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Chairman: Mr. Károly CSATORDAY (Hungary).

AGENDA ITEM 95

Question of convening a world disarmament conference
(continued) (A/5992, A/C.1/L.340 and Add.1-2)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. Bohdan LEWANDOWSKI (Poland) said that the arms race and the constant threat which it posed to international peace and security gave each nation, large or small, Member or non-member of the United Nations, the right and duty to concern itself with the problem of disarmament and to contribute to its solution. Certain countries, including the People's Republic of China, had been barred from disarmament discussions for years. The discrimination against one of the great Powers, which was also a nuclear Power, inevitably rendered tenuous even partial solutions which were not endorsed by all the great Powers. The idea of convening a world disarmament conference open to all countries had been overwhelmingly approved by the Disarmament Commission. Such a conference would make it possible to reconcile two schools of thought: the view that disarmament depended, in the first place, on the great Powers and their willingness to disarm and the view that the undeniable responsibility of the great Powers could and should be harmonized with the interests of all, with each country contributing towards that objective. The General Assembly should endorse the valuable proposal to hold such a conference.

2. Although the idea of a world conference was generally accepted, there were still certain reservations about how it should be prepared and organized. For example, some delegations seemed unduly concerned about the role to be played by the United Nations in the convening of the conference. Poland respected their preoccupation with the prestige of the Organization, but would point out that it was discriminatory practices which were undermining the Organization's authority and making it imperative to establish a new forum for disarmament discussions; the principle of universality should be observed in disarmament efforts, not only for reasons of justice and international law but also in order to

ensure the durability of treaties and facilitate new agreements. That could be achieved by pooling all ideas advanced by the parties concerned including, for example, the proposals made by the German Democratic Republic on 20 October 1965.^{1/} If the principle of universality had been strictly observed with regard to United Nations membership, there would have been no need to convene a conference outside the Organization: the First Committee of the General Assembly or the Disarmament Commission would have served the purpose. The idea of a special disarmament conference was a natural consequence of the Organization's deficiencies, but it was in full conformity with the Charter, which called upon Members to refrain from the use of force and to seek all means to abolish war.

3. Some countries thought that the time had not yet come for all militarily significant States to participate in disarmament negotiations and claimed the right to decide when the time would be ripe; yet such procrastination, while it might be in the interest of one State or of a very small group of nations, certainly did not serve the cause of the world community. Admittedly the task was complex but it was also urgent, and Poland saw no plausible reason why the conference should not be convened as soon as possible, for example in 1966.

4. Other countries were raising questions of procedure. It went without saying that the success of the conference depended on adequate preparations; it would be premature, however, to settle the technical questions at the present time because, in any event, all those questions would have to be agreed among all the countries concerned and particularly among the great Powers, since no nuclear Power was likely to accede to an important arrangement of a substantive or procedural nature unless it had participated in its formulation. Each of the five nuclear Powers bore special responsibilities for the maintenance of peace and each should enjoy equal rights, should agree to the convening of the conference and should take part in the initial negotiations. It was important, first of all, to seek the consent of those five Powers and ensure their participation in the conference.

5. Some delegations feared that the work of the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament might slow down or be altogether abandoned, pending the outcome of the world conference; however, Poland had never intended—nor,

^{1/} Transmitted to the President of the General Assembly by a letter dated 27 October 1965 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian People's Republic, and communicated to the Members of the United Nations by note verbale dated 3 November 1965.

he believed, had the non-aligned countries—that efforts made in one forum should be halted in expectation of talks envisaged in another. All efforts should be channelled towards the same goal. On the other hand, more than one speaker had admitted that the effectiveness of the Eighteen-Nation Committee had been prejudiced by its inadequate membership; if the world disarmament conference were to decide to improve the composition of that negotiating body, its decision could only be welcome.

