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Chairman:

Mr. Ordonez
(Vice-Chairman)

(Philippines)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Ordonez (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEMS 47 TO 65 (continued)

CONSIDERATION OF AND ACTION ON ALL DISARMAMENT AGENDA ITEMS

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee will now proceed to the second phase of its work. As members were informed, this morning's meeting as well as those scheduled from 5 to 7 November have been set aside for the introduction of and comments on draft resolutions.

Mr. HYLTEINIUS (Sweden): At last year's session of the Committee, Sweden circulated, in document A/C.1/45/8/Rev.1, a memorandum on naval armaments and disarmament. It was stated in the memorandum that every fourth nuclear weapon in the world, or a total of about 15,000, was earmarked for deployment at sea. Approximately one third, or about 5,000, of all sea-based nuclear weapons could be estimated to belong to the category "sub-strategic", comprising a variety of nuclear weapons intended for targets at sea, as well as nuclear-armed cruise missiles and other nuclear arms for attacks against targets on land. In the memorandum, Sweden proposed negotiations on the prohibition of non-strategic nuclear weapons at sea.

As is well-known, since then facts and figures have changed, or are about to change, substantially. We have been able to welcome the historic Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the United States and the Soviet Union containing a commitment to reduce substantially the number of strategic nuclear weapons and, in many respects, constituting a turning point in world disarmament efforts. In the last few weeks we have also seen initiatives directed specifically at naval nuclear disarmament.

(Mr. Hyltenius, Sweden)

The unilateral measures recently announced by the Presidents of the United States and the Soviet Union comprise a total withdrawal of all their naval sub-strategic nuclear weapons. These are decisive and much appreciated steps in naval disarmament. After they have been implemented, all the 5,000 sub-strategic nuclear weapons will have disappeared from the high seas.

Over the years Sweden has many times called for an end to the policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence or absence of nuclear weapons on board any particular ships at any particular time. As we interpret them, the declarations by United States defence officials in connection with the recently announced unilateral measures indicate that, as soon as United States nuclear weapons have been withdrawn, this policy will no longer be relevant to surface ships and attack submarines. In practice, it will thus not be applied any more. We fervently hope that all the nuclear Powers will act in the same manner. Such a change of policy would contribute to openness and transparency in naval matters and would in itself be a confidence-building measure of great significance.

(Mr. Hyltenius, Sweden)

As encouraging as these latest developments may be, let me however note that much remains to be done in the maritime domain. Confidence could be further strengthened, not least through a multilateral regime for the prevention of incidents at sea, building on the positive experience of existing bilateral agreements.

As has been stressed by Sweden in many forums, the laws of sea warfare are also in urgent need of modernization. I will return to this subject under the agenda item regarding excessively injurious conventional weapons.

The year 1991 has been a memorable one for disarmament, giving hope and encouragement for years to come. Let me conclude by emphasizing that this now holds true also for the state of affairs in the field of naval disarmament.

Mr. O'BRIEN (New Zealand): I would like to address agenda items 51 and 53. I have the honour to introduce into the First Committee, under those two items, a draft resolution entitled "Comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty", which is to be found in document A/C.1/46/L.4.

For nearly 20 years New Zealand, alternating with Australia, has submitted a draft resolution in this Committee on nuclear testing. Mexico has done likewise, and every year both draft resolutions have been adopted by overwhelming majorities. Initially, each draft resolution reflected the rather different perspectives of its group of sponsors. In recent years, those differences have become less and less clear-cut, but the shared objective has always been the same: cessation of nuclear testing.

New Zealand and Australia as main sponsors of one of the traditional texts and Mexico as main sponsor of the other attempted last year to present the Committee with a single text. We did so in the belief that the time had come for the First Committee to demonstrate as far as possible its willingness

(Mr. O'Brien, New Zealand)

to approach this important subject on a common basis. Our efforts were, of course, also consistent with our aim of rationalizing the Committee's work. It was a matter of regret that those efforts were not successful in 1990.

