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LETTER DATED 20 FEBRUARY 1962 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
ADDRESSED TO THE ACTING SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a message from Mr. N.S. Khrushchev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, to Mr. John Kennedy, President of the United States of America and Mr. Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, on the question of convening the eighteen-Power Disarmament Committee at the Head of Government (Chief of State) level.

Kindly arrange to circulate the message from the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, together with this letter, as an official United Nations document.

(Signed) V. ZORIN
Permanent Representative of the
USSR to the United Nations

MESSAGE FROM MR. N.S. KHRUSHCHEV, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL
OF MINISTERS OF THE USSR, TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY, PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED STATES AND MR. HAROLD MACMILLAN, PRIME
MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Mr. President,

Mr. Prime Minister,

I am addressing you on a matter which, as is evident from your message of 7 February 1962, is also engaging your thoughts.

I cannot but welcome the fact that you, too, are considering the part that will be played in the solution of the disarmament problem by the recently established eighteen-Power Committee which is to begin its work at Geneva on 14 March 1962 and of which our countries are members. It is indeed our duty to do so in view of the fact that, by the resolution adopted at the sixteenth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Governments of the countries represented in this Committee have been entrusted with a matter of such vital importance to the peoples as general and complete disarmament.

No proof is needed that the progress of work in this Committee will largely determine the future course of development of the international situation. Will the Committee succeed in rising to a height from which the remote and the difficult will appear near and feasible; will it prove able to accomplish the important task assigned to it, that of reaching agreement on general and complete disarmament? Or will the new disarmament body begin at the very outset to come up against the same difficulties on which its predecessors foundered? All those who are not indifferent to the future of mankind are seeking an answer to those questions. And these questions are becoming a source of increasingly profound and grave concern to the peoples in that the armaments race is still growing, consuming the labour and wealth of hundreds of millions of people, while the threat of a new war is increasing, finding material expression in the massive accumulation of armaments.

It seems to me that all this must be kept in mind if the significance which attaches to the resumption of disarmament negotiations at Geneva in the present circumstances is to be correctly understood.

You will, I think, agree with me that a certain amount of preparatory work for these talks has already been done. For the first time in the whole history of the negotiations the disarmament body has quite precise terms of reference - the basic principles for general and complete disarmament approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations. There are also grounds for hope in the fact that the disarmament body now includes representatives of all the three main groups of States in the world, the socialist States, those belonging to the Western Powers' military blocs and the neutralist States. These are undoubtedly favourable factors.

At the same time, none of us can fail to realize that truly heroic efforts have still to be made if the disarmament talks are to yield the desired results. It is sufficient to compare the Soviet programme for general and complete disarmament with the other proposals put forward at the sixteenth session of the General Assembly, which are at variance with our programme, to see with one's own eyes what mountains still have to be moved before an agreement can be reached.

The Soviet Government considers it necessary to take steps in advance to ensure that the work of the Committee of Eighteen will not slip into a well-worn rut and that it will not ultimately degenerate into a war of words among civil servants. The various committees, sub-committees and commissions on disarmament, of which quite a number have been set up in the past, have come to an inglorious end too often for us not to have learnt the necessary lessons.

In our opinion, the most important thing at the moment is that the work of the Committee of Eighteen should get off to a good start on the right track, that it should be given a powerful boost, which would enable it to do productive work and achieve good results.

Who is in a position to start the Committee's work off in this way? Who can most easily break through the routine attitudes and disagreements in which disarmament negotiations become enmeshed almost as soon as they have begun? It seems to me that this task should fall, first and foremost, on those in whom the people have most confidence and who are in possession of the fullest authority.

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Accordingly, the Soviet Government proposes that the work of the Committee of Eighteen should be set in motion by the Heads of Government (Chiefs of State) of the countries represented in the Committee. The Heads of Government would arrive in Geneva by 14 March and would themselves undertake the most responsible and difficult part of the work confronting the Committee of Eighteen in the initial stages. This idea may seem rather unusual, but you will agree, I am sure, that it is fully justified by the great importance of the goal and by the circumstances in which the Disarmament Committee is beginning its work.

