

Statement by Mr. Olof Palme, chairman of the
Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security
Issues to the second special session of the General
Assembly on disarmament, June 23, 1982.

Mr President,

It is a great privilege for me to speak here today as chairman of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues. It was to this Second Special Session on Disarmament by the General Assembly of the United Nations that we wanted to provide some input by our work. I can assure you that we consider it important to be able to present our findings and our conclusions to the United Nations and the delegations here present.

Also I would like to express the Commission's gratitude to the governments, organisations and individuals that have supported our work - by financial contributions, by inviting us and receiving us, and by meeting and discussing with us.

I would like also to express a special appreciation of the non-governmental organisations, the popular movements, the peace groups the churches, the doctors, the trade unions, the scientists - all those that have together formed public opinion and have created such a strong popular support for disarmament in the last two years or so.

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I certainly do not agree with all arguments, or all slogans or all proposals from these groups but I think that we should all recognize what a great service they have rendered. They have made us all much more aware of the dangers of the arms race. They have questioned the necessity of a continued build-up in nuclear weapons and the wisdom of common strategic thinking. They have changed public opinion and thus influenced political leaders, for these are normally sensitive to criticism. Many of the groups have often been small and worked under difficult circumstances. Many have had limited financial means, only large resources of idealism.

I am convinced that without all these arguments put forward in books and articles, at seminars and conferences and without these marches and demonstrations we would not have been able to see how negotiations that have been idle now are being revived. And we would not have had the many proposals to reduce, to freeze, to cut or not to use nuclear weapons, that have been put forward lately.

It is sometimes said that the flamboyant rhetoric of popular movements must be tempered by the realism of statesmen. In these days I rather feel that the rhetoric of statesmen should be tempered by the down-to-earth realism of ordinary people who have come to understand what nuclear war would mean and demand practical action to prevent it.

The Commission started its work in September 1980. The international atmosphere at that time was part of the explanation why we decided to set up the Commission. The international dialogue was more or less silent - apart from accusations. Negotiations had stopped. New weapons were deployed or planned.

One thing that we had in mind when we started was to contribute to a revival of the international dialogue and to try to draw public attention to current arms limitation and disarmament problems. I remember that at our first meeting it was said that the most acute problem was to try to help saving the Salt 2 Treaty and keeping the Salt process going. I can only express my satisfaction that the Salt process is being reborn whatever the acronyms.

The members of our Commission were not primarily experts in the disarmament field. What we may possess though is experience from policy making and from a broad political field. Five were former heads of state or leaders of governments, five others had served as cabinet ministers, some of us had had a long diplomatic career. We come from both Nato and Warsaw pact countries, from non-aligned or neutral countries, from industrial nations and from the developing world. This means that we had in our Commission different interests, different ideologies, different perspectives. But the members did not represent governments, they were all invited in their personal capacities.

We did not want to interfere with on-going negotiations or with disarmament work already under way. And we did not want to try to cover the whole ground or to elaborate a complete programme of disarmament. Others do that, and in a much better way than we could hope to.

We had a more limited objective. We tried to show what practical steps could be taken to create a downward spiral in the arms race. General and complete disarmament is of course the final goal. But there is a need now to initiate a process that with time can gather momentum and lead us towards the goal. Results are badly needed if people shall keep any confidence in us. So we tried to identify measures that in the years ahead could reasonably be negotiated and implemented and contribute to disarmament.

We also tried to identify a starting point, a basis that would be agreeable to the different interests and the different security needs. We did not try to find out who was guilty of what. We asked what we did have in common, despite our different backgrounds, and different opinions. To find such a basis is I think essential for any practical work towards disarmament.

So our report contains some principal conclusions that we all think are essential. And it outlines a practical programme of actions. We propose a set of short- and medium-term measures. The short-term measures could and should be implemented within the next two years; the medium-term measures within the five years. If you study the programme you will find that the concrete measures that we propose do not imply or presuppose a total change of policy of governments. The proposals are not revolutionary in the sense that they mean that governments have to give up basic convictions. But if the whole programme is implemented, the security situation will be changed in a revolutionary way - and to the better.

We spent much time studying the effects of nuclear war. We met with experts in the East and the West, we discussed with doctors, we travelled to Hiroshima to hear about the effects of the only two nuclear attacks that have taken place in reality, and we heard testimony from survivors of those attacks.

Our conclusion was unambiguous: a nuclear war cannot be won. Victory is not possible. It would be such a catastrophe that the notion of victory would be meaningless.

It is sometimes argued that the losses of life and the damages even if they are great are in some meaning "acceptable". But who is to decide what is "acceptable" - to your own country, to other countries, to the world as a whole, to the unborn generations? Can this question be answered by strategic institutes, by military planners. To my mind this is a political and moral issue of the highest magnitude. We in the Commission used our humble moral and political judgement and this is our answer: any doctrine based on the belief that it is possible to wage a victorious nuclear war is dangerous and irresponsible.

