

A Report on the UN Special Session on Disarmament

Slow progress in disarmament led many of the United Nations Member States, particularly the non-aligned countries, to request the convening of a Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament. The idea of such a special session had evolved over the past few years as an alternative to a World Disarmament Conference and in contrast to the limited possibilities for discussion provided by a regular session of the General Assembly. A special session was perceived as offering the appropriate opportunity to discuss *comprehensive disarmament in a practically universal forum*. The decision to hold the special session was taken by the General Assembly on 21 December 1976 by resolution 31/189 B, which also established a Preparatory Committee to examine all questions relevant to the special session. Fifty-four countries were appointed members of the Preparatory Committee, which met in five sessions.

The United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD) was held in New York from May 23–June 30, 1978. One hundred and forty-five nations attended and this was the first time since the Disarmament Conference of 1932 that virtually all countries of the world met to discuss all aspects of disarmament.

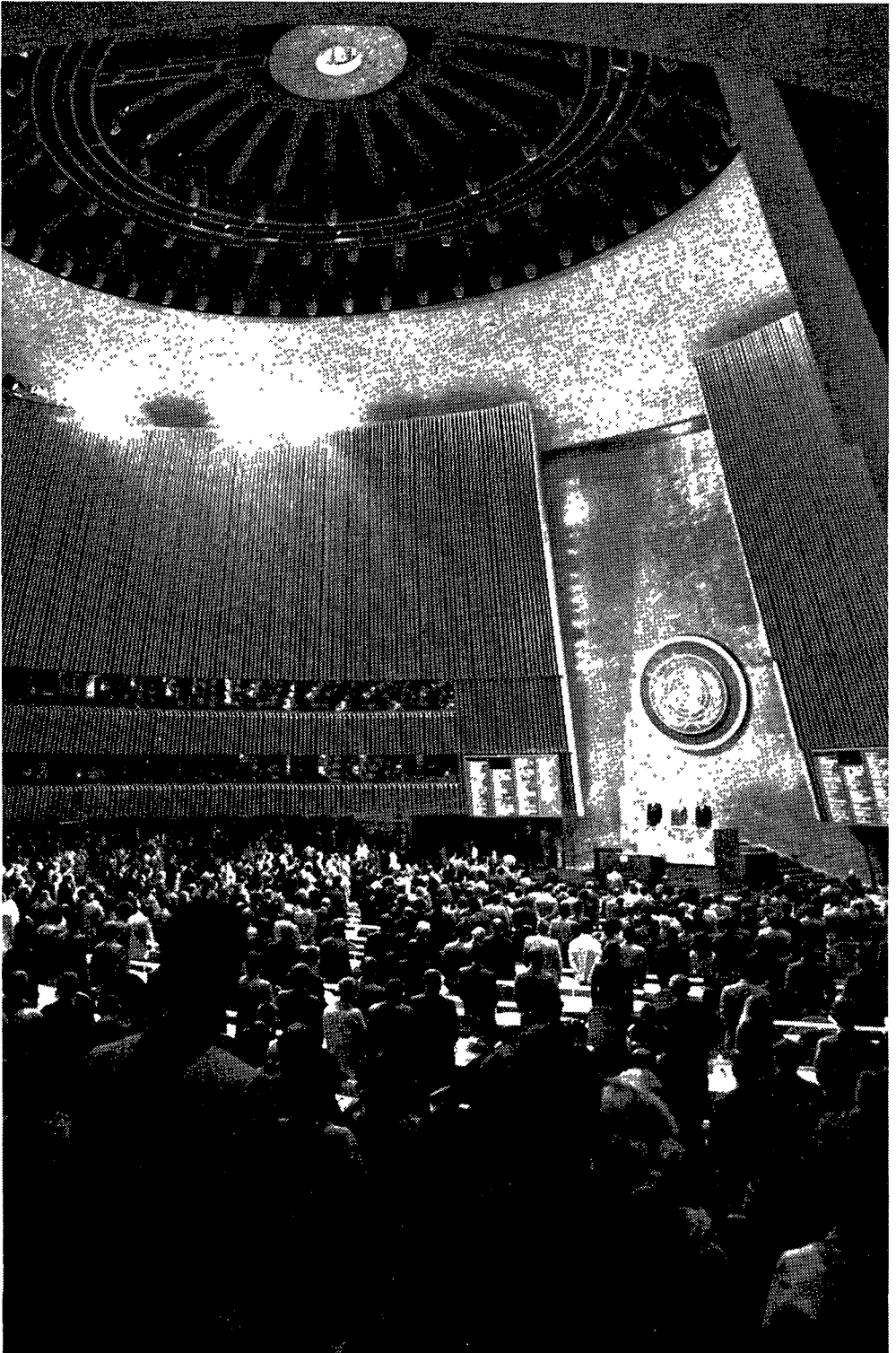
The agenda for the SSOD included inter alia:

- a review and appraisal of the present international situation,
- the adoption of a Declaration on Disarmament,
- the adoption of a Programme of Action on Disarmament,
- a review of the role of the UN in disarmament and of the international machinery for negotiations on disarmament, including, in particular, the question of convening a world disarmament conference.

