority of nuclear disarmament notwithstanding, other weapons of mass destruction continue to be a cause of deep and widespread anxiety. The proliferation of chemical weapons is an alarming development and the appalling danger of their actual use in conflict has in fact increased. This spectre alone should encourage States to remove the remaining obstacles and speedily conclude the chemical-weapons convention that is being negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament at Geneva. The firm political will that has led to agreements in other areas needs to be mustered to rid the world at long last of the scourge of chemical weapons.

Substantial progress in conventional arms limitation and disarmament is being made on the European continent, and it is gratifying to witness this development in

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what has been regarded traditionally as the most heavily armed region of the world. The significance of this process goes beyond the sheer numbers of arms and armed forces involved. Entirely new security arrangements are being shaped as mutual confidence replaces suspicion and fear. However, this constructive change has yet to be extended to other regions. Only when the new appreciation of collective security becomes more firmly rooted world wide shall we be able to claim that a new international order has come into being.

Recent developments have clearly shown that aggression and the resort to force in international relations are not acceptable to the international community. It is to be hoped that the sense of shared responsibility reflected in the firm response of the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, will also be demonstrated by a progressive dismantling of the world's huge stockpiles of weapons - nuclear, chemical and conventional. The efforts currently being made to tackle the issues of conversion and redirecting military capabilities to civilian purposes are healthy signs of the new sense of direction. I welcome the initiatives put forward and the proposals made in this respect and trust that they will be taken up energetically by the international community.

The turn for the better in the field of arms limitation and disarmament should lead us to redouble our efforts on behalf of peace. The responsibility for building a safer future is a universal one and I should like to pay a tribute on this occasion to the commitment of non-governmental organizations around the world. They have been selfless and persuasive champions of the cause of disarmament, and they have heightened public awareness of our objectives. They deserve our support and co-operation. A rare opportunity to alter the equation of

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international peace and security is now within reach. Much depends on our grasping it. After more than a generation of confrontation, expectations are high, and we cannot afford to disappoint them.

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the First Committee, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his very thoughtful statement.

The First Committee has thus concluded its meeting devoted to observance of Disarmament Week.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.