In our time, direct contacts between the leaders of States have become established practice in international relations, in the form of personal meetings, conferences, exchanges of messages, or personal participation in the work of the most representative international bodies. This is, indeed, understandable. As the distances between States rapidly become less significant and as the means of destruction become ever more formidable, the responsibility of statesmen grows ever greater, and more insight and wisdom is required in settling major international problems, and even other problems which at first sight may appear secondary, but which frequently have their roots in matters of war and peace. This is doubly true of disarmament, which affects the interests of States in their most vital area, national security, and which calls for particular foresight, flexibility and boldness, if a solution is to be found.

I will not conceal the fact that I received your joint message when I was already working on this appeal to the Heads of Government of the States represented in the eighteen-Power Disarmament Committee. It is satisfactory to note that we are thinking, on the whole, on the same lines. I fully share your view that it is the personal responsibility of Heads of Governments to direct disarmament negotiations and that the situation in the Committee of Eighteen should be the subject of a more general exchange of views between us. But why should we confine ourselves to half-measures and merely be represented by our Ministers for Foreign Affairs at the beginning of the Disarmament Committee's work? Logically, if one starts out from the arguments you have put forward, one cannot but arrive at the proposal which the Soviet Government is making, namely, that the Disarmament Committee's work should be begun at the highest level. The work of the Committee of Eighteen could be begun at the highest level even if not all the Heads of Government (or Chiefs of State) of the countries in

the Committee wished to or were able to take part; that should not be regarded as an obstacle to our taking part in its work. It goes without saying that the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of our countries should also take part in the work of the Committee of Eighteen together with the Heads of Government, as well as in the following stage of its work.

There is thus a great deal in favour of our proposal that the Heads of Government should take part in the work of the Committee of Eighteen. There may, of course, be some people who will assert that our proposal means the Soviet Union is again raising the idea of a summit conference and who will start to argue about whether the conditions are or are not right at present for such a conference. I want to make it clear in advance that our proposal is not that there should be a summit conference as that term is usually understood, but that the Heads of Government should take part in the work of the Committee of Eighteen set up by the United Nations; not that they should discuss a broad range of international questions, but that they should negotiate on one specific question - disarmament. Only someone who has no interest in solving the problem of disarmament can say that the time is not yet ripe for consideration of that problem.

We must not expect, of course, that at Geneva the Heads of Government will immediately succeed in making so much progress that there will be nothing left to do but sign a treaty on general and complete disarmament. But if the result of their efforts is at least to set the negotiations on the right track and to outline the contents of a treaty on general and complete disarmament, that will be a tremendous step forward, which the peoples of the world have long been awaiting. It seems to me that it is worth while, very worth while, to make this attempt, which, if it succeeds, as the Soviet Government sincerely hopes it will, promises to produce a fundamental change in international relations and to bring mankind nearer to the realization of its age-old dream of peace.

It is no secret that Heads of Government frequently hold negotiations on stepping up military preparations. But since that is so, on what grounds can anyone object to holding the first meetings of the Committee of Eighteen at the highest level, so that we can work in a fitting manner for the noble aim of disarmament! Posterity would not forgive us if we let slip the opportunity to discuss the problem of disarmament in a forum of such authority as a meeting of the Heads of Government of eighteen States held specially for the purpose.

I hope that you will understand the Soviet Government's motives in proposing that the Committee of Eighteen should begin its work at the Head of Government (or Chief of State) level and that you will react favourably to this proposal.

I have sent similar messages to all the Heads of Government (or Chiefs of State) of the countries represented in the eighteen-member Committee on Disarmament.

(Signed) N. KHRUSHCHEV
Chairman of the Council of
Ministers of the USSR

10 February 1962
