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Thirty-eighth session
Agenda item 140

QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA

Letter dated 5 October 1983 from the Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

I refer to the request by the delegations of Antigua and Barbuda and Malaysia (A/38/193 and Corr.1) to inscribe the question of Antarctica on the agenda of the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

On behalf of the Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty, I have the honour to state the following, the substance of which was brought to your attention on 19 August 1983:

"The Antarctic Treaty, which is open to all countries of the world and is of unlimited duration, establishes Antarctica as a region of unparalleled international co-operation in the interests of all mankind.

"It is based on the Charter of the United Nations, promotes its purposes and principles and confirms Antarctica as a zone of peace.

"It excludes Antarctica from the arms race by prohibiting any measures of a military nature such as the establishment of military bases and fortifications, the carrying out of military manoeuvres or the testing of any type of weapons, including nuclear weapons.

"It encourages and facilitates scientific co-operation and the exchange of scientific information beneficial to all States.

"It protects the natural environment for all mankind.

"The Treaty establishes a comprehensive system of on-site inspection by observers to promote the objectives and ensure the observance of the Treaty.

"The Treaty serves the international community well and has averted international strife and conflict over Antarctica. It removes the potential for sovereignty disputes between Treaty Parties.

"Revision or replacement of the Treaty which is now being suggested by Malaysia and Antigua and Barbuda would undermine this system of international law and order in Antarctica with very serious consequences for international peace and co-operation. It is unrealistic to think that, in the present state of world affairs, a new or better legal régime for Antarctica could be agreed upon. The undermining of the Treaty could open the way to an arms race in the region and might lead to new territorial claims. It would not serve the interest of any country, or group of countries, if Antarctica became an area of international conflict and discord.

"The Treaty system has proved to be a remarkably successful, practical and dynamic arrangement. Every effort should be made to preserve and maintain it.

"It is for these reasons that the Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty have serious reservations about the initiative by the Governments of Malaysia and Antigua and Barbuda and about any attempt to revise or replace the present Treaty system.

"This initiative inaccurately represents the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. It implies that there is a need for revision or replacement of the Antarctic Treaty system, something which could only be achieved under international law by the Parties to the Treaty."

Since the above was agreed upon by the Consultative Parties, two further States have been admitted to Consultative Party status on 12 September 1983.

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 140.

(Signed) Richard WOOLCOTT
Chairman of the New York Group
of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative
Parties