6. Lastly, the non-recognition of some States was no excuse for blocking a world disarmament conference, since it would not be the first international assembly attended by countries which did not maintain diplomatic relations with each other. All States whose concurrent action was necessary to achieve the desired result should be present and the proposal for convening the conference should not be hedged with prior conditions which might thwart the whole undertaking. Short-sighted interests must give way before broader considerations: a world disarmament conference might help to restore confidence among nations and facilitate the adoption of world-wide disarmament measures; it could thus render an appreciable service to mankind.

7. Mr. FOSTER (United States of America) said that the item under consideration stemmed from the Disarmament Commission resolution of 11 June 1965^{2/} and that it was therefore pertinent to recall the reasons why the United States had abstained in the vote on that resolution. His delegation had stated at that time that it was far from convinced that, in foreseeable circumstances, a world conference would facilitate agreements on arms limitations or reductions which had then been possible; if therefore the conference could not produce useful results, it would only impair the essential negotiations being conducted in the Eighteen-Nation Committee and elsewhere. After listening carefully to the statements made in the Committee, the United States was still not convinced that a conclusive case had been made in favour of convening the conference.

8. The United States had amply demonstrated, by word and deed, that it was ready to take urgent and practical action to halt the arms race and reduce the risk of armed conflict. Its constant aim was to promote negotiations to that end and it agreed that special priority should be given to the question of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, while efforts continued towards the achievement of general and complete disarmament. The United States sincerely hoped that the negotiations would result in the conclusion of a treaty on non-proliferation to which all nations would be able to accede. The United States also wanted to reach agreement on other related steps and to that end it had made new proposals and introduced new flexibility into its earlier proposals and positions. It had declared its willingness to take into account recent scientific progress in finding the basis for an agreement on a comprehensive test ban; it had reiterated its desire for a verified freeze of the numbers and characteristics of nuclear weapon delivery vehicles which could subsequently promote a

reduction in the number of such vehicles; it also believed that the time was ripe for a cut-off of the production of fissionable materials for weapons and for the transfer of sizable quantities of such material to peaceful uses, and in that connexion it had proposed the demonstrated destruction by the United States and the Soviet Union of thousands of nuclear weapons from their respective stocks.

9. He had recalled those proposals in order to emphasize that the United States sought the adoption of concrete measures and was prepared to negotiate seriously on such measures now, at Geneva or elsewhere, and also because there seemed to be a tendency on the part of some to feel that a Government's desire to achieve progress in disarmament was demonstrated by its willingness to participate in a world disarmament conference. So far as the United States was concerned, its desire to achieve progress had been demonstrated by concrete proposals. The only relevant issue was whether a world disarmament conference would facilitate or delay the conclusion of the agreements which were now urgent and feasible and whether such a large conference would be able to deal constructively with the technical and complex measures involved or whether it would dissolve into polemics designed to exaggerate differences rather than reconcile them. It was true that the Eighteen-Nation Committee had not yet made all the progress desired, but its discussions had paved the way for several existing agreements and laid the groundwork for future agreements which would help to halt the arms race. The United States was not aware that the participants in the work of the Eighteen-Nation Committee attributed their inability to achieve further agreements in 1965 to the absence of one or more Governments or that they believed the difficulties would disappear if the forum were modified. For its part, the United States delegation doubted whether a world disarmament conference would help to resolve the difficulties and continued to believe that such a conference could hamper the work of the Eighteen-Nation Committee. Nothing should be allowed to interrupt the process of negotiation there.

10. Many supporters of a world conference viewed it as a means of associating certain militarily significant States with future disarmament talks, but it was not at all clear that all States wished to enter into disarmament negotiations. All agreed that if substantial progress was to be made toward general and complete disarmament, Communist China must at an appropriate stage participate directly in the process of negotiation. Until such participation could be achieved on a constructive basis, efforts must continue to be made to reach agreement on non-proliferation and related measures to halt the nuclear arms race.

