

Political and security questions

Chapter 1

Disarmament

International tensions and the continued arms race had an adverse effect on disarmament negotiations and deliberations during 1981, and as a consequence there were few tangible results in the field of disarmament. Various aspects of arms limitation, disarmament and the consequences of the arms race were considered by the Disarmament Commission, composed of all United Nations Member States; the Committee on Disarmament, a 40-nation negotiating body meeting at Geneva; and the General Assembly and its First Committee.

The Disarmament Commission, meeting at United Nations Headquarters from 18 May to 5 June,⁽⁷⁾ adopted a consensus recommendation restating some general principles in favour of nuclear and conventional disarmament (p. 21), and considered other matters without making substantive recommendations (p. 29). The Commission proposed to continue work in 1982 on unfinished business.

During much of the year, the Committee on Disarmament (p. 30) was the only active forum for interregional disarmament negotiations, since several sets of bilateral or trilateral talks outside the United Nations framework were in suspense. By the end of the year, the General Assembly was able to welcome the commencement, on 30 November, of negotiations between the USSR and the United States on medium-range nuclear forces in Europe.

The Committee met from 3 February to 24 April and from 11 June to 21 August, and submitted a report to the General Assembly.⁽⁴⁾ Four of its ad hoc working groups met during the year, dealing respectively with security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States, radiological weapons, chemical weapons and a comprehensive programme of disarmament. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons framed 18 draft articles or elements of an international convention to ban such weapons (p. 69). However, the Committee failed to agree on proposals to establish subsidiary bodies on a comprehensive nuclear-test ban or on cessation of the nuclear-arms race and nuclear disarmament.

Work continued at two sessions in New York (4-15 May and 5-16 October) of the Preparatory Committee for the Second Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament,⁽⁸⁾ as a result of which the Assembly decided to hold the special session in New York from 7 June to 9 July 1982.⁽¹³⁾ Also, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research completed in 1981 its first full year of operation (p. 106).

The General Assembly, at its regular 1981 session, discussed 20 disarmament items, some of them embracing more than one issue. Under those items, it adopted on 9 December a record number of 49 resolutions on specific disarmament questions. These resolutions were recommended by the First Committee, devoted to disarmament and related international security questions, following a general debate on disarmament at 24 meetings of the Committee (15 October-4 November). In addition, on 27 October,⁽¹²⁾ the Assembly requested a report by the Secretary-General suggesting obligations and measures to protect nature from the pernicious effects of the arms race, and to limit and prohibit the types of military activity presenting the greatest danger for nature.

Aspects of disarmament negotiations and machinery were dealt with in four resolutions initiated under the collective item on implementation of the recommendations adopted at the 1978 special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.⁽⁶²⁾ The Assembly urged States to intensify efforts to conclude negotiations taking place in the Committee on Disarmament and other forums,⁽⁴⁰⁾ and called on States to observe the principles of its 1979 Declaration on International Co-operation for Disarmament⁽¹⁰⁾ and to refrain from action that could hamper disarmament negotiations.⁽³¹⁾ Noting that the Disarmament Commission had been unable to conclude consideration of its agenda, the Assembly requested the Commission to continue its work.⁽²⁹⁾ The Assembly urged the Committee on Disarmament to continue negotiations on priority items and to complete the elaboration of a comprehensive programme of disarmament (p. 22)