

Progress in First Committee at UNGA 44

The 44th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 44) concluded in New York in December 1989. Issues related to arms control, disarmament and international security were assigned, as usual, to the First Committee of the General Assembly, in which all member states of the UN are entitled to participate. In the First Committee, national delegations make statements about, debate and then vote on resolutions introduced there. Resolutions passed by the Committee are forwarded to the UNGA plenary, where they are officially adopted.

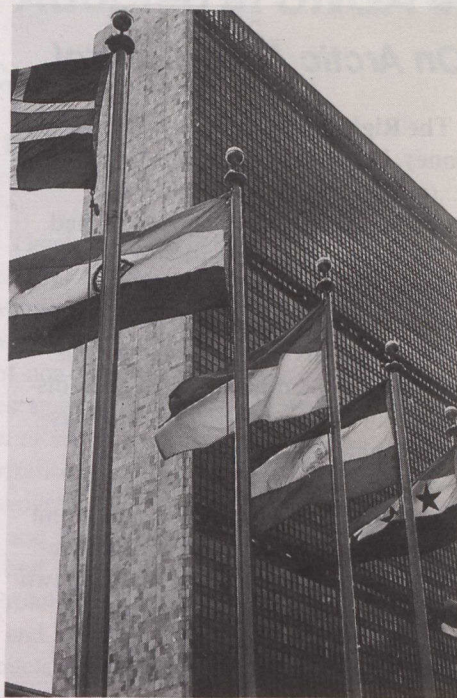
The First Committee is not a negotiating forum, with the power to draft and implement disarmament measures. Rather, it is a deliberative forum, in which countries exchange views on disarmament-related issues. Adopted UNGA resolutions are therefore not binding agreements but, instead, declarations of principle or recommendations of action to be taken. Those

Canada particularly prominent on chemical weapons issue

resolutions that are adopted by consensus can have considerable influence in promoting progress on specific disarmament measures, by making recommendations and arriving at positions that are acceptable to all UN members.

In keeping with the importance that it attaches to the UN system, Canada plays an active role each year in the consideration of disarmament issues at the First Committee. The Canadian delegation to the 1989 session, headed by Ms. Peggy Mason, Ambassador for Disarmament, took the lead on several resolutions and joined in co-sponsoring a number of others.

The Canadian delegation assumed a



The flags of some of the member-states of the United Nations in front of the Secretariat Building at UN Headquarters in New York. United Nations photo

particularly prominent role on the issue of chemical weapons. Three resolutions dealing with different aspects of this subject were adopted by the General Assembly, all of them by consensus and all co-sponsored by Canada. The Canadian delegation drafted one of these resolutions and, in collaboration with Poland, ensured that the concerns of all delegations were incorporated into the text, allowing it to receive unanimous support. The Canadian-Polish resolution urges the Geneva Conference on Disarmament to intensify its efforts toward the conclusion of a convention for the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and for the destruction of existing stocks. Canada hopes that this resolution will give impetus to the important goal of ridding the world of all chemical weapons in the near future.

The issue of nuclear testing also attracted considerable attention in the

First Committee. Achieving a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is one of the arms control and disarmament priorities of the Canadian government. Canada was one of a group of six countries, under the leadership of New Zealand, that formulated a resolution entitled "Urgent need for a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty." Because of fundamental differences among, in particular, the five nuclear-weapon states, it was not possible to arrive at a text that could attract unanimous support. However, support for the resolution among non-nuclear-weapon states was overwhelming. From Canada's perspective, the resolution takes a realistic approach to this difficult issue by acknowledging the progress that has been made and outlining a program of work for the Conference on Disarmament that will lead to further steps toward a CTBT.

As in past years, Canada introduced a resolution entitled "Prohibition on the production of fissionable materials." The resolution emphasizes that the production of such materials for weapons purposes — they are required to detonate nuclear devices — is an important element in any progress toward nuclear disarmament. It requests that the Conference on Disarmament, at an appropriate stage of its work on nuclear testing, pursue consideration of this matter. Like the CTBT resolution, this text was adopted with widespread support.

In addition to its work on the resolutions mentioned above, Canada participated actively in the range of First Committee discussions, which included themes as diverse as the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in various regions of the world, conventional disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Over 60 resolutions pertaining to disarmament and international security were adopted at UNGA 44, twenty-three of them by consensus. Canada co-sponsored ten disarmament-