

UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
GENERAL

A/8683  
10 May 1972

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-seventh session  
Item 50 of the preliminary list\*

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

Letter dated 9 May 1972 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden  
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter of 21 April from the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Security Council Affairs, Mr. Kutakov, requesting my Government to nominate a consultant expert to participate in a meeting in New York 15-19 May 1972, to assist you in the preparation of a report on napalm and other incendiary weapons and all aspects of their possible use. I understand that similar requests have so far been directed to the Governments of Czechoslovakia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Romania and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In response, I am instructed to state that my Government intends to send to the meeting you have scheduled Mr. Erik E. Moberg. This readiness is based upon the following understanding.

The role of the group of governmental consultant experts is that of assisting you to prepare the report which the General Assembly has requested you to submit on napalm and other incendiary weapons and all aspects of their possible use. Under resolution 2852 (XXVI) the report requested by the General Assembly is to be in line with what you suggested in paragraph 126 of your report on respect for human rights in armed conflicts (A/8052). This paragraph reads:

"The idea of undertaking and pursuing the study referred to above received the support of a number of the experts consulted by the Secretary-General and of those of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In particular it was considered useful, as an initial step, to study the precise effects of the use of napalm on human beings and the living environment. If the General Assembly accepts the merit of that idea, it might consider requesting the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of qualified consultant experts, a report on napalm weapons and the effects of their possible use. The preparation of this report might in general be patterned

\* A/8700.

after the Secretary-General's report on the question of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons, 1/ to which reference was made in paragraph 192 of the preliminary report and which, in operative paragraphs 1 and 4 of its resolution 2603 B (XXIV), section II, the General Assembly welcomed as an authoritative statement on the subject and recommended to the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament as a basis for its further consideration of the elimination of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons. The contemplated report on the question of napalm which might be prepared by the Secretary-General could facilitate subsequent action by the United Nations with a view to curtailing or abolishing such uses of the weapons in question as might be established as inhumane".

We conclude that, in line with your suggestion, the General Assembly has requested you to prepare a report which may serve as a factual basis for a subsequent discussion by the General Assembly or other organ of humanitarian and legal aspects of the use of incendiary weapons. We share this view and our representative to the Third Committee of the Assembly made it entirely clear on 2 December 1971 2/ that the contemplated group of experts was not to deal with legal aspects of the use of incendiary weapons.

Our understanding of the mandate of the group of experts which the General Assembly has requested you to employ can be summarized in the following manner:

The purpose of the report is to create a solid factual basis for a subsequent discussion in the appropriate forum - be it the Red Cross Conference, the General Assembly or the Disarmament Conference - of humanitarian and legal aspects and possible restrictions or prohibitions of use. For such a discussion it is important to know, inter alia, whether the various weapons within this category are capable of being directed to military targets or are indiscriminate and what type of injuries they cause to human beings. The factual basis thus needed may be stated as follows:

- (1) A description of the various weapons within this category, and the substances used in them;
- (2) The purposes for which these various weapons are intended and used;
- (3) The effects of these various weapons;
- (4) The specific medical effects: injuries caused.

We have felt it necessary to explain in such detail our understanding of the role of the experts, as this is of basic importance in choosing our expert.

We take it that the above represents a correct representation of your request in accordance with the General Assembly resolution and your own report, referred to in that resolution.

---

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.68.IX.1.

2/ See A/C.3/SR.1891.

Finally, we would like to urge that every effort be made to secure a sufficiently broad participation of experts to ensure that the important knowledge and experience which is no doubt available to Governments of States possessing technologically advanced incendiary weapons may be fully utilized. We cannot but believe that it is in the interest of these States to help you to prepare a report on these matters that will be as fully informed as possible.

I have the honour to request that this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Olof RYDBECK  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
Permanent Representative to the United Nations

-----