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**REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF A SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM IN THE
AGENDA OF THE FORTY-FOURTH SESSION****EDUCATION AND INFORMATION FOR DISARMAMENT****Letter dated 16 August 1969 from the Permanent Representative
of Costa Rica to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General**

On instructions from my **Government**, I have the honour to request, in accordance with rule 14 of the **rules of procedure of the General Assembly**, the inclusion in the agenda of the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Education and information for disarmament".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum concerning this request is attached **hereto**.

(Signed) Carlos Jose **GUTIERREZ**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION FOR DISARMAMENT

1. The situation of the world with regard to disarmament and international security is at present **ambiguous**. While there is an apparent relaxation of tensions between the two great super-Powers, the climate on the regional level is **one of insecurity** and precarious balance, because of wars in progress or still unresolved peace negotiations. It seems that, for the great Powers, war is no longer "a continuation of political means", in Clausewitz's harsh phrase, while, in Zbigniew Brzezinski's equally harsh phrase, "today (war) is a luxury that only the weak and the poor can afford". Owing to the dangerous balance of terror that still dominates the international scene, and perhaps precisely because of it, it seems safe to say that war could only occur today because of error or madness. But error and madness are the subject-matter of psychology and education. They are not the province of military analysts or negotiators.

2. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the two centuries of senseless, economically disastrous and, above all, destructive and annihilating war which culminated in the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons and other more complex arms have not affected the consciousness of the leaders and peoples of the entire developing world, who are doing everything they can to follow the bad example of the old Powers and those of more recent vintage.

3. We cannot be sure that war has been completely ruled out between the two greatest military Powers. For "objective" economic and political reasons, as well as for "subjective" ones related to the age-old hatred between entire peoples, the lack of confidence between States, the still very widespread presence of ethnic or religious prejudice, and the existence of rivalry and competition among the powerful, the reduction of international tension is a temporary phenomenon which can only become irreversible to the extent that the causes of war and the arms mentality are attacked at their deepest roots, that is to say, those which can be traced to aggression, violence and the culture of violence.

4. At the level of the third world countries, perhaps what has happened is something like what Robert L. O'Connell says rather ironically in a recent book: "... beneath the baleful but helpless gaze of the nuclear few, the small fish are left to fight among themselves with relative impunity". (Of Arms and Men, a History of War, Weapons and Aggression, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 4) But the impunity is really relative in terms of the cost the peoples of the developing world have had to pay in violence and military expenditure, which can be measured in terms of millions of deaths and billions of dollars of foreign debt. Moreover, the arms race which until recently seemed only a dangerous game played by the great Powers, has taken hold of the minds of many of the leaders and peoples of the developing world, in a cultural and social climate of violence which is difficult to uproot.

5. In the **face of** these sad realities of consciousness alienated by war and its underlying **causes**, it is surprising that little attention **has** been paid to education and communication for disarmament in the agendas of the **First Committee of the General Assembly and other** United Nations forums. The annihilation and mass destruction of **persons** and resources that the armed conflicts of the last 50 years have left behind them, the emergence of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, the probability that in **the immediate future** many States or groups within States will have available to them even **more** destructive and deadly weapons **systems**, and the possibility that a **mere** accident or **error** may at any moment plunge the world into an irreparable chemical, bacteriological or nuclear disaster **are** reason enough to emphasize the need to replace armed conflict or violent solutions by dialogue, co-operation and conciliation among nations. That the question is a vital one for the future of the human race was **recognized** by the General Assembly in the Final Document of the tenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly (resolutic-n S-1012), which states that "mankind today is confronted with an unprecedented **threat** of self-extinction arising from **the massive and competitive** accumulation of the **most** destructive weapons **ever** produced", (**para. 11**) and which urges Member **States** and UNESCO to take steps to develop programmes of disarmament education and peace research at all levels (pars. 107).

6. As has been eloquently **stated** by the World Veterans' Federation **in** a paper presented at the World Congress on Disarmament Education, sponsored by UNESCO in 1980, "**the** progress made in international co-operation will . . . remain precarious and inadequate as long as the only guarantee of peace is based on the necessarily unstable and constantly shifting 'balance of terror', until people **everywhere** are convinced that their national security can be ensured in a real **climate** of confidence by means other than arms, and as long as the mistrust-breeding **arms race** continues to develop" ("**The** role of education and information in overcoming obstacles to disarmament", document **SS-80/CONF.401/25, p. 2-3**).

7. Indeed, many **statesmen** and widening sectors of world public opinion have **become** aware of these problems. Examples of this new awareness can be seen in the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978, and the World Congress on Disarmament Education, to which we have already referred, although no meaningful progress has been made in this area since that **time**. If anything, there has **been** **stagnation** in the consideration of the issues discussed at those **meetings**. The reason for this is **that**, despite the World Disarmament Campaign and the tireless efforts of non-governmental organizations in particular, the progress achieved in "**détente**" and co-operation is fragile and can be suddenly reversed by an aggravation of the international situation. The weight of intellectual patterns and habits of thinking, according to which resort to force is, in the final analysis, the only way of settling international disputes, **mistrust**, fears that a reduction in armaments would endanger individual security by weakening the possibility of striking back in the event of any threat, and the apparent audacity of the new solutions proposed, all give rise to psychological obstacles which are **more** difficult to **overcome** than those of a technical nature, Hence the urgent need for the General Assembly to consider these problems from now **on** both in the First Committee and in the Disarmament Commission and other forums, particularly in view of the Declaration of the 1990s as the Third Disarmament Decade.

8. Education and communication are together essential factors in the process of combating the underlying psychological and cultural causes of war, the arms mentality and violence. Only by making use of the formal and informal means which these two essential institutions provide is it possible to find solutions to the underlying problems of world and regional disarmament. Consequently, combined action must be taken by the different United Nations forums to institute disarmament education and information programmes both in the various organs of the Organisation and in different regions of the world, with the assistance of Member States and non-governmental organisations. But this will be possible only if the General Assembly considers the underlying problem of disarmament which stems from man's aggressive and violent tendencies.
