

UNITED NATIONS
General Assembly

FORTY-FOURTH SESSION

Official Records

FIRST COMMITTEE
15th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 25 October 1989
at 10 a.m.
New York

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TAYLHARDAT (Venezuela)

CONTENTS

- Observance of Disarmament Week

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned within one week of the date of publication to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC 2/50, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

89-63087 4174V (E)

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.1/44/PV.15
27 October 1989
ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OBSERVANCE OF DISARMAMENT WEEK

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): The First Committee is holding this special meeting in commemoration of Disarmament Week, which began on 24 October 1989. We are hereby continuing a tradition established by the General Assembly at its first special session devoted to disarmament.

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to welcome to the First Committee His Excellency Major-General Joseph N. Garba, President of the General Assembly for the forty-fourth session. May I, on behalf of the First Committee and on my own behalf, congratulate you, Sir, not only on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly, but also on your diplomatic skills and the great efficiency with which you have been discharging the important responsibilities entrusted to you.

It is also a special honour and a pleasure to welcome to the First Committee the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar. I am confident that his vast knowledge, his great experience and his tireless dedication to the promotion of the cause of peace and the noble objectives of the United Nations will contribute to enhancing the role played by the United Nations in resolving the vital problems confronting mankind at the present time.

As you know, and as I said at the outset, it was decided, in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, that the week beginning on 24 October, the date of the founding of the United Nations, would be devoted, every year, to promoting disarmament objectives and to mobilizing international public opinion in order to create a climate conducive to the promotion of practical measures with a view to the cessation of the arms race and disarmament. This year, the commemoration of Disarmament Week is of especial significance because of the particularly favourable circumstances in

(The Chairman)

the international political environment. The new climate of the relations between the major Powers and between the two major military alliances has created a momentum that prompts us to believe that prospects for concrete and effective disarmament measures are more tangible today than they have been in the past. This fact has been present in the minds of the majority, if not all, of the delegations that have spoken in the general debate on disarmament items, which is now under way in the First Committee. There prevails an attitude of cautious optimism as a result of the qualitative changes that we have witnessed on the international political scene.

These new circumstances, it must be recognized, have not yet had an impact on the activities of multilateral forums that deal with disarmament questions. With the exception of work being done in respect of chemical weapons, little progress has been made on other subjects related to disarmament. In my opinion, the best contribution that the celebration of Disarmament Week can make, at the present time, to the efforts of the United Nations in the field of disarmament would be to promote the mobilization of international public opinion, through Governments, non-governmental organizations and the social communications media, in support of the work of the multilateral bodies dealing with disarmament, and in particular, the Conference on Disarmament.

(The Chairman)

Here I would like to stress the idea that the United Nations has the primary role to play in the field of disarmament. As was stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the message he addressed to the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of its work this year,

"While issues of arms limitation and disarmament can and should be addressed also at the bilateral, regional and subregional levels, there is no substitute for global measures of disarmament. A number of critical disarmament issues can find durable solutions only in a global framework. This, and the fact that no such solutions have been achieved during the past decade, continue to lend further stress to the necessity of making full use of the machinery to negotiate multilateral disarmament measures." (CD/PV.484, p. 5)

It is therefore necessary to revitalize and strengthen the role of multilateral forums that have activities in the field of disarmament and, more specifically, as I have said, the Conference on Disarmament, which is the single multilateral forum for negotiations in this field. For this purpose, it is essential to give full effectiveness to the relationship of strict interdependence and complementarity between these forums and the smaller bilateral or regional machinery used by the two military alliances. As has been said on many occasions, disarmament is of concern to all countries, large and small, powerful and weak, because the arms race poses dangers to all. It affects the security of all, and its cessation will therefore be of benefit to all.

In the present economic conditions, the relationship between disarmament and development is becoming increasingly evident. The close interrelation of these two objectives requires that the international community make increasing efforts to advance simultaneously towards the attainment of those two objectives, taking into account the fact that the process of economic development will benefit from any progress, from any positive results, achieved in disarmament. The reduction of

(The Chairman)

military expenditure, in allowing for the release of sizeable human and material resources, will contribute to the reactivation of the economies of the large developed countries and at the same time will give new impetus to the process of development in general and to a renewed and greater recovery in the developing countries.