11. His Government's reservations regarding a world disarmament conference were not based on any desire to exclude Communist China or on an unwillingness to participate with its representatives in meaningful talks that could advance the cause of peace and disarmament. On the contrary, the United States would welcome any serious indications of Communist China's interest in promoting peace and disarmament and would be prepared to find appropriate ways to bring such indica-

^{2/} Official Records of the Disarmament Commission, Supplement for January to December 1965, document DC/224.

tions to bear on the solution of current problems, whether they were problems affecting the restoration of peace in South-East Asia or problems involved in achieving the limitation and reduction of armaments. But where was the evidence that the Chinese Communists were prepared for serious disarmament discussions, let alone negotiations? The channels for discussion with Communist China had remained open: various Governments including those of three nuclear Powers, were represented at Peking, and the United States had held 127 talks at Warsaw with representatives of Communist China, but out of all that had come no evidence that the Communist Chinese leaders were interested in halting the nuclear arms race or in other meaningful disarmament measures. Instead, they had shown their defiance of world opinion in starting tests in the atmosphere in the face of the treaty banning such tests; despite numerous appeals, some from the General Assembly, they had refused to subscribe to that treaty and continued openly to attack it. The negative views of Communist China on a comprehensive test ban, nuclear-free zones and the proliferation of nuclear weapons were too well known to require further discussion.

12. Quite apart from Communist China's attitude, there were many questions of organization, procedure and substance to be studied before Governments could reach decisions regarding their attendance at a world conference, and it was for that reason that it would be inadvisable at present to take a decision to convene such a conference or to set a date for it. It would be necessary, for example, to have a clear understanding on such matters as the auspices under which the conference would be held, when, where and for how long it would meet, what its agenda would be, how its secretariat services would be provided, how much it would cost and who would pay for it. Contrary to what the representative of the Soviet Union had said, those were not prior conditions but the normal preparations for any conference.

13. Another major question that needed careful study was that of attendance at the conference. As other speakers had pointed out, to say that "all countries" should be invited did not solve the problem. All members of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies must be invited, but there remained the question of how to ensure the actual participation of militarily significant countries. It would seem prudent to ascertain whether Communist China would be prepared to attend the conference and make a substantive contribution, since no purpose would be served by a conference that would add nothing to what could be accomplished within the United Nations.

14. Lastly, if any world conference was to be held, it would be absolutely necessary, as the representative of Canada had already suggested, to set up some sort of preparatory body to examine the organizational and substantive issues and to report its recommendations to Governments. He was certain that many Governments shared the view that they must reserve their decision regarding participation until they could study the recommendation for dealing with those many issues. Unless it was carefully prepared, a world conference would surely reflect discord and could result in a hardening of positions rather than a wider measure of agreement. The United States, for its

part, would give careful study to whatever recommendations were made on the matter; in the meantime, it must continue to reserve its position with regard to participation in a world disarmament conference. In conclusion, he urged careful preparatory work to ensure that any world conference would facilitate and not hamper progress, give confidence to all concerned and assure them of avoiding a futile propaganda display that would set back the very goals that all wished to achieve. His delegation reserved the right to speak again later in the debate.

15. Mr. WALDHEIM (Austria) said that the idea of convening a world disarmament conference which would be open to all countries had found wide support in the Disarmament Commission. For some months, numerous delegations had been exchanging views in order to find the most appropriate way to implement the project. Many of the questions that had emerged were still unsolved. That was due to their technical and political complexity, and his delegation believed that a great deal of perseverance and patience would be needed for the realization of the project. For its part, Austria supported the idea of a world conference and was prepared to collaborate in bringing it about.

16. To be successful, a world disarmament conference required not only careful and detailed technical preparation but also a clear concept of its manifold political implications. A number of preliminary questions would therefore have to be examined in full objectivity and without passion in order to secure unanimity in the First Committee on the holding of such a conference.