Further we do not believe that a nuclear war can be controlled and limited. Some claim that conflicts involving the use of nuclear weapons and extending over days or even months could remain limited. We conclude in our report that "to envisage such a conflict seriously one must make incredible assumptions about the rationality of decision makers under intense pressure, about the resilience of the people and machinery in command and control systems, about social coherence in the face of unprecedented devastation and suffering, about the continuance of effective governmental operations about the strength of military discipline". The limited nuclear war is simply an illusion and to contemplate it as a serious possibility is equally dangerous and irresponsible.

When the Commission visited Hiroshima, four survivors of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki told us about their experience these days in August 1945. One of them was Dr Tatsuichiro Akizuki from the San Franciscan Hospital in Nagasaki and now an old man. He told us how helpless he felt as a doctor on that day, and he went on to say that science and technology had made great advance and transformed the world. "But unfortunately the moral standards of human beings have not caught up with the development of science and technology".

I think that Dr Akizuki, this healer of human wounds, from Nagasaki is right. We have fantastic skills and tools - but we lack in wisdom, we have not yet understood. But I am after all optimistic, wisdom will grow with every generation, even if there are temporary setbacks.

One thing that we all must understand, and that we must teach those who not yet understood, is that nuclear weapons have transformed the very concept of war. In the nuclear age no nation can achieve absolute security through military superiority. No nation can defend itself effectively against a nuclear attack. No matter how many nuclear weapons a nation acquires, it will always remain vulnerable to a nuclear attack. And thus it's people will ultimately remain insecure. This is a central fact that all nations must realize.

Security can thus not be achieved through unilateral measures - there is not such a thing as a modern Pax Romana. Security must instead be achieved through cooperative efforts. Even political and ideological opponents must work together to avoid nuclear war. They can survive only together. They would be united in their destruction. A nuclear war would not end in victory for one, but in mutual destruction. Security in the nuclear age means common security.

The principle of common security does not deny that nations have a legitimate right to a secure existence. But it does mean that security cannot be based on military competition. Stability based on armaments cannot be sustained indefinitely. Deterrence cannot be made foolproof. An international system based on armaments may suddenly crumble.

Common security means that nations should show restraint and renounce policies which seek advantage through armament and military power. The search for military superiority must not be a goal for national policy, but instead parity ought to be the guiding principle. And once you have accepted military parity as a principle, you are committed to negotiations. For parity can be defined only by the parties concerned in negotiations. This also means that the notion of linkage must be abolished. Linkage is an unsound principle. Negotiations for the limitation of arms require continuity and stability, and cannot be regarded as rewards for an adversary's good behavior.

We therefore conclude that "a doctrine of common security must replace the present expedient of deterrence through armaments. International peace must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than a threat of mutual destruction".

Of course the changes in thinking will not occur overnight. But nations must start now to build an international structure of common security. I would like to outline to you some of the components of that structure of common security, the practical steps that we propose. These steps cover both nuclear and conventional armaments, they concern both the US/USSR strategic arms competition and regional conflicts. We strongly urge limits on the qualitative arms race, including an early conclusion of a treaty banning all nuclear tests, and a treaty banning chemical weapons altogether, universal adherence to the NPT Treaty, and so on. We discuss verification problems in connection with our proposals. In this short time,

however, I cannot give you a complete account of the whole program, but would like to concentrate on some of them.

Let me start by taking up the question of regional security.

In the last few weeks stateswomen and statesmen have come to this session on disarmament to talk about peace. Not one, I believe has claimed that war as such is good or that it gives glory to men and countries. Not one, I believe has objected to disarmament as a goal. On the contrary all who have spoken here have supported the high principles, have warned of the nuclear arms race, have remained of the horrors of war.

In these same weeks several wars have been fought around the globe: between Iran and Iraq; in Lebanon where Israel has invaded; there has been a war in the South Atlantic; there is fighting going on in Afghanistan ^{and in Vietnam} and there is a war ⁱⁿ El Salvador. The war in Chad has continued and recently the capital was taken by one of the sides.

These are only the latest examples of a list of some 130 to 140 so-called local wars that have been fought since 1945. Nearly all of them have taken place in the Third World.

All these wars mean loss of life, human suffering, tragedy. Young men that in March of his year were alive and laughing and planning for their future are now in June dead - killed on the Malvinas or drowned in the South Atlantic Sea. Children in Lebanon have been mutilated, families uprooted, homes destroyed. And we know from previous wars that once the fighting has come to a halt, the suffering continues for the civilians. There is often wide-spread famine. There are perhaps millions of refugees. There is often a society unable to cope with the problems that war has created.