The various proposals made at the sessions of the Preparatory Committee and at the SSOD itself were consolidated into one document. Consensus on this Final Document was reached on June 30, the concluding day of the session. The Final Document consists of three major parts

- I. Declaration of Principles
- II. Programme of Action
- III. Disarmament Machinery.

The **DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES** affirms the duty of all States to contribute to efforts in disarmament as well as their right to participate in disarmament negotiations on an equal footing. Nuclear-weapon States are singled out as bearing primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament.



In the **PROGRAMME OF ACTION** priority is accorded to **nuclear negotiations**. Nuclear disarmament should be achieved by urgent negotiations of agreements and with adequate measures of verification.

An agreement prohibiting nuclear weapon testing, with a protocol covering nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes as an integral part of it, should be concluded urgently.

Nuclear-free zones are recognized as constituting an important disarmament measure. The States concerned are called upon to ensure the full application of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America. Several resolutions of the General Assembly have dealt with the establishment of nuclear-free zones in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia and States of regions concerned should continue to pursue that objective.

The conclusion of a convention on the prohibition of other **weapons of mass destruction** is mentioned as another urgent task for multilateral negotiations.

The process of **conventional weapons** reduction should be pursued and consultations ought to be carried out to limit the international transfer of conventional weapons.

The Secretary-General of the UN is asked to initiate an expert study on the relationship between **disarmament and development**. An interim report on the subject should be submitted to the General Assembly at its 34th session (1979), while the final study should reach the General Assembly at its 36th session (1981).

The section on **DISARMAMENT MACHINERY** cites the General Assembly as the main deliberative organ of the United Nations in the disarmament field. Its 1st Committee should deal, in the future, only with questions of disarmament and international security.

The Special Session also established a disarmament commission, composed of all members of the UN, to follow up its relevant decisions and recommendations.

The Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) will be replaced by the Committee on Disarmament which will be open to the 5 nuclear-weapon States and to 32–35 other states to be chosen in consultation with the President of the 32nd session of the General Assembly. Its membership will be reviewed at regular intervals and it will be convened in Geneva no later than January 1979 under a chairmanship that will rotate on a monthly basis.

The date for holding a second SSOD will be decided by the General Assembly at its 33rd session. The SSOD also recommended that a World Disarmament Conference should be convened at the earliest appropriate time, with universal participation and adequate preparation.

Sections of Special Interest to the IAEA in the Final Document of the SSOD

In the **DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES** it is said that:

“Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is a matter of universal concern. Measures of disarmament must be consistent with the inalienable right of all states, without discrimination, to develop, acquire and use nuclear technology, equipment and material for the peaceful use of nuclear energy to determine their peaceful nuclear programmes in accordance with their national priorities, needs and interests, bearing in mind the need to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons ...”



Dr. Sigvard Eklund, the Director General of the IAEA, addressing the Assembly.
Photo United Nations/M Grant

In the **PROGRAMME OF ACTION** the chapter on non-proliferation includes the following:

“Non-proliferation measures should not jeopardize the full exercise of the inalienable rights of all states to apply and develop their programmes for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy for economic and social development in conformity with their priorities, interests and needs. All states should also have access to and be free to acquire technology and equipment and materials for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, taking into account the particular needs of the developing countries. International co-operation in this field should be under agreed and appropriate international safeguards applied through the International Atomic Energy Agency ...

“Efforts should be made to conclude the work of the International Fuel Cycle Evaluation strictly in accordance with the objectives set out in the joint communique of its organizing conference ...”

The transfer of nuclear technology received much attention from the developing countries during the debates at the SSOD, with the rights of non-nuclear weapon States described in Article IV of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) being reaffirmed. The Director General of the Agency, Dr. Sigvard Eklund, who was invited to address the Special Session on 1 June 1978, also touched upon this matter.

“A particularly sensitive question is the transfer of nuclear technology. ... The issue goes to the very roots of co-operation between the industrial countries and the third world. The industrial development of the developing countries is predicated on the free and full transfer of advanced technology. This is also in a sense a bargain struck in the NPT; in return for accepting full-scope safeguards the non-nuclear weapon States were assured of access to peaceful nuclear technology. The fact remains that one should not lose sight of the two major objectives – namely adequate energy supplies and non-proliferation.”

Fears about possible restraints on nuclear technology transfer and concern over preserving national rights to develop programmes for peaceful uses of nuclear energy with free and equal access to technology and equipment have been voiced on various occasions in the past year. Such occasions include the Conference on the Transfer of Nuclear Technology (Shiraz, Iran, April 1977), the International Conference on Nuclear Power and Its Fuel Cycle (Salzburg, Austria, May 1977); the World Energy Conference (Istanbul, Turkey, September 1977), and the 32nd session of the UN General Assembly, which in Resolution 32/50 requests the Secretary General of the UN to invite all States to communicate to him their views on the convening of an international conference or conferences, under the auspices of the United Nations system, aimed at promoting international co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Secretary General is to submit a report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session.