17. No fewer than six times on the First Committee's agenda were concerned, to a greater or lesser degree, with the most important question of general and complete disarmament. The United Nations had taken a lead in that field, and the Member States were increasingly supporting the Organization's role in disarmament matters, in conformity with the Charter. In the past year the Eighteen-Nation Committee had assumed an increasingly important and useful role and had, in fact, been entrusted with the task of working out a treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. His delegation therefore believed that the role and competence of the United Nations in the field of disarmament should not be curtailed and that the present disarmament mechanism of the United Nations should, despite its shortcoming, be retained intact.

18. The proposed world disarmament conference should, therefore, not be in competition with the United Nations but should strengthen United Nations efforts. The proposal adopted at the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries in October 1964 had been inspired by the same consideration, and his delegation therefore welcomed the initiative taken by the sponsors of the draft resolution before the Committee. In addition to providing a stimulus for the process of disarmament, the conference would make it possible to establish an international forum. The participation of all countries in the disarmament negotiations was all the more desirable in view of the increasing interdependence of nations, which was a decisive factor in

disarmament. Comprehensive agreements, to be effective, had to be concluded between all countries, in particular the great military Powers. It was to be hoped that all countries, especially those possessing nuclear weapons, would participate in the world disarmament conference.

19. The success of the conference would depend not only on the number of countries participating but also on the degree of prior understanding that the First Committee succeeded in reaching. In that connexion, his delegation believed that the agreed principles for disarmament negotiations,^{3/} which were the very basis of the negotiations both in New York and at Geneva, should provide a constructive basis for the work of the conference. A universal understanding on the substance of those principles would in itself represent major progress. Apart from such difficult and premature questions as the agenda and procedure of the conference, there were other technical questions which should be carefully settled in advance, such as its place, date, duration and financing, and, to that end, it would be necessary to establish a preparatory committee on the basis of broad geographical and political representation.

20. The organization of the world disarmament conference would undoubtedly raise a number of problems and difficulties, but if all countries made the necessary effort it should be possible to make the idea a reality. It was in that spirit that the Austrian delegation supported the idea of a world disarmament conference, and it was prepared to co-operate fully in bringing it about.

21. Mr. ROSSIDES (Cyprus) said it was distressing that after so many years disarmament remained an unattainable goal. There were many reasons for the failures encountered, but basic among them was the inherent incompatibility between the concept of disarmament and that a balance of power during the process of disarmament. The world was passing through a critical period of transition, during which mankind strove to move towards reason while it was still dominated by the concept of force.

22. Another reason for failure had been the lack of parallel efforts to develop the peace-keeping functions of the United Nations. Such development was indispensable in order to establish an atmosphere of security favourable to disarmament. While methods to achieve disarmament had remained unchanged, there had been changes in the forums. Bilateral negotiations between the nuclear Powers had been succeeded by multilateral conferences linked to the United Nations, which had developed into the Eighteen-Nation Committee. The establishment of that Committee had been of immeasurable value, for it permitted detailed discussion and negotiation in which rigid positions taken by the opposing blocs could be altered and differences narrowed. In that respect, the eight non-aligned Powers in the Eighteen-Nation Committee had played a most constructive role.

23. The proposal for a world conference on disarmament was a new and imaginative one. It had first

been made by the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries held at Cairo in 1964. Subsequently, at the beginning of 1965, after other proposals had been submitted, in particular by the People's Republic of China and France, the Disarmament Commission had adopted a resolution on a world conference. Since then, there had been discussions and negotiations on the advisability of, and procedures for, a world conference. The Secretary-General had advocated the convening of a world disarmament conference in the introduction to his annual report on the work of the Organization (A/6001/Add.1). He had also said, in a speech in Canada in September 1965, that progress in disarmament could hardly be made while one of the world's major military Powers did not participate in the deliberations. In the United States Senate similar views had been expressed, notably by Senator Robert Kennedy, who had spoken for the participation of China in the Geneva negotiations.

