

The occasion of the Third Special Session devoted to Disarmament offers an ideal opportunity for the United Nations to initiate this orientation programme designed to promote and improve the NGO community's understanding of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament and of other disarmament fora. This programme would have three goals. The first would be to improve understanding of the UN's role in the field of disarmament. The second would be to gain a more indepth knowledge of arms control and disarmament mechanisms and issues which are addressed in non-UN fora. The third would be to familiarize NGO representatives with the work and procedures of their own national representatives to the United Nations.

A programme organized in this fashion would lend itself to a convenient division of labour between the Department of Disarmament Affairs and the participating missions in New York. The DDA would be responsible for developing and overseeing a series of seminars and workshops. Where appropriate, the DDA would draw upon expertise made available by Member States and by individual experts. The participating Member States would be responsible for developing the component of the programme which would orient the NGO representatives to the activities of their missions and policies of their states.

In order to convey an accurate flavour to the seminars and workshops on the UN, they should be held while the First Committee and United Nations Disarmament Commission are in session. The time spent at the UN should be at least one week, and no more than two. So that participants can become actively involved in the seminars and become acquainted with their colleagues in the programme, attendance should be limited to no more than thirty at a time. Two sessions of the programme could probably be conducted consecutively during UNGA and UNDC, involving a total of 120 participants annually.

This proposal emerges from the Canadian experience running a similar programme for Canadian NGO representatives. Since 1986, Canada has brought NGO representatives to New York in order to expose them to the work of the First Committee. The programme's duration is one week and is highlighted by the following events: attendance at First Committee meetings, briefings by UN Secretariat officials and presentations by officials of other Member States. To date, the response to the programme has been most positive, with the participants expressing the common sentiment that they have gained an enhanced appreciation of the UN and its work in the field of disarmament.

Canada views this proposal as an effective means of providing for the NGO community a first-hand educational exposure to the arms control and disarmament process. It will also foster an enhanced understanding of the UN role in disarmament and the part which is, and could be played by NGOs.

Of course, many details remain to be discussed and elaborated. To that end, Canada is ready to assist with the design and implementation of the programme.

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