



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/36/532
25 September 1981

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-sixth session
Agenda item 24

HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF STATES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATURE
FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1	2
II. BACKGROUND	2 - 9	2
III. ANALYSIS OF REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS . . .	10 - 25	3

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This interim report has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on behalf of the Secretary-General, in response to paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 35/8 of 30 October 1980, which focuses, inter alia, on the impact of the arms race on nature.

II. BACKGROUND

2. The declaration adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm clearly stated that man and his environment must be spared the effects of nuclear weapons and all other means of mass destruction.

3. The United Nations Conference on Desertification, meeting at Nairobi from 29 August to 9 September 1977, in its resolution 4 of 9 September 1977 denounced the effect of destructive weapons and practices on ecosystems. The General Assembly, by resolution 32/172 of 19 December 1977, requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its thirty-third session on the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Conference. UNEP, in co-operation with the United Nations Centre for Disarmament, accordingly prepared a report on the effects of weapons on ecosystems which was submitted to the Assembly at its thirty-third session as the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 4 (A/33/259, annex II).

4. This submission also constituted a response to UNEP Governing Council decision 6/1 of 24 May 1978, section III, paragraph 2, in which the Council considered that the environmental consequences of the arms race, including weapons with harmful impacts for present and future generations and irreversible deterioration of the environment, should be brought to the attention of the General Assembly.

5. At its eighth session, the UNEP Governing Council considered the state of the environment report 1980 (UNEP/GC.8/3), which included as one of the selected topics "the environmental effects of military activities".

6. By decision 9/4 of 25 May 1981, the Governing Council of UNEP requested the Executive Director to include in his presentation of the system-wide medium-term environment programme the regular analysis of the impact of the arms race on nature, and invited the Secretary-General to submit to the second special session of the General Assembly on disarmament the special report, prepared with the co-operation of UNEP in accordance with the terms of General Assembly resolution 35/8 of 30 October 1980, on the pernicious effects of the arms race on nature.

7. By decision 9/8 of 26 May 1981, the Governing Council called upon Governments to stop the arms race and, until disarmament is achieved, to allocate at least 0.001 per cent of armament spending for development projects and the protection of the environment.

8. The report on the state of the environment 10 years after Stockholm, now under

preparation for submission to the UNEP Governing Council at its tenth session, deals extensively with peace, security and environment.

9. As a first step in the preparation of the report called for by the General Assembly in resolution 35/8, the Executive Director of UNEP initiated a process of consultation with Governments. By a letter sent in April 1981, with which was enclosed background information, including the three UNEP reports cited above, all Governments were requested to submit their comments on the issues raised in the resolution.

III. ANALYSIS OF REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

10. As at 30 August 1981, replies to the Executive Director's letter had been received from 34 Governments. Seven of these replies consisted of acknowledgement or notification that the request had been duly transmitted to the appropriate authorities. Another five Governments stated that their position had been clearly stated at the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, when their representative abstained in the vote, and expressed their opposition to involvement of UNEP in this matter.

11. Support for the provisions of the resolution was expressed in general terms in three of the replies, while the remaining 19 replies show a great variety of reactions, ranging from a listing of relevant national legislation, through general comments on the documentation enclosed with the letter, to concrete suggestions for future action.

12. Two Governments, while recognizing the importance of the issue, considered that it should not be dealt with in the manner suggested in General Assembly resolution 35/8, which, in their view, adopted a narrow approach to a very broad issue. These Governments believed that to emphasize the environmental consequences of arms risks overlooking the fact that the arms race posed health risks to mankind in all aspects, and thus should be addressed within the context of concrete and comprehensive disarmament measures consistent with the national security of all States.

13. Another Government stated that the resolution in question suffered in its view from a lack of specificity, and did not appear capable of achieving any tangible results that would go beyond the work already carried out on the subject by UNEP.

14. A number of Governments recommended the establishment of a broader scientific, technical and legislative base within UNEP for the promotion of multilateral and bilateral co-operation in the field of the environment and of a reduction in military expenditure in favour of the development of the world and the preservation of the environment.

15. Several replies emphasized the close interrelationship between the arms race, environment and development, and some discussed the international dimensions of the arms race.