But we did not give up. Over the past 12 months we have seen a series of positive developments in the international disarmament and security situation, developments which were widely commended during the general debate held over the last three weeks. Amongst other things I refer, of course, to the ratification of the threshold test-ban Treaty and the Treaty on peaceful nuclear explosions, the agreement on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and, most recently, the announcements by the United States and the Soviet Union on tactical nuclear weaponry.

Against that background, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico and other interested delegations, notably Japan, Sweden, Canada and Norway, were encouraged again to embark on a course of negotiations this year to draft a single draft resolution on a nuclear-test ban, one which would secure the support of most, if not all, of the international community. I am extremely pleased to place the results of those negotiations before the Committee in document A/C.1/46/L.4.

The draft resolution is sponsored by the 42 States which last year sponsored either the Australia-New Zealand or the Mexican draft resolution. Their names head document A/C.1/46/L.4, and I will not read out the long list. But I want to assure each and every one of the States listed there of our deep appreciation of their support. It demonstrates the importance which States Members of the United Nations accord to a nuclear-test ban. I might add that since submitting the text we have had requests from other States also wishing to sponsor the draft resolution, and I would encourage any delegation

(Mr. O'Brien, New Zealand)

so interested to contact the Secretariat and add its name to the list of sponsors.

The sponsors of this draft resolution are convinced that an end to nuclear testing by all States in all environments for all time is an essential step towards preventing the qualitative improvement and development of nuclear weapons. It would also contribute, along with other concurrent efforts to reduce nuclear arms, to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

By the draft resolution the General Assembly would welcome the recent positive developments to which I referred a moment ago. Amongst those is the long-awaited ratification of two important bilateral treaties, the 1974 threshold test-ban Treaty and the 1976 Treaty on peaceful nuclear explosions. But as draft resolution A/C.1/46/L.4 makes clear, we consider that the most effective way to bring about a cessation of nuclear testing is through a multilateral treaty that would attract the adherence of all States. The Conference on Disarmament has a particular responsibility in that regard, a responsibility spelled out in paragraphs 3 and 4 of our draft resolution. Paragraph 5 sets out our views on the work the Conference on Disarmament and its Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts should undertake in addressing the verification requirements of a test-ban treaty.

For the first time in many years, the First Committee has the opportunity to speak with one voice on the subject of a nuclear-test ban. Draft resolution A/C.1/46/L.4 represents a very real effort by all concerned to promote a practical, positive approach to this often emotionally-charged subject. I would particularly like to salute the efforts of Ambassador Miguel Marin Bosch of Mexico and Ambassador Paul O'Sullivan of Australia and their delegations in enabling us to place this text before the Committee today. Together we commend it to all member States.

Mr. MARIN BOSCH (Mexico) (interpretation from Spanish): The cessation of all nuclear testing is among the main disarmament goals of the United Nations. Along with the overwhelming majority of other Member States, Mexico has insisted on the urgent need to put an end to such tests once and for all. This is a measure the priority of which has been recognized repeatedly by the General Assembly and by the Secretary-General.

More than 30 years ago the international community stated that a complete halt to testing was the key to stemming the qualitative nuclear-arms race. Every year since 1957 the General Assembly has spoken out on this issue.

The commitments undertaken in the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty and reiterated in the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) concerning the achievement of a comprehensive test-ban treaty have come to naught. For three decades there have been unsuccessful bilateral and trilateral negotiations.

The Conference on Disarmament too has failed in its attempts. Some have argued against a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty; they have claimed that testing is essential to enhance the safety of nuclear-weapon design and to maintain the credibility of the nuclear deterrent, and that the lack of sufficient verification would make it possible to gain a military advantage.

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

The independent scientific community demonstrated, however, that the problem of verification could be resolved appropriately and that the only purpose for which tests were essential was to develop new types of nuclear weapons.