24. There were several reasons for holding a disarmament conference. The first and most important was to bring into the talks the militarily significant States which were not currently participating in them, such as China and France. The second reason was to give new impetus to disarmament negotiations generally. The world was weary of the unproductive talks held over so many years. The hopes raised by the signing of the 1963 test ban treaty had vanished. The prospect of a world disarmament conference opened new horizons. As the forum for disarmament negotiations was broadened and became global in its composition, so should it become broadened in its outlook. The conference should deal with the question of disarmament with the interests of humanity as a whole in mind, and should tackle it not as an isolated task, but as one closely linked to all necessary endeavours for world peace and the survival of mankind.

25. Such a conference, with about 125 participants, would be better suited to talks than to detailed negotiations, but it could prepare the way for negotiations in a new spirit and in a more limited forum such as the Eighteen-Nation Committee. Its agenda would naturally be general and complete disarmament and collateral measures. But it was to be hoped that eventually bolder and more effective steps might be taken towards the total elimination of the nuclear threat by way of the destruction of armaments, with parallel measures in other fields of international co-operation, which would give to disarmament its full meaning.

26. While many delegations felt, as did his delegation, that a world conference would help the cause of disarmament, there were others which believed the contrary: they feared that it might set in motion political trends which would only worsen the atmosphere in the negotiations. They thought that if it was already difficult to achieve agreement among the present participants, it would be even more difficult with new participants. While the risk of further complicating the disarmament talks was a genuine one, it was a risk that had to be faced in any case, and the sooner the better. There was, indeed, a greater risk in the absence of certain States whose participation in the negotiations was vital. The time

^{3/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixteenth Session, Annexes, agenda item 19, document A/4879.

was approaching when universal agreements must be concluded, and no Power would subscribe to an agreement if it had not been able to participate in its preparation.

27. If a world disarmament conference was at present desirable, it did not follow that it was possible. Very delicate political problems were involved. One was the question of the participation of the militarily significant States which were not now participating in the disarmament negotiations.

28. There could be no prior assurance of the presence of any of those States. The answer could only be found through diplomatic probes, followed, of course, by formal invitations. It had been suggested that participants in the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries should be asked to assist in the preliminary explorations, and that suggestion seemed sound. On the basis of those explorations it could be decided how a preparatory committee for the world conference could best be set up. The exploratory period would terminate when such a committee was established, with its own character and rules of procedure. The conference would of course report back to the United Nations, which was undeniably the body ultimately concerned with disarmament.

29. Another question was that of the proper relationship between the world disarmament conference and the United Nations. Normally, the conference would be a subsidiary organ of the United Nations; but the present situation was not a normal one. Technically speaking, the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament had not been established by the United Nations, although it had been approved by the latter in a special resolution, was administered by the United Nations Secretariat, and was financed through the regular budget. The problem in organizing a world conference was to achieve a balance that would adequately link the conference to the United Nations without alienating non-member Governments, which might feel that they should enter the Organization by the front door rather than through a subsidiary organ. The relationship between the conference and the United Nations would be a matter for detailed negotiations. One possibility would be to invite the preparatory committee to report to the Disarmament Commission or to its Chairman. Another would be to associate the United Nations in the exploratory phase and to allow further relationships to develop of themselves. A third would be to offer the services of the United Nations Secretariat to the conference, as had been done in connexion with the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Latin America.

30. Another problem was that of the relationship between the world conference and the Eighteen-Nation Committee. It seemed right that the Committee should reflect the wider composition of the world conference. The conference should help to further the talks without itself negotiating treaties. There would be negotiations for that purpose subsequently in the Eighteen-Nation Committee, which would perhaps be enlarged.

31. Lastly, work towards a world disarmament conference should not slow down current negotiations and discussions. The question was too important and urgent to allow any slackening or pause while the preparatory negotiations for the convening of a world conference were proceeding.

