

1 December 1965

4/ek

A/C.1/EV.1392

17

*Trade in arms
Disarmament Yearbook.*

Mr. PARDO (Malta): I am sure that I need not make a fully comprehensive statement on the draft resolution which my delegation has the honour to submit for consideration. The draft resolution, contained in document A/C.1/L.347, is so modest in scope and, I hope, so non-controversial in substance that I am sure only a few words are needed.

In view of the difficulties experienced in obtaining agreement on concrete measures of disarmament on the basis of the joint statement of agreed principles for disarmament negotiations, the General Assembly, at its seventeenth session, in resolution 1767 (XVII), while calling upon the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament expeditiously to resume negotiations on general and complete disarmament under effective controls, recommended that urgent attention be given by that Committee to various collateral measures intended to decrease tension and to facilitate general and complete disarmament. Again, at its eighteenth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 1908 (XVIII), urged the Eighteen-Nation Committee to make efforts to seek agreement on measures which could serve to reduce international tension, lessen the possibility of war and facilitate agreement on general and complete disarmament.

In accordance with these resolutions, interesting proposals for collateral measures outside the nuclear field were submitted to the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament in 1964 by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Brazil and the United Kingdom, among others. However, in its report to the Disarmament Commission and to the nineteenth session of the General Assembly, contained in document A/5731, the Eighteen-Nation Committee reported that it had not reached any specific agreement either on the question of general and complete disarmament or on any of the measures aimed at lessening international tension.

Again, in its last report, contained in document A/5986, the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament reported that "in view of present international developments, a number of members concentrated their attention ... on collateral measures". However, the collateral measures discussed by the Committee do not appear to have been directly related to the non-nuclear aspect of general and complete disarmament, in view of the high priority attached to the questions of nuclear dissemination and proliferation, and to the achievement of a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

(Mr. Pardo, Malta)

As far as we are aware, there was little discussion of collateral measures intended to reduce tensions and to facilitate general and complete disarmament. Yet, as was recognized in operative paragraph 2 (a) of the resolution adopted by the Disarmament Commission at its 102nd meeting on 15 June 1965, in the present international situation consideration of any measure or proposal which might contribute to the relaxation of international tension and to the development of relations of mutual trust between States is one of the most urgent and necessary tasks of the United Nations; it is, indeed, a prerequisite if we are to make any progress at all on disarmament questions.

I do not pretend that the draft resolution submitted by my Delegation can by itself bring about any radical change in the international atmosphere. It is, among other things, too limited in scope. It does, however, I believe, have the merit of drawing attention to a problem which up to now has received little attention in the United Nations, and which is scarcely less serious in its implications than that of nuclear proliferation and dissemination. I refer to the dissemination of non-nuclear weapons. As my delegation pointed out last spring, in the Disarmament Commission, we are faced not only with an arms race between the nuclear Powers but also by arms races among some non-nuclear Powers.

These arms races which affect large areas of the under-developed world are always dangerous in that not only do they tend to render unstable local balances of power but also, often, may be a prelude to the direct involvement and even confrontation between major military Powers. In addition, the cost to the participants can be very high, some poor countries have among the highest per capita rates of military expenditure in the world. The sums devoted to military expenditure, much of which is often applied to the import of arms, by some non-nuclear Powers are sometimes not insignificant, even in absolute terms. Thus, in 1963, in the area of interest of my country, the Mediterranean, two countries to the east of us spent, between them, over \$1,000 million on armaments. In a more distant area of the world, two other countries, both poor, spent between them an even larger sum on armaments in 1964.

In these and other cases, arms races on the present scale are only made possible by arms and/or subsidies received from abroad. Although, in our view, this situation is tragic in that scarce resources are diverted from much needed economic and social development, we do not question the right of any country to request arms for the protection of its security, or of any State to devote a substantial portion of its programme of aid to or trade with developing countries to making possible the satisfaction of such requests. There can be little doubt, however, that the secrecy surrounding many of these transactions exacerbates delicate situations, and can endanger the peace of the world. This, according to the Charter, is the concern of all Members of the United Nations.