At the present time, with the disappearance of ideological rivalry and military rivalry on the part of the super-Powers and their allies, arguments against a comprehensive test-ban treaty lose all meaning. Furthermore, in a completely changed international atmosphere, the main military Powers have begun to question their military doctrines and the need to maintain the level and diversity of their arsenals. Why should they continue to test nuclear weapons in order to modernize arsenals if they wish to reduce them radically with a view to their elimination?

We welcome the recent unilateral initiatives in the field of nuclear disarmament, and we welcome particularly the decision of the Soviet Union to suspend its nuclear testing for one year. We are perhaps witnessing the beginning of what may be a reversal of the nuclear-arms race. We appeal to the main nuclear Powers to intensify their bilateral consultations on this subject and to promote multilateral negotiations.

Almost daily the international press takes note of the timeliness of the subject of a nuclear-weapon-test ban. It is a matter of constant debate. A comprehensive test-ban treaty is attainable precisely at this time when relations between the nuclear Powers have moved from confrontation to cooperation. Technological and scientific advances in the field of verification now offer solutions to the obstacles that used to be invoked, if we have the necessary political will.

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

The cessation of nuclear testing continues to be the starting-point for successful nuclear non-proliferation. If no progress is made in this field, the very future of the current non-proliferation regime might be jeopardized. We have two possible courses of action to achieve our objective, both of them viable and undoubtedly complementary. The first of them would be to amend the partial test-ban Treaty of 1963 in order to convert it into a comprehensive ban. This process is now being carried out in the Amendment Conference which, under the leadership of Minister Ali Alatas of Indonesia, began its substantive work in January of this year, and we hope that progress will be made in this respect.

The other possibility would be the beginning - the beginning, I repeat - of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. The Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear-Test Ban was re-established, with certain expectations, at the beginning of 1991. In spite of the imaginative approach and the endeavours of its Chairman, Ambassador Chakrabarti of India, it only managed to put forward the same positions as everyone already knows. The debate was interesting, but in the last analysis it was the same debate as always; it was business as usual.

Years and even decades after the end of the Second World War, some men appeared who had been lost in the forest of certain Pacific islands. They were soldiers who were not aware that the war had ended. Something similar is now happening in Geneva. In the Palais de Nations there seem to be representatives who have not yet been informed of the end of the cold war. The thick walls of the Council Chamber perhaps serves as a fortress for certain outdated military doctrines.

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

For many years now the delegation of Mexico, together with other delegations, has been submitting in the First Committee a draft resolution on the subject of the cessation of all nuclear-weapon tests, a draft which the General Assembly has invariably approved by an overwhelming majority. The Assembly has also been approving, with a similar vote, another draft resolution on the urgent need for a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty.

This latter draft has been sponsored by another group of countries headed by Australia and New Zealand. Given the similarities and the content of the two resolutions in 1989, the delegations of Australia, New Zealand and Mexico, supported by the respective co-sponsors, decided to attempt to merge their respective texts. That merging, which was almost achieved last year, was introduced just a few moments ago by Ambassador Terence O'Brien of New Zealand. My delegation is pleased at the text which we have developed together, and which is contained in document A/C.1/46/L.4. We wish to state here our appreciation for the efforts made by the delegations of New Zealand and Australia, and by all of the other sponsors.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN (Australia): On behalf of the Australian Government I am very pleased to support the comments by my New Zealand and Mexican colleagues in commending the text of the draft resolution on a comprehensive test-ban treaty. The successful merger of two earlier similar but competing resolutions is on substantive grounds and on procedural grounds. Substantively, it gives a clear framework for the expression of the international community's views on testing issues. Procedurally, it helps rationalize this Committee's work.

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

We clearly recognise that there are differing views on the issues raised by nuclear testing, but those differences need to be managed in a satisfactory way in accordance with the ordinary working methods of this Committee. Australia believes the merged text offers such a framework, for the nuclear-weapon States also. We look forward to a high level of support for this draft resolution.

