

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 28 February 2006, at 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr. PARK In-kook (Republic of Korea)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1007th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At our morning meeting we learned with great sadness of the passing away of the former member of the United States delegation, Mr. Ed Cummings, who served as Counsellor for Legal Affairs at the United States Mission in Geneva and head of the United States delegation to most of the CCW-related meetings. On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament, I offer my sincerest condolences to the family of the late Mr. Cummings and to the delegation of the United States.

The Conference will continue its debate on nuclear disarmament with the sub-item “Assessment on implementation of current and nuclear disarmament”.

I have the following speakers for the plenary this afternoon: Sweden, the Netherlands, Mexico and Norway.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Borsiin Bonnier of Sweden.

Ms. BORSIIN BONNIER (Sweden): Mr. President, may I first say that it is a true pleasure to see you in the Chair? - and I want to express my own and my delegation's appreciation for the efforts you have made, together with the other Presidents for this year.

Last spring and summer, my delegation made two suggestions on how we could begin to approach the issue of nuclear disarmament in the CD, namely by an open and transparent stocktaking of what disarmament efforts have already been made or are ongoing and by a discussion of the role of nuclear weapons in the military and security doctrines of today. I welcome that two nuclear-weapons States have made statements on this this morning. I suggest that we invite all those possessing nuclear weapons to present us with the state of affairs and that we set aside some further time for this purpose later on.

Today I wish to share with you some thoughts on risks or threats related to nuclear weapons.

Firstly, we have the risk that terrorists could acquire nuclear weapons, the risk of nuclear terrorism. We all know that a terrorist cannot be deterred from using nuclear weapons by fear of retaliation and that nuclear weapons are useless against a terrorist or terrorist network. Nuclear weapons thus serve no purpose in meeting this relatively new threat. The problem is rather the existing arsenals and stockpiles of fissile materials and their security. Can we, the non-nuclear-weapons States, rest assured that the nuclear complexes across the world are fully secured? Presumably, most at risk would be the more easily transportable non-strategic arsenals. Also, there is no global inventory of existing fissile material stockpiles. And much of it is not under safeguards. How would we even know if some amount “disappeared”? I thank those nuclear-weapons States that commented on some aspects of those issues this morning, and I look forward to further detailed discussions later.

(Ms. Borsiin Bonnier, Sweden)

Secondly, the risk of proliferation, the possibility that more States might acquire nuclear weapons. Well, proliferation has happened. Again, nuclear weapons can do nothing to counter proliferation. Actually it might very well work the other way, and we must be wary of the impact which the nuclear choices of some have on the security decisions of others. If development of nuclear weapons continues, some may become inclined to disregard calls to forgo the