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FIFTH COMMITTEE
Agenda item 115

PROGRAMME PLANNING

Revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989
(extended to 1991) and draft introduction to the medium-
term plan for the period beginning in 1992

Note by the Chairman

1. By its resolution 36/228, section I, the General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) on the work of its twenty-first session. 1/ One such recommendation is contained in paragraph 471 of the CPC report, which states that:

"Each chapter of the proposed medium-term plan should be submitted to the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly before the plan as a whole is adopted by the Assembly in plenary meeting".

2. In paragraph 67 of the report of the CPC on its resumed twenty-eighth session, 2/ which forms part of the documentation for agenda item 115, the Committee recommended that, in continuing work on the introduction to the new medium-term plan, the Secretary-General should take fully into account the views of Member States expressed at the Committee's twenty-eighth session and that the General Assembly should seek further comments of Member States through discussion in its Main Committees. To this end, the Secretary-General's note (A/43/329) together with the report of the Committee, should be made available to all relevant United Nations bodies. Furthermore, in paragraph 72 of the same report, CPC recommended that the General Assembly at its forty-third session should consider with particular attention the question of the structure of the medium-term plan in the light of the discussion conducted in the Committee.

3. On 12 October 1988, through the President of the General Assembly, the Chairman of the Fifth Committee addressed identical letters to the Chairmen of the other Main Committees indicating that the General Assembly had before it, in

document A/43/6 and Corr.1, the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 (extended to 1991) and transmitting the above-mentioned recommendations of CPC on the draft introduction to the medium-term plan for the period beginning in 1992. He also indicated that, in order to permit the Fifth Committee to take fully into account the views that the Member States might to express in the Main Committees on the relevant chapters of the revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 (extended to 1991) and on the Secretary-General's note containing the draft introduction to the new medium-term plan, it would be appreciated if such views were to be communicated to the Fifth Committee no later than the first week of November 1988.

4. The substantive portions of the replies received by the Chairman of the Fifth Committee are reproduced below:

A. Letter dated 7 November 1988 from the Chairman of the First Committee

I have the honour to inform you that, with reference to your communication dated 12 October 1988 (A/C.1/43/4) regarding agenda item 115, entitled "Programme planning", the First Committee took up this question at a formal meeting, following extensive consultations under the aegis of the open-ended informal group of the Friends of the Chairman. I am hereby transmitting the text of the Committee's letter, dated 4 November 1988, including its annex. 3/ I wish to note further that subsequent to the meeting, the delegations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America indicated that they had not joined the consensus on paragraph 6, i.e. the penultimate paragraph of the letter. In addition, enclosed herewith, please find also the relevant parts of the verbatim records of the 27th meeting, 4/ as agreed upon by the Committee.

Text of the First Committee's letter dated 4 November 1988

Taking into account the importance of the subject-matter involved, the First Committee, after due deliberation, has decided to transmit the following agreed text to the Fifth Committee in reference to the revisions of the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989 (extended to 1991).

In view of the United Nation's primary purpose under the Charter to maintain international peace and security, it is essential that the Secretary-General of the United Nations should continue to provide to Member States adequate assistance, including all relevant Secretariat services, in their efforts to advance arms limitation and disarmament efforts contributing to the strengthening of international peace and security.

In his draft introduction to the next medium-term plan (A/43/329) the Secretary-General indicates that "the Organization must also continue to accord high priority to the work of its disarmament organs". In order to reflect this priority and to carry out its increased work-load, every effort

should be made to enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, one of the smallest units of the Secretariat, and the resources accorded to the Department should be commensurate with the requirements of its mandated tasks within the existing resources of the Secretariat and in accordance with resolution 41/213. In this respect, the Committee noted the recommendation contained in paragraph 37 of the report of the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination on the work of its twenty-eighth session. 2/

Considering the universality of interest in disarmament, an equitable representation on as wide a geographical basis as possible in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations should be fully reflected. Without prejudice to these principles, the employment of women at all levels should be encouraged.

Concerns have been expressed with regard to some concepts contained in the Secretary-General's note (A/43/329). Taking into account the importance of the subject-matter involved and that arms limitations and disarmament must remain a high priority of the United Nations in the coming years, the Committee considers that more time should be devoted to the examination of this document. It transmits the views of Member States as annexed herewith. 3/

B. Letter dated 4 November 1988 from the Chairman
of the Special Political Committee

I wish to inform you that this matter was brought to the attention of the Special Political Committee at its 5th meeting, on 17 October 1988, with the request that any members of the Committee wishing to express their views should do so in writing.