Finally, may I take the opportunity of thanking in particular the efforts of my New Zealand and Mexican colleagues as well as my friends from the other core group countries: Canada, Japan, Norway and Sweden. In Geneva and in New York, these countries have cooperated closely and, we believe, very effectively with a useful result.

Mr. AALBU (Norway): Norway has traditionally been co-sponsoring a draft resolution put forward by Australia and New Zealand on the urgent need for a comprehensive test-ban treaty. We highly appreciate the fact that it has been possible this year to have just one draft resolution on this question covering agenda items 51 and 53. We are happy to co-sponsor this merged draft resolution.

As we said in our statement in plenary, the achievement of a total and permanent ban on all nuclear testing remains an important Norwegian disarmament objective. A comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty is absolutely necessary in order to prevent the qualitative improvement and development of nuclear weapons and their further proliferation, and to contribute to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. Our concern about environmental and health risks associated with nuclear testing is an additional argument for discontinuing such testing.

(Mr. Aalbu, Norway)

We share the view expressed in the draft resolution that the most effective way to achieve an end to nuclear testing is through the conclusion, at an early date, of a comprehensive, verifiable nuclear-test-ban treaty that will attract the adherence of all States. In this regard we greatly appreciate the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear-Test Ban established by the Conference on Disarmament.

We also attach great importance to, and we take an active part in, the work of the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts and their GS/ETT-2 experiment, the result of which will now be analysed and evaluated before the Group's next meeting early next year. A global network for the exchange of seismic data must serve as the most important basis for a future system of verification of a test-ban treaty.

(Mr. Aalbu, Norway)

Careful thought should now be given to the question how the work of the Group and the results of the global experiment could be used as a basis for a treaty-verification system.

The Conference on Disarmament has particular responsibilities in the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. We would like to see the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban in 1992, with an appropriate mandate as spelled out in this year's draft resolution.

It is our hope that the wide-ranging proposals made by the President of the United States and the President of the Soviet Union with regard to strategic nuclear arms would have a positive impact on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee. Norway will, for its part, continue to support the work of the Conference on Disarmament in this field.

Mr. HYLTIENIUS (Sweden): I should like to express the strong support of the Swedish delegation for draft resolution A/C.1/46/L.4, "Comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty", which was introduced just now by the Ambassador of New Zealand.

Sweden has consistently over the years called for multilateral action on the test-ban issue. That position has been manifested by its co-sponsoring of the two traditional draft resolutions on the subject. Sweden's support for two separate draft resolutions emanated from a pragmatic attitude as to the formulation of a mandate for the Ad Hoc Committee of the Conference on Disarmament in addressing the issue.

In our view, what matters is that substantive work on a nuclear-test-ban treaty be carried out so that the overall goal of a treaty can be effectively promoted and, when political conditions so allow, negotiations can lead to quick results. We hope that negotiations on a treaty can start without further delay.

(Mr. Hyltenius, Sweden)

Sweden is very pleased that the efforts initiated last year to arrive at a merged text on the test-ban issue have this year resulted in one joint draft resolution. This has been possible owing to considerable flexibility on both sides, and the result is, in the view of my delegation, very satisfactory. Furthermore, the draft resolution would, as pointed out by the representative of New Zealand, at long last allow the First Committee and the General Assembly to speak with one voice on this important item, sending even stronger political signals from this authoritative body. It is encouraging that the draft text has already received as many as 42 sponsors.

In July this year Sweden submitted to the Conference on Disarmament a revised draft proposal for a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. The text contains updated sections with regard to verification of a test-ban treaty as well as provisions on organisational aspects. My delegation hopes that that draft will be given careful consideration by the Conference on Disarmament and will facilitate the work on this highly topical nuclear item.

My delegation joins the delegation of New Zealand in commending this draft resolution for wide support by the members of the First Committee.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.