

knowledge of this power reduces the will to negotiate and encourages the temptation to seek to impose views and solutions, including unrealistic deadlines or objectives on disarmament, through fiat of numerical vote. At the special session, the temptation will be very strong – and the greater the temptation the greater the danger that consensus will not be reached. Many militarily-significant states, especially nuclear-weapon states, could feel themselves obliged to abstain, or vote against parts of the Final Act, and accordingly to ignore or discount the results issuing from any special session that have been obtained by weight of number alone. Should that occur, more damage would probably be done to the credibility of the General Assembly than to the actual process of arms control and disarmament, particularly between the super-powers, which has an independent dynamic of its own.

Whatever brave words might follow, any such result would represent a failure of the special session and of the states that took part. Thus the negotiating process should have one fundamental objective: to find the lowest common denominator of agreement and raise it to the highest.

Canadian role

The interest of a considerable section of Canadian public in arms control and disarmament has traditionally been lively, and has been confirmed as the date of the UN special session on disarmament approaches. The Government has appointed a Canadian co-ordinator for the session with a view to ensuring that the views of interested Canadian groups and organizations and individual Canadians with special expertise on disarmament matters are heard. Consultations will continue until the special session opens.

By virtue of its history, and by the conscious design of successive Canadian Governments, Canada, a Western industrialized country, a leading member of the Commonwealth and of La Francophonie, yet with no imperial or colonial legacy abroad, enjoys a virtually unique position of confidence in the Third World. At the same time, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Canada is directly and vitally interested in *détente*. The fact that it is one of the largest exporters of nuclear technology has brought special responsibility – and leverage – in the field of non-proliferation. For these reasons, Canada has a certain ability to influence events – not a

decisive ability, perhaps, but at least a constructive one. Transcending all other concerns is the necessity to avoid the disaster of nuclear war.

There is little international disagreement on the ends of arms control and disarmament, but there is debate on the precise means to ensure national security in an uncertain world where ideological, economic, and even racial, fissures run deep. This fact has a bearing on the chances of success if the results at the special session are not agreed to by consensus. The potential for hortatory, morally-satisfying but sterile statements and for the immediate imposition of long-term or unrealistic goals or deadlines for disarmament measures is very great. A Comprehensive Program for General and Complete Disarmament, which the General Assembly called to the attention of the CCD in 1970, has not been implemented and is not likely to be achieved in this decade, if in this century.

With these considerations in mind, Canada, in concert with others, is seeking to encourage the special session to focus on the concrete and the specific, where, by the adoption of a step-by-step approach, tangible results can be sought through negotiation in the next three to five years.

The world has avoided nuclear war for 33 years, and the relative stability of the international system is dependent upon a finely-tuned military balance, of which the process of arms control and disarmament is an integral part. During the past 20 years, eight multilateral treaties and ten bilateral Soviet-American pacts on arms limitations and control have been concluded. Other significant agreements have also been reached. For example, the Treaty of Tlatelolco, though imperfect (it permits nuclear explosions), is an application to Latin America of the conception of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. There have been treaties on the banning of nuclear weapons from the seabed and outer space, and on the prohibition of warfare by means of environmental modification. A chemical-weapons treaty may soon be negotiated.

The decision of the United Nations General Assembly to hold a special session on disarmament reflects the general desire of the world community to infuse a renewed sense of purpose into the process of arms control and disarmament, and to reaffirm its resolve to move toward this common goal. The major challenge the special session will face, however, is to match this idealism with realism, and to make the abstract concrete.

*Fundamental
objective
is to find
lowest common
denominator*

Editor's note: The above article on the United Nations special session on disarmament was written before the General Assembly convened in New York on May 23, 1978.