It is my pleasure now to invite the distinguished President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Major-General Joseph N. Garba, to address the First Committee.

Mr. GARBA (President of the General Assembly): As President of the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly, I have the honour and privilege of once again discharging the pleasant duty of speaking on behalf of this unique multilateral forum, the largest and most representative gathering of sovereign States that ever existed, representing the hopes and dreams of billions of human beings and, indeed, of mankind as a whole, as we commence the observance of Disarmament Week.

There is no greater honour than to defend peace, the basic principle upon which all other human aspirations are built. And to speak of world peace without disarmament, especially in our nuclear age, is, I daresay, like attempting to build a house from the roof downwards, or indeed, attempting to build a house without a foundation. Not only is disarmament a vital, indeed an essential, factor for the fulfilment of the primary and fundamental objective of the United Nations, which is to maintain international peace and security, it is above all, and quite simply stated, important for mankind's very survival - the survival of every one of us.

Nearly five decades ago, 50 million human beings perished in the most destructive armed conflict in history. That war, the Second World War, was perhaps the last major global conflict in which battlefields, numbers of casualties and the

(The President of the
General Assembly)

quantity and quality of destruction could be localized. It was certainly the last world war to be fought and to be won.

In an age of rapid technological advances in almost every field, the seemingly endless quantitative and qualitative arms race has heightened the horrors and cost of war and rendered traditional notions of national security obsolete. As the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues has observed,

"In the nuclear age, nations can no longer hope to protect their citizens through unilateral military measures. All States, even the most powerful, are dependent in the end upon the good sense and restraint of other nations. Even ideological and political opponents have a shared interest in survival. In the long run, no nation can base its security on the insecurity of others. True security requires a co-operative effort, a partnership in the struggle against war which can only be established through dialogue and reconciliation."

As the quest for security, including disarmament, is clearly a universal concern of interest to all countries, it is increasingly recognized that the multilateral forum of the United Nations, committed as it is to universality in its membership, provides the best framework for intergovernmental dialogue and co-operation in this field. The complex and difficult task of halting the arms race and moving in the direction of significant disarmament progress will not be easy. A continuous and sustained process that aims at pooling the efforts of the entire international community on the basis of equality and in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter will help advance prospects for progress. As progress continues to be made towards disarmament, the international community should also pay attention to global and regional security concerns. In this connection, we have the pleasure to commend the

(The President of the
General Assembly)

Secretary-General for arranging this year the first United Nations regional disarmament workshop for Africa, which examined regional security requirements and perceptions, including related regional issues. My Government was pleased to host this workshop in Lagos in April of this year in co-operation with the Department for Disarmament Affairs.

The forty-fourth session of the General Assembly and the observance this year of Disarmament Week are taking place against a background of truly remarkable changes in our world. These changes result, as I said at the opening of the forty-fourth session, from the gradual improvement in super-Power relations. While this improvement in super-Power relations has raised much hope world wide, especially in the field of disarmament, there is no cause for undue optimism, as the Ninth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries recently cautioned us. As long as the arms race - in particular, the nuclear-arms race - continues, there can be no room for complacency. Indeed, much work remains to be done to rid mankind of nuclear weapons and, for that matter, of all other weapons, as the means of settling international disputes.

Each year, during Disarmament Week, the United Nations seeks to focus particular attention on the urgent need to promote the objectives of disarmament. This important event provides a valuable opportunity to increase public awareness of the many, multifaceted dangers of the arms race and to encourage an atmosphere conducive to progress in disarmament efforts.