I have the honour to transmit to you, for the attention of the Fifth Committee, a communication which I have received in that connection, namely, a letter dated 3 November 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of 77. 5/

C. Letter dated 15 November 1988 from the Chairman
of the Second Committee

I should like to inform you that the Second Committee considered the afore-mentioned questions at its 30th, 39th and 41st meetings, held respectively on 2, 10 and 11 November 1988, and decided to transmit to the Fifth Committee the relevant extracts of its summary records (see A/C.2/43/SR.30, 39 and 41), 6/ as the views expressed by the Second Committee on the questions referred to above.

D. Letter dated 8 November 1988 from the Chairman
of the Third Committee

Members of the Third Committee expressed their views at the 31st and 32nd meetings and I enclose the relevant excerpts of the summary records of the meetings for your information (see A/C.3/43/SR.31 and 32). 6/

E. Letter dated 27 October 1988 from the Chairman
of the Fourth Committee

At its 9th meeting, on 19 October 1988, the Fourth Committee decided to invite members wishing to submit their views on the above documentation to do so in writing. I wish to inform you in that connection that I have received three communications, submitted in accordance with that decision: a letter dated 21 October 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples; a letter dated 21 October 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations; and a letter dated 25 October 1988 from the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations. Copies of the three communications are herewith attached for the attention of the Fifth Committee. 7/

F. Letter dated 11 November 1988 from the Chairman
of the Sixth Committee

I wish to inform you that this matter was brought to the attention of the Sixth Committee at its 16th meeting on 18 October 1988 and that, at the same meeting, the text of your letter was communicated to the chairmen of the regional groups of the Committee for comments.

On the basis of the results of consultations undertaken by the regional groups, which were completed on 8 November 1988, I have the honour to inform you that the Sixth Committee has no comments to make on the agenda item in question.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/36/38).

2/ Ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/43/16 (Part II)).

3/ See annex for the substantive portions of the communications from Member States in the First Committee.

4/ Not reproduced in the present document; to be issued as A/C.1/43/PV.27.

Notes (continued)

- 5/ Not reproduced in the present document. For the text, see A/SPC/43/L.10.
- 6/ Not reproduced in the present document.
- 7/ Not reproduced in the present document. For the text, see A/C.4/43/L.8.

Annex

VIEWS EXPRESSED BY MEMBER STATES IN THE FIRST COMMITTEE

Argentina

[Original: Spanish]

[4 November 1988]

I wish to draw your attention to and reaffirm the relevant paragraphs of the statement made by the delegation of Argentina in commenting on the draft introduction to the medium-term plan for the period beginning in 1992 at the twenty-eighth session of CPC.

As it pointed out at the time, the delegation of Argentina believes that the introduction to be adopted is extremely important, since it will contain the guidelines for the work of the Organization in the next decade.

In that respect, Argentina believes that the introduction should be clear and should state, in general terms, policies, objectives and priorities, avoiding details which would be out of place in a document of this kind and which, to a certain extent, could diminish the flexibility required to achieve those objectives.

It also believes that, in the prologue to the introduction, the wording of paragraph 8, which refers specifically to disarmament, should take account of the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly, the first special session devoted to disarmament; should be more general and include the ultimate objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. In that regard, it should also consider bilateral and multilateral negotiations as complementary, without establishing a kind of causal or hierarchical relationship between them.

With regard to the "framework" for the next medium-term plan, described in the introduction, Argentina believes that the structure of the plan is particularly important. The reduction in the number of major programmes from 31 to four seems to be based on a criterion which is not clear and whose programmatic consequences are not specified. Moreover, the text does not indicate the criterion which was used for grouping the various activities of the Organization.

As to section II, on mandates and programmes, Argentina believes that paragraph 40 should be reworded, and it should be borne clearly in mind that the period to which the paragraph refers will end in 1997. If the intention is to reflect the goal of the Organization in coming years with respect to nuclear disarmament, it should be pointed out that that goal is not to reduce nuclear weapons further but to continue to seek to eliminate them. That goal could be reached through the conclusion of international agreements containing measures for nuclear disarmament.

The delegation of Argentina also believes that it would be more exact to state that "it is important to achieve" a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, and not merely stress that it was important "to continue progress" towards such a treaty.

With regard to the convention on chemical weapons, what is important is not "to draft" the convention - the drafting is already well under way - but to conclude it.

On the other hand, Argentina believes that, in keeping with the practice of the Organization, it would be more suitable to use the term "arms limitation" instead of "arms control" in both paragraph 40 and paragraph 99.

