



PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION  
OF SWITZERLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS

S T A T E M E N T

by

Ambassador Herbert von ARX

in the First Committee of

the United Nations General Assembly

on October 28, 1992

(unofficial translation)



Mr. President,

Over the last few years, there have been important achievements in the field of disarmament. The balance sheet of last year's negotiations has once again been positive. Bilateral and regional disarmament agreements of considerable relevance have been concluded and the Conference on Disarmament was able to finalize a draft Convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction.

The implementation of all these instruments will be an important task in the coming years. Firstly, we will have to make sure that all States concerned adhere to these agreements and comply fully with their obligations. Secondly, all necessary means will have to be provided to permit the scheduled destruction of weapons with the appropriate precautions to protect people and the environment.

Mr. President, allow me to say a few words on the greatest achievement in the field of disarmament this year, the Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons. Switzerland neither possesses nor has the intention to acquire chemical weapons and is therefore pleased with the consensus achieved on the draft Convention. My delegation would like to commend the Conference on Disarmament, its ad hoc Committee on chemical weapons and the chairmanship of Ambassador Ritter von Wagner. This draft Convention represents an important break-through even if it is not perfect in all respects. For instance, my country would have preferred that the verification measures, in particular those concerning challenge inspections, be less complicated and more binding. The text of the draft Convention is indeed very ambitious and its many technical details may prove difficult to implement. If future progress is to be achieved in the field of multilateral disarmament, - in particular

- 2 -

with the creation of an effective verification system for the biological Weapons Convention and of a system of challenge inspections for the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty - it would be important to concentrate more on the substance and to leave the elaboration of practical measures to the international control organisations.

Although Switzerland could not fully participate in the negotiations of the conference on disarmament, it has committed itself to be among the original States signatories of the Convention two years ago in the CSCE Charter of Paris for a new Europe. This pledge has been reaffirmed in the 1992 Helsinki Document and signifies our conviction that this Convention can only achieve its goals if all States that possess chemical weapons or have the industrial and technical means to produce them adhere thereto. In this respect, I hope that all nations will honor the efforts of the Conference on Disarmament and sign the Convention at the Paris Signatory Conference in mid-January next year. We welcome the current efforts undertaken in the First Committee to prepare a draft resolution aiming to ensure that the largest number of States possible participate in the signatory conference in Paris and that all signatory States ratify the Convention in due course.

Mr. President

Switzerland has always aspired to participate, with in its means and possibilities in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Thus, we were glad to witness and benefit from the improvement of the observer status over the course of the last years.

- 3 -

The restricted membership of the Conference on Disarmament is the result of a historical development as well as a concern for efficiency in multilateral disarmament negotiations. However, the end of the Cold War and in particular the conclusion of the chemical weapons negotiations re-opens the debate on the composition of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, I would like to recall that Switzerland has applied for membership in order to become a full participant. It is obvious that the question of membership is closely linked to the future agenda of the Conference in Geneva. In my delegation's view, however, it would be desirable that the Conference open up to all interested States applying for membership. A solution should be actively sought and a decision taken no later than 1993. The time has come for a frank discussion among all interested States about the future role of multilateral disarmament. Allow me to add that my country will spare no effort to maintain the traditional standard of Geneva as a host for international conferences and negotiations.

Mr. President

The draft Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons brings an important additional element to the international norms related to the control of weapons of mass destruction. Beside implementing this Convention over the next few years, we have to reexamine one of the first international systems of non-proliferation, i.e. the Treaty on Nuclear Non-Proliferation, signed in 1968. Twenty-five years after its entering into force, an international conference will take place in 1995 in order to decide whether this Treaty will stay in force indefinitely or be prolonged for a specific period of time. My Government is committed to the maintenance and strengthening of this regime and will decide

- 4 -

on the prolongation of the Treaty at the appropriate time. The following factors contribute to the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime:

- The satisfactory implementation of all provisions of the Treaty as well as its universality, the latter having recently been considerably strengthened.
- The progress of efforts to reduce the number of nuclear weapons to the lowest possible level
- the progress towards a complete and comprehensive ban of nuclear tests
- the improvement of negative security guarantees and
- the strengthening of the IAEA safeguard system. The reinforcement of the verification provisions of the IAEA must prevent cases such as the one seen in Iraq and must keep up with the rationalization of means so that excessive costs can be avoided.

Mr. President

In our intervention of last year, we welcomed the recommendations of the group of experts on means and measures to improve transparency in the transfer of conventional armaments. Meanwhile, thanks to the continuous efforts of this Committee, the General Assembly has adopted resolution 46/36H and, according to paragraph 8 of this resolution, the Secretary General of the United Nations, together with the assistance of governmental experts, has worked out the technical modalities for the implementation of such measures. It is my pleasure to announce herewith that my country will contribute to the register of the

United Nations on the transfer of conventional armaments. We consider this register a first important step in a field where international cooperation must be improved much further. My country supports all efforts aimed at achieving a better harmonization of existing norms and rules governing the international transfer of war material.

Mr. President

The successes of disarmament negotiations contrast sharply with the persistence and violence of on-going armed conflicts worldwide. Europe, which has hardly liberated itself from the spectre of totalitarianism, is again confronted with the horrors of war. The resulting sufferings are difficult to understand because we thought that conflicts in Europe belonged to the past. On battlefields in Europe and elsewhere even the most basic principles of humanitarian law are repeatedly violated. As a Party to the Conventions of Geneva and as its depositary Switzerland makes an urgent appeal to the conscience and responsibility of all parties to these armed conflicts. We urge them not only to respect principles of humanitarian law but also to promote their respect. The international community cannot tolerate that such principles which represent a civilization achievement be trodden upon with impunity. My country urges all governments to observe strictly the Geneva Conventions and its additional Protocols, to renew their efforts to enforce them, to contribute to their dissemination in armed forces as well as to support the International Committee of the Red Cross in its endeavours to ensure the respect of humanitarian law worldwide.

- 6 -

Allow me to conclude by saying that the Swiss government is both surprised and sad to have to recall this issue with such insistence at a time of hope for a new era in international cooperation. But the atrocities committed on many battlefields leave us no other choice than to reinforce our engagement for a better respect of humanitarian law.

I thank you very much Mr. President.