And all these wars will have served little purpose.

When after some time we will look back at the wars of these last few months, we will be able to see that the real causes of conflicts have not been removed. And one thing is certain: these wars have not awakened the noblest feelings in the nations and among the peoples concerned. The rhetoric accompanying these wars has not been one of great cultural and humanistic advancement.

Furthermore, these wars may have created new problems, more difficult to solve. The Palestinian question, to mention one example, cannot be solved by the destruction of the PLO. Desolation is not peace even if you call it that.

It is quite obvious that in the Middle East nations cannot achieve security at each other's expense. The nations in the region can only destroy each other if they do not accept the fact that the peoples and their nations have to live together, side by side. They must seek security together, they must accept to cooperate even with the prospective opponent. Security in this region must be common security.

Local wars have the potentiality of developing into larger conflicts, perhaps involving the major powers. The developing world is fragmented and torn by a variety of indigenous conflicts. There are territorial claims often with roots in a colonial past. There are ethnic and religious animosities. And there is struggle for political influence and privilege among disparate elements of society. Pressures from economic underdevelopment and the maldistribution of resources and wealth produce strains that may result in violence and war.

All these local and regional tensions are further complicated by the East-West rivalry that often is

superimposed on the conflicts in the Third World. The developing world has a great interest in detente between East and West.

There is another important dimension to security. Many nations in the Third World see no other alternative but to arm themselves. But economic resources are unevenly distributed among nations and so is military power. Many of the nations that have emerged after 1945 are small states. Some sixty-two states have less than one million inhabitants. They cannot possibly afford large standing armies or expensive modern military equipment. Their very smallness and weakness may be a temptation to other more powerful nations. Indeed, whole new questions of security arise for the international community, problems that call for a joint, common effort.

The most important and most valuable tool for common security that we together possess is the United Nations. We believe that this instrument can be used in a more determined way and that the UN and its security role must be strengthened. In particular we think that the capacity of the Security Council and the Secretary General to preempt conflicts ought to be enhanced.

We propose therefore in our report a procedure to deal with Third World border conflicts. This procedure would constitute a first step towards collective security. After the emergence of a border conflict, the procedure involves the Security Council and the Secretary General at an early stage and includes the sending of fact-finding missions, military observer teams and UN military forces to the area in question.

It's purpose would be to prevent conflicts from being settled by armed forces but the purpose would not be to pronounce on the substantive issues in dispute. An introduction of substantial UN forces before the outbreak of hostilities would, in most cases we believe, prevent violations of territories from occurring at all.

This procedure, if it is to be effective, must have the support of the veto powers and of the Third World. The Security Council and the Secretary General must have the power to act and be able to act. The cooperation of the permanent members of the Security Council is particularly important. Their consent is a prerequisite for the effective functioning of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security.

What are the chances for such a concordat? I believe the chances should be rather good. The scope of the "concordat" is clearly limited both in procedural and operational terms. But the prize could be great in terms of conflicts that may be solved peacefully instead of violently. And I believe that in many ways, we would all benefit. The regions would be more secure. We could limit the resources spent on arms. Major powers would not feel induced to get involved in remote areas, as their opponents could also be expected to keep out.

While I am speaking about the United Nations, and about efforts to strengthen the role of this organization, I would like to add one important aspect. It concerns the role of international law. If the United Nations shall be an effective instrument for peace, the countries of the world must pay universal adherence to the rules of international law. There must be certain established rules for the international behaviour of nations. And when I say universal adherence, I mean universal.

We cannot have one set of rules for the rich countries of the world, ~~and their friends/~~ and another set of rules for the poor countries. As within nations, the law must apply equally. Otherwise, it can never be respected.

Let me now turn to another area.

The confrontation between East and West has found its military expression primarily in Europe. On that continent with its dense population that twice in this century has been ravaged by war, we find today the greatest concentration in history of military power. Nowhere in the world is there such an amount of conventional and nuclear weapons poised against each other.

This confrontation takes place between the two military alliances. Their perceptions, their security needs, their decisions are major factors behind the military build up in the US and the Soviet Union.

Some countries in Europe have decided to remain neutral, outside the alliances and to alleviate in that way the East-West confrontation. But they cannot totally escape from the military logic of the alliances. For these maintain military forces that have a relation to the general level of military confrontation around them.

Even a conventional war in Europe would be a catastrophe regardless of whom would prevail, given the quantity and the quality of the weapons. And it would almost inevitably escalate to a nuclear war. A nuclear war in Europe would affect also the neutral states that have deliberately given up the option of nuclear weapons. And most likely such a war would result in a total nuclear conflagration.