With regard to section III, dealing with priorities, Argentina reiterates the need to reflect the priorities established in the Final Document of 1978. Of particular concern is the fact that paragraph 99 affirms that the main task of the United Nations is to provide a forum for the development of agreements and conventions on arms "control" - limitation - and disarmament, without including the goal of achieving general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

China

[Original: English]

[4 November 1988]

Paragraph 8 is not complete or comprehensive in its description of the overall situation in the field of disarmament. In order to avoid unnecessary controversy and confusion in the work of the First Committee, this paragraph needs to be carefully redrafted to make it strictly in line with the existing resolutions of the General Assembly, in the field of disarmament, particularly those that have been adopted by consensus.

Some important elements have to be added into paragraph 40. For instance, in recent years it has been universally recognized that the countries with the largest arsenals should bear a special responsibility for disarmament and should take the lead in disarmament measures. Furthermore, at present it is very important to emphasize that the qualitative aspects of the arms race needs to be addressed along with its quantitative aspect.

The last sentence of paragraph 96 should be deleted.

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]

[4 November 1988]

The delegation of Cuba endorses the views communicated by the Cuban Government with regard to document A/42/512, as well as the views expressed by the Cuban delegation on the issue in question at the most recent session of CPC.

With regard to the specific references to issues relating to disarmament and international security in document A/43/329, I wish to point out that greater emphasis should be laid on the priorities of the United Nations in this area, and which were clearly expressed in the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly. In that regard, the urgency of adopting practical measures to halt the nuclear arms race and to prevent the outbreak of a nuclear war must be reaffirmed.

In addition, greater emphasis should be laid on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in order to ensure that outer space is used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

Moreover, greater prominence should be given to the relationship between disarmament and development, and there should be explicit reference to the need to implement the action programme adopted by the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development.

Finally, in document A/43/329, there are certain notions which should be revised. One of those is the reference to the "comparative lack of success in multilateral disarmament negotiations"; in reality, there are no multilateral negotiations on the priority issues recognized by the General Assembly and it is therefore essential for all States to show the political will to begin multilateral negotiations on those issues.

The document also refers to "negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons further", and states that countries should "resist the temptation" to buy arms. In reality, clearer and more direct reference should be made to the need to reach an agreement banning the use of nuclear weapons, including the first use, and to the need to eliminate the factors which lead States to buy arms, including hostile and aggressive acts against them and both military and non-military threats to their security.

German Democratic Republic

[Original: English]

[7 November 1988]

I have the honour to refer to the discussion concerning your response to the letter of the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.1/43/4) which we have had in the open-ended group of the friends of the Chairman where you invited Member States to submit their views regarding the substance of that letter.

The delegation of the German Democratic Republic would like to reaffirm its support for the text of your response to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee as adopted by the Committee on 4 November, while underlining its position on the new paragraph 3 of the letter.

In order to carry out its enlarged responsibilities, the staff and resources of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which is one of the smallest units of the Secretariat, should be commensurate with the requirements of its mandated tasks within the existing resources of the Secretariat. Equitable representation on as wide a geographical basis as possible, including at the senior Professional levels, should be fully reflected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, as a sign of the universality of interest in disarmament. In connection with staff changes in the Department for Disarmament Affairs, preference should be given to nationals of those Member States that are underrepresented. While equitable geographical distribution should be respected, the employment of women at all levels should be encouraged, in particular at the Professional and senior levels.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]

[3 November 1988]

In regard to this matter, I believe that it is necessary first of all to confirm the views expressed by the delegation of Mexico at the most recent session of CPC, which refer to the document as a whole and to the various individual chapters. I particularly wish to draw attention to the request that the Secretariat should provide more information on the programmes envisaged under each proposed major programme, so as to afford a basis for a more rigorous assessment of the draft introduction to the medium-term plan.

Moreover, specifically with regard to the work of the First Committee of the General Assembly, I have the honour to convey to you the following comments of my delegation concerning the document in question:

The medium-term plan is a political instrument which will lay the foundation for the work of the Organization in the 1990s. Therefore, the delegation of Mexico believes that the plan should maintain and enhance the role of the United Nations in those areas which are vital for the maintenance of international peace and security.

/...

For that reason, we are concerned that in the prologue to the draft introduction to the medium-term plan submitted by the Secretary-General, no reference is made to the ultimate objective of "general and complete disarmament under effective international control" and, that, when considering "the comparative lack of success in multilateral disarmament negotiations", the responsibility of the major military Powers and the lack of political will to launch multilateral negotiations on priority disarmament issues are not adequately emphasized (para. 8).

In that regard, the prologue to the draft introduction should emphasize the danger posed by the existence of vast arsenals of nuclear weapons and should reflect the priorities agreed in the Programme of Action of the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly, the first special session devoted to disarmament. It should also take into account the action programme of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development.