32. Mr. BELAUNDE (Peru) said that the problem of disarmament was essentially a technical one rather than one of opinion or good will. General and complete disarmament had met with no opposition from world public opinion, which had always followed the question with keen interest. The main obstacle, therefore, was not so much the absence of that psychological and moral factor as the difficulty of reconciling the interests of the great Powers and creating confidence between them. The unfortunate consequence of the desire for power was mistrust; thus disarmament was at once a psychological and a technical problem. Scientific progress, by partially removing the causes of mistrust, had made possible the conclusion of the Treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. But so far as concerned a ban on underground tests—a step which would constitute definite progress towards disarmament—technology was still not advanced enough to inspire full confidence.

33. That being so, it was doubtful whether, despite the tremendous repercussions that a conference which might be described as ecumenical would have, the mere convening of a disarmament conference could miraculously remove the deep, essential and latent cause of the mistrust which was at the root of the disarmament problem. On the other hand, the influence of world public opinion—which such a conference would focus entirely on disarmament—should not be underestimated. Thus, though any illusions would be idle, there were grounds for hope that the conference would prove useful. It would have the advantage of being concentrated on a single subject and would thus provide an opportunity for underlining the responsibility of the small countries to give their co-operation, and for fearless exploration of the responsibilities of the major Powers. It was a great honour to take on a responsibility; and to carry it out under the scrutiny of mankind was not only a duty but also an excellent means of emphasizing the role played by each country in the disarmament problem. If, therefore, a disarmament conference could serve to bring home to the nuclear Powers their responsibilities to the world, could stress the need for advances in technology and could induce countries to put aside their mistrust in order to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, it would be worthwhile. The United Nations should therefore seize the opportunity to focus the heat of public opinion on disarmament; it should not be so blinded by the propaganda risks of such a conference as to overlook the advantages it would entail. United Nations experience demonstrated that in the end reason and truth always prevailed over passion and wishful thinking.

34. In the opinion of the Peruvian delegation, therefore, a disarmament conference should be convened, if only to give the subject the publicity it deserved but which the international Press was no longer giving the First Committee's debates. If, however, the con-

ference was to be as effective technically as psychologically, it might be advisable for the draft resolution (A/C./L.340 and Add.1-2), which the Peruvian delegation would support, to call for the co-operation of technologists and scientists throughout the world and request them to submit reports on the various aspects of disarmament to the conference and to the preparatory committee. Scientific reports would be accompanied by legal opinions on the form of control to be applied to the comprehensive test ban and the ban on the manufacture of nuclear arms, which could not be left to good faith alone. The preparatory committee provided for in the draft resolution should therefore be required not only to carry out political consultations but also to enlist the co-operation of technicians, scientists and lawyers, and that of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

35. In conclusion, he remarked that not even those speakers who doubted the value of a world conference had denied the importance it would have as a forum in which countries that did not take part in the disarmament discussions in the First Committee or in the Eighteen-Nation Committee might participate. The Saudi Arabian representative's proposal that all the nuclear Powers should begin discussions with a view to ensuring the participation of such countries was a good one. Everyone was aware of the difficulties which the preparatory committee would have to face in that connexion. That being so, it would

perhaps be advisable not to set a time-limit, which might result in the conference's being convened prematurely or in too much haste. If an attempt was to be made to secure the co-operation of jurists and scientists all over the world and to consult the major Powers, it was not certain that the preparatory committee would be able to complete its work by the end of 1966, so that the conference would have a chance of success in 1967; it would doubtless be preferable therefore to allow the committee itself to set a date for the conference. In addition, it would be well for the sponsors of the draft resolution to make it clear what the relationship between the United Nations and the conference would be.

36. He hoped that in the light of the ideas he had just submitted the sponsors of the draft resolution would introduce changes in their text that would enable the resolution to be adopted unanimously. He reserved the right to speak again later, if the need arose.

37. The CHAIRMAN reminded members of the Committee that they should speak in the order in which their names had been placed on the list, failing which it would be assumed that they no longer wished to make statements in the discussion. He urged speakers on the list to be ready to take the floor when their turn came.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.