

Disarmament when!

resolutions are pressed to a vote at the 1982 session of the General Assembly, they will probably be adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Non-Governmental Organizations

One of the noteworthy developments at UNSSOD II was the greatly increased role played by the public and by NGOs and research institutes. The disappointing stalemate and apparent lack of any real sense of urgency inside the UN conference halls stood out in sharp contrast to the fervor, sense of commitment and the impressive mobilization of public concern outside. Not only did three-quarters of a million sober, respectable citizens rally in Central Park in Manhattan on June 12 (the largest in North American history), and another quarter of a million in the streets, but every day during the session there were a number of briefings, meetings, lectures, church gatherings and other activities for the NGOs and the people who had come from all the continents of the earth. Representatives of fifty-three international NGOs and twenty-two research institutes addressed the delegations (as compared to twenty-five and six respectively at the 1978 session).

The obvious anxiety and commitment of the NGOs and of the public impressed the delegates at the special session, but did not of course change any of the predetermined positions of any delegation. Nevertheless, it may have stirred some feelings among them which may be conveyed to their governments, particularly if the members of the public decide to transform themselves into political activists. Certainly the level of their participation and their potential influence has increased markedly.

Conclusion

In the closing days of the session, when it became apparent that no consensus was possible, some of the non-aligned countries began to speak of forcing the issues to a vote in order to register their views. Others opposed this procedure on the ground that this would make the special session no different from any regular session of the General Assembly, and that it was useful to maintain the practice of having special sessions to deal with important matters on the basis of consensus. They argued that in future special sessions, as had occurred at UNSSOD I, the consensus rule could help to push recalcitrant states (mainly the nuclear powers) towards compromises.

Since it was not possible to agree on any comprehensive program for disarmament or on any agreed general declaration, the Chairman of the main committee of the whole, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji of Nigeria, prepared a set of conclusions for the purely procedural report. The conclusions stressed the organic relationship between the colossal waste of resources on military programs and the problems of economic and social development. The prevention of nuclear war was singled out as the most acute and urgent task of the present day. The conclusions also noted the "unanimous and categorical reaffirmation by all Member States of the validity of the Final Document" of UNSSOD I and their solemn commitment to it and their pledge to respect the priorities in disarmament negotiations as agreed to in its Programme of Action. It was also agreed that there should be a third special session on disarmament at a date to be set by the General Assembly at its 1983 session.

It is a sad commentary on the failure of UNSSOD II

that the reaffirmation of the validity of the Final Document is considered as somewhat of an achievement. The President of the General Assembly in summing up its work stated "this session has not been a success . . . The cause . . . lies in the sad state of the world in which we live . . . Nations cannot repeatedly ignore the rule of law, bypass the United Nations, have continued recourse to the use of force and then expect this institution, which they have weakened and damaged by their actions, to function effectively in solving problems and aid in the creation of a disarmed and tranquil world." He saw some positive developments in the increasing concern manifest in public opinion about the need to relieve humanity of the fear and danger of universal annihilation. He hoped that the World Disarmament Campaign would reinforce that level of public consciousness which the session helped to extend and strengthen. He said "The problem clearly lies in the gap between what people the world over want and need, and what their governments are willing to do."

Why did it fail?

Why was UNSSOD II such a failure while UNSSOD I had been a most successful conference, although its Final Document remained unimplemented?

The main reason, of course, is that the political climate and the timing were wrong. UNSSOD II was held at a time when relations between the US and USSR were under severe strain and the two powers were embarked on the greatest arms race in history, each trying to keep up with what it sees as an attempt by the other to achieve superiority. Although the idea of nuclear superiority is an illusion when each side can utterly destroy the other as a functioning entity, no matter which one is insane enough to launch a nuclear strike first, nevertheless the mere perception by a nation of a threat to its security is enough to prevent it from negotiating any reasonable and genuinely balanced agreement for arms limitation. Since each regards the other with suspicion they both tend to regard the other's proposals as seeking some unfair advantage. It is very difficult to make progress in disarmament, when one of the superpowers — the US — openly proclaims its intention to embark on a huge arms buildup.

The smaller non-aligned countries suspect the motives of both superpowers and their respective allies, but have little room for playing a third-party role when either of the major powers wants no outside interference or compromises. Moreover, the non-aligned countries are not as united as they were in 1978, and some of them have been successfully wooed by one or the other of the superpowers, so that some polarization has set in among them. Hence they cannot wield even the limited influence they have when they stand together.

Another reason is that, despite some of the cold war rhetoric used by the Reagan Administration, the US has pretty well succeeded in preempting the disarmament discussions. The INF and START nuclear negotiations, the Vienna talks on conventional force reductions and the US proposals for confidence-building measures to lessen the risk of war, cover most of the main areas of disarmament. While some countries stated their suspicions of the sincerity and equitable balance of the US proposals, no nation really wanted to see the negotiations aborted or suspended. So, in this respect too, in a situation where the US