I have spoken of secrecy. Actually, it is seldom that significant transfers of arms or military equipment from one country to another can take place in total secrecy. The major Powers are usually aware of arrivals of arms in areas in which they are interested, and normally they are quickly informed of the type and military potential of the arms or equipment involved. The interested neighbours of the importing country, however, may not be quite so well informed; they will probably be aware of the general category of arms and military equipment -- whether fighter aircraft, tanks, anti-aircraft guns, or other -- reaching their neighbour, but some time may elapse before they can obtain reliable information concerning the precise quantity, type and military worth of the arms imported. In the meantime, they may have over-reacted by ordering more sophisticated arms, or larger quantities of arms, than would have been needed to balance the imports of their neighbour. Thus the arms race may go further and accelerate faster than the countries concerned might wish. In these circumstances we feel that an effective system of publicity might make a modest contribution to relaxing local tensions and if not halting, at least moderating the arms race.

Equally important is the fact that the United Nations has no reliable information on the arms traffic.

(Mr. Parlo, Malta)

In accordance with Article 9 of the Charter, the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. Surely, in certain circumstances, an excessive accumulation of armaments in one or another region of the world is a matter which may threaten international peace and security. Surely, also, the transfer between States of arms, ammunition and implements of war, which in the past ten years has totalled perhaps 55,000 million, is a significant factor in many such situations. Yet, the Secretary-General has difficulty in bringing the matter to the attention of the Security Council since he has no reliable information. Thus, the United Nations must repeatedly take emergency action to cope with the outbreak of armed conflicts which could, perhaps, have been avoided had the threatening symptoms been brought to the attention of the Security Council in good time through the impartial channel of the Secretary-General.

Although the matter has not previously been discussed in the United Nations, there is nothing new in the idea of giving publicity to the transfer between States, whether by way of sale, trade or otherwise, of arms, ammunition and implements of war. The activity of the League of Nations in the disarmament field was largely based on the assumption that a full and frank exchange of military information was a prerequisite for any progress towards the limitation or reduction of armaments. Article 8 (6) of the Covenant of the League reads as follows:

"The Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes".

Article 8 -- and I take the liberty of quoting from the 1926 report of the Temporary Mixed Commission of the League -- "was not drawn up with a view to facilitating the work of general staffs. Its object was to improve the political atmosphere by creating confidence". This is precisely the object of the draft resolution submitted by my delegation. It is not necessary to examine here in detail the techniques employed by the League to implement the provisions of Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. It is sufficient to mention that, starting in 1924, a Yearbook on the Trade in Arms, Ammunition and Implements of War was published by the League, and that this particular publication was

(Mr. Pardo, Malta)

considered so entirely non-controversial that, to the best of my knowledge, it never aroused any debate of principle. The Yearbook on the Trade in Arms, together with another League publication -- the Armaments Yearbook -- contributed to create and maintain for ten years an atmosphere of confidence in which it was possible to stabilize world armaments. This is an achievement which we hope one day the United Nations will match.

There is a small, but interesting, point which it might be useful to mention in connexion with the League Yearbook on the Trade in Arms. The publication was, in the first instance, prepared at the request of the Temporary Mixed Commission, and was intended for preliminary work relating to the expected Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms. After signature of the 1925 Convention for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms, publication of the Yearbook was continued by the League, both as a useful means of supplementing and co-ordinating the system of publicity established by the Convention, and in view of the expected Disarmament Conference. It might be useful if an experimental edition of a Yearbook covering transfers between States of arms, ammunition and implements of war could be published in advance of the disarmament conference which we are planning for 1967.

It cannot be contested that the international traffic in armaments is a problem, that it is an urgent problem, and that it has, in the past, and may in the future, endanger the peace of the world. We ask that the problem be recognized. We have no illusion that publicity alone will solve this problem, but we hope that it may diminish some of the dangerous consequences of the trade as now practised by enabling the United Nations to become aware of and to discuss dangerous situations before armed conflicts break out.

There are many ways in which publicity could be effected. Although we have our preferences, we shall not voice them at this stage since we feel that the matter can best be examined, in the first place, by the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. That is all that the modest -- and I hope, non-controversial -- draft resolution submitted by my delegation seeks to achieve.