16. One Government drew attention to the two distinct aspects of resolution 35/8

and recommended that each should be examined separately. The first aspect was very general in nature, in that it declared the historic responsibility of States for the preservation of nature for future generations, referred to the determination to preserve nature as prerequisite for the normal life of man, called upon States to take measures to promote international co-operation in this field, and requested the views of States on possible measures to be taken at the international level. This aspect was reflected in the first, fifth, seventh and eighth paragraphs and in paragraphs 1, 3 and the final part of 4. The remaining paragraphs of the resolution focus on particular aspects of human activities that have disastrous consequences on man and environment. In the view of the Government in question, all States were not equally responsible for the arms race, and to state the responsibility of States for the preservation of nature in the context of nuclear warfare, without an adequate indication as to the gradation of responsibilities in the arms race, was to suggest that all States were equally accountable not only for the threat of war but for the testing of nuclear weapons, the hoarding of weapons of mass destruction, the accumulation of toxic chemicals and the adverse effects that these activities have on the environment.

17. Some countries commented specifically on the report on the effects of weapons on ecosystems, the relevant chapter of the state of the environment report 1980 and the draft of chapter 16 of the report on the state of the environment 10 years after Stockholm, considering them to constitute important steps towards a major comprehensive study of the impact of military activity on the environment, which in their opinion should become one of the major lines of activity on the part of the international community.

18. One Government of a developing country expressed concern over the fact that both the resolution and the reports prepared by UNEP did not make clear the distinction between the responsibilities of the developed countries and those of the third world. In its view, the documentation prepared by UNEP tended to highlight alleged military activities and expenditure in so-called third world countries. While assessing global military expenditure, the reports should take into account the primary responsibility for disarmament that rests with the States having the largest military arsenals, and should register the fact that the vast majority of conventional weapons, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, were produced, developed, retained and deployed by the nuclear weapon States and their allies. The report should mention that six States (including the five nuclear-weapon States) were responsible for 80 per cent of the world's military expenditure.

19. Some countries expressed the view that the increased military expenditure taking place in many developing countries was dictated by internal and external factors. The external factors were emphasized in certain replies which stated that the conflicts and tensions in the world have been exacerbated by the intensification of great-Power rivalry and the competition among great Powers for spheres of influence.

20. Nuclear weapons were singled out as posing the most comprehensive threat to the environment on a global scale. Some countries expressed the view that UNEP should accordingly give the highest priority to effective measures for nuclear

disarmament, as called for by the General Assembly at its special session in 1978. Some countries felt that the international community should pay close attention to the environmental risks of:

- (a) Nuclear weapons testing, particularly in the atmosphere;
- (b) Large stockpiles of nuclear and chemical and radiological weapons;
- (c) Waste from industries producing nuclear weapons.

21. Some countries stated that, in their view, opposition should be expressed to the use of force in settling international conflicts, the use of weapons to destroy crops or forests, the squandering of resources on arms race, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and of bacteriological methods of warfare, and the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, outer space and under water.

22. Some countries suggested that efforts should be aimed at the conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty and of conventions on the prohibition of chemical and radiological weapons, and at the urgent ratification and entry into force of the Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests and of the Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes.

23. Four countries suggest that UNEP should organize regular seminars and symposia to review and analyse the arms race and its impact on the environment.

24. In general, in addition to the issue, the role of the United Nations system was stressed, but while the majority of developed countries were against the involvement of UNEP, the replies from developing countries clearly visualized a role to be played by UNEP.

25. In view of the relatively small number of substantive replies received from Governments, ^{1/} it would be premature to put forward definitive proposals regarding possible measures to be taken at the international level for the preservation of nature. Accordingly, the Secretary-General proposes that he continue to solicit the views of Governments and that, with the assistance of the Centre for Disarmament and UNEP, he convene a small expert group meeting to review a summary of the views of Governments and advise on further steps to give effect to

^{1/} Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Ethiopia, German Democratic Republic, Guinea, Hungary, India, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Korea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, Sweden, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America and Zimbabwe.

resolution 35/8. He would then prepare a report to the second special session of the General Assembly on disarmament indicating the views of Government and making such recommendations as may be considered relevant at that time.