(The President of the
General Assembly)

In this connection, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to the nuclear-weapon Powers to take substantial steps towards nuclear disarmament and, as a first step in this direction, to stop the further development, testing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Such measures would have a major restraining impact on the arms race as a whole and allow the international community to prepare to enter the new century with rekindled hope and optimism for a new world order based on security at the lowest level of armaments and armed forces, more peaceful, just and equal, free from war and want, and hence, more stable.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): I now invite His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, to address the First Committee.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: A spirit of positive change in international relations is spreading throughout the world. Despite current difficulties - and there are many - the present situation offers opportunities that must be seized for the resolution of problems that were, until recently, considered intractable. This applies not least to questions relating to arms limitation and disarmament. Member States have always considered these issues in the broad context of their national security. Their willingness to support the disarmament process has thus been inextricably linked to the prevailing political climate and their perceptions of the threats facing them.

With the recent improvement in relations at the global level, new horizons are at last opening for the pursuit of real disarmament and arms limitation measures. The two major Powers and their respective allies must be given credit for the significant steps that they have taken in this regard. The conclusion of the

(The Secretary-General)

Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles, and more important, its implementation, have already been hailed as the first truly tangible measure for nuclear disarmament. The recent indications of progress in bilateral negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union on a 50 per cent cut in their strategic nuclear forces and on other related matters represent a most welcome reassurance to the international community.

And yet, despite these developments, unless the present positive momentum in bilateral negotiations on various nuclear questions, including the urgent need for the cessation of nuclear-weapon tests, is soon translated into concrete undertakings, the risks of both vertical and horizontal proliferation will become more acute. The threat of further proliferation of nuclear weapons is a very real one. If not fully addressed, it may well jeopardize the constructive atmosphere that has recently emerged in various international forums and reverse the positive processes taking place in international relations generally. Only expeditious and decisive measures of nuclear disarmament can effectively discourage such a possibility from occurring. I therefore urge the two major Powers to intensify their efforts towards an early conclusion of a START agreement. This could be an important step in assuring the continued adherence of the international community to the principle of non-proliferation, the preservation of which remains one of the essential elements in our efforts to contain the nuclear danger.

I am heartened and encouraged by the breadth of vision and readiness for mutual accommodation displayed by the parties involved in the negotiations on conventional arms reduction in Europe, the most heavily armed region of the world. The outcome of these negotiations will have serious implications for the role of regional disarmament in the pursuit of global security. Each region has its own characteristics, and they must be taken fully into account. Genuine security for all, however, can only be attained if each region is ready to work actively towards

(The Secretary-General)

the global goal. I therefore appeal for renewed vigour and determination on the part of Governments in all regions of the world to join in the search for security at lower levels of armed forces and armaments. In this connection, States must devise and demonstrate a resolve to overcome existing differences by peaceful means in order to create the most conducive conditions for significant disarmament measures.

While the role of bilateral and regional negotiations is self-evident, it is also no substitute for the pursuit of disarmament at the global level. The strengthening and reinvigoration of the multilateral disarmament process is vital, given the global nature of many of the issues involved and their implications for international peace and security. In fact, these processes must be seen as two sides of the same coin and should reinforce each other.

Among the many measures of extraordinary importance that can be taken at the global level, I believe that one stands out as both urgent and immediately requiring a multilateral solution: the complete ban on chemical weapons. The Paris Conference earlier this year served a most useful purpose in raising public awareness of the appalling nature of these weapons of mass destruction. Subsequent negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament and the recent Conference held in Canberra have helped in identifying the problems and charting the course of action for the successful conclusion of a convention. There cannot be any ambiguity concerning our objectives in this regard. The negotiations must be completed expeditiously and be comprehensive in scope. A partial solution is simply not acceptable. Delays, or anything short of a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons, would adversely affect the momentum created world-wide for the prohibition of these deadly weapons and increase the risk of proliferation.

As we are all aware, the problems on the agenda of disarmament negotiations cannot be resolved overnight. However, I strongly believe that recent steps taken

(The Secretary-General)

by the international community are in the right direction, but the process must be sustained and, more important, strengthened. I am confident that the annual observance of Disarmament Week will reinforce our commitment to the pursuit of arms limitation and disarmament as an indispensable means of creating a just and peaceful world.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Spanish): This brings to a close the observance of Disarmament Week.

Before adjourning the meeting I wish to inform the members of the Committee that immediately following this meeting there will be a pledging conference for the World Disarmament Campaign.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.