As to the framework for the next medium-term plan, the delegation of Mexico believes that the particular influence, competence and importance of the various organs of the Organization should be maintained. In that regard, the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament contains a section on machinery, in which the functions of the various organs dealing with disarmament are defined.

Similarly, the structure of the medium-term plan should reflect the functions of the intergovernmental organs and the various units of the United Nations Secretariat. In that regard, the Secretariat should carefully review the implications of formulating a major programme entitled "Peace, security, disarmament and the self-determination of peoples", which would include issues dealt with by the Security Council and by the Plenary, the First Committee and the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. At the last most recent session of CPC, some delegations already criticized the proposed restructuring and warned against over-simplification.

As to the only paragraph in the proposed programme which deals with questions of disarmament (para. 40), attention should be paid to its wording, so as to use the United Nations terminology of "arms limitation", and so as never to lose sight of the ultimate objective of "general and complete disarmament under effective international control". In view of the fact that the third special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament did not reach any agreement, it would be preferable to avoid references to that session in the medium-term plan.

Lastly, with regard to priorities, the delegation of Mexico believes that, rather than to establish a multilateral nuclear alert centre (para. 96), consideration should be given to the role that the United Nations could play in verifying compliance with the arms limitation and disarmament agreements. Similarly, while research on all aspects of disarmament was an important element for disarmament negotiations (para. 99), it should be recalled that the main function of the United Nations is to provide a forum for concluding disarmament agreements.

Venezuela

[Original: Spanish]

[4 November 1988]

The expression "arms control" is used in various parts of the draft introduction to the medium-term plan. This expression does not enjoy general acceptance because it would seem to indicate that the United Nations proposes simply to establish "control" over existing weapons, whereas the objective is to bring about the cessation of the arms race and, ultimately, general and complete disarmament.

Paragraph 8 notes that the disarmament agreements concluded by the two major nuclear Powers, while "very welcome", "reveal ... the contrasting comparative lack of success in multilateral disarmament negotiations". This sentence would appear to establish a relationship of cause and effect between bilateral and multilateral negotiations. Multilateral negotiations are not dependent on bilateral negotiations. There is a complementary relationship between the two, in the sense that each, although independent, must stimulate and complement the other. Accordingly, it would be appropriate - when describing the progress in bilateral negotiations as "welcome" - to express concern at the lack of progress in multilateral negotiations.

Paragraph 8 also includes a list of the areas covered by multilateral disarmament negotiations. This list is inconsistent with the priorities laid down in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

The same paragraph indicates that, if progress is to be achieved in multilateral disarmament negotiations, "a greater sense of security" must be achieved through the solution of regional conflicts and both supplying and purchasing countries must refrain from selling and buying arms.

This approach to the conditions for disarmament is a little simplistic. Moreover, there is no mention of the main reason why progress in multilateral disarmament negotiations has been held up, namely, the lack of political will.

Paragraph 8 also states that "new international norms and attitudes" need to be developed and established; the meaning of this assertion is unclear.

The last sentence of paragraph 8 states that there is a need to find "common ground between those who assert that money released by disarmament should be spent on international economic assistance and those as equally convinced that disarming nations will have to spend this money on verification and on their own domestic needs". This interpretation of the relationship between disarmament and development is new and appears to be inconsistent with the Final Document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development.

Paragraph 40 contains a sentence which gives particular cause for concern. The sentence states that "a stimulus" must be provided "for negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons further and to conclude agreements on other disarmament issues and other kinds of weapons". The idea of negotiating a reduction in the use of "nuclear weapons" is not under consideration. Furthermore, the aim is not the conclusion of disarmament agreements as an end in itself, as the second part of the sentence would appear to imply. The objective is to conclude agreements on specific measures of disarmament, in accordance with the provisions of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Paragraph 95 includes "the pursuit of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament" among the major priorities of the United Nations in the coming years, together with the maintenance of international peace and security. The principal objective of United Nations activity in the disarmament process, according to the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, is "the cessation of the arms race" and "general and complete disarmament". Under that objective, nuclear disarmament heads the list of priorities. This fact should be reflected in the document under consideration.

The last sentence of paragraph 96, and especially its second part, should be the subject of particularly careful consideration. It is unclear what has given rise to the idea that the United Nations should take action to "reduce the risk" of "the chilling possibility of isolated launchings by those who may clandestinely gain access to nuclear devices".

This statement has highlighted certain passages in the draft introduction to the medium-term plan which need to be revised because they both incorporate concepts incompatible with the views or overall feelings of Members of the United Nations and are inconsistent with the objectives adopted by the Organization through the pronouncements of its principal organs.