There are many problems in Europe and there will be difficult developments in the next decades. But one thing is certain: war is not a solution of Europe's problem. Security in Europe must be common security.

The Commission has devoted much time to discuss the situation in Europe. We believe that the armies in Europe today are much larger than basic security needs of each of the sides would motivate. Drastic reductions would enhance security. And we do not believe that the military build up has resulted in a net increase in the security of either side. The ratio of forces has not changed much over the last twenty years. The main difference is merely that the confrontation continues but at a much higher level of potential destruction than before.

The security in Europe is a complex and difficult problem. There are different opinions as to the military doctrines, about the credibility of deterrence and so on. I will not go into that. Personally I do not believe however that the security in Europe can be sought solely on the basis of a continued military build-up. It would be too risky and too costly - politically and economically. Something more must be done than developing new weapons. Europe needs detente and cooperation. But the continued military confrontation is an obstacle to detente.

The large deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe or targeted at Europe raise special problems. There must be substantial reductions in the stockpiles of these weapons. But there is a link between the nuclear weapons in Europe and the balance of conventional forces between East and West. Nato introduced ^{how} nuclear weapons in Europe to compensate for what it perceived as an inferiority in conventional forces. So we believe that a precondition for denuclearization in Europe is that the two sides reach a negotiated agreement for rough parity in conventional forces. When our proposals for Europe have been discussed, this point seems to have been missed. What the Commission has stressed is

not just withdrawal of nuclear weapons but the need for an agreement on conventional forces to facilitate nuclear reductions. We have therefore called for an early conclusion of an agreement in the negotiations in Vienna on conventional force reductions. In our report, and this I would like to repeat and stress here, we urge that the Foreign Ministers of the participating states get together to solve the remaining problems and conclude an agreement before the end of this year.

An agreement on conventional forces in Europe would facilitate reductions in nuclear weapons. Of these weapons the so-called battle-field ones constitute a special risk, since they are likely to be used early in a conflict. We have therefore proposed that these weapons be withdrawn from the forward areas, and a zone free of battlefield nuclear weapons be created in Europe. This scheme would also be implemented within the context of a negotiated agreement on conventional forces.

It has been said that such a zone would be of limited military significance and value. Well, in that case the risk that you take by agreeing to such a zone is equally small. This objection rather speaks in favour of the idea. Also it has been said that nuclear weapons could quickly be reintroduced in the area. This is probably true even if you do not move around nuclear weapons as if they were sacks of potatoes. The commission recognizes this in the report itself and says: "however, we consider the establishment of the proposed zone an important confidence building measure which would raise the nuclear threshold and reduce some of the pressures for early use of nuclear weapons". Especially, as we also say that there would have to be provisions for verification, including a limited number of on-site inspections in the zone on a challenge basis, this scheme would contribute to an increased mutual confidence. I am convinced, in short, that if our proposals for Europe were implemented we would have more stability, more security,

more confidence and less armament in Europe.

There is an economic dimension to security. The arms race makes us not only more insecure, it also makes us poorer. We should remember what Adam Smith once taught that great fleets and armies are 'unproductive labor'. I do not need to elaborate at length on this theme. Many speakers have discussed it, and the question of disarmament and development has been carefully analyzed by a U N study group under the leadership of Inga Thorsson. Let me just say that in the long run, real security for any nation lies in economic and social progress, and in economic cooperation between nations, in regions and worldwide. We share the conviction of the Brandt Commission that the South and the North, the East and the West, have mutual interests in economic progress. No country can resolve its problems alone. A reduction in the present high level of military spending would therefore be in the economic interest of all countries, even those who spend relatively little on their own military efforts.

Seen from another angle, a reduction in military spending which gives more resources to fighting poverty is also a contribution to peace. That rich nations grow richer while poor nations become poorer is intolerable from the point of view of solidarity and justice. But it is also intolerable because of the dangers inherent in such a situation of conflicts between the poor and the rich, between north and south. A widening gap between rich and poor nations will inevitably lead to increased tensions, and ultimately become a threat to world peace. A world where hundreds of millions of people are literally starving to death, where millions and millions are without water, where children die because of diseases that could be cured with just a fraction of the resources spent on arms

- in such a world, tensions will persist, and the threat of war will not go away. This is, in my mind, another decisive argument in favor of disarmament, and in favor of using the resources for the economic and social well-being of people.

No country can hope to win military advantage by out-running its competitor in an economically costly arms race. All countries are hurt by the economic difficulties of the major economies. Common security is not only a matter of freedom from military fear. Its objective is not only to avoid being killed in a nuclear apocalypse, or in a border dispute, or by a machine gun in one's own village. Its objective, in the end, is to live a better life: in common security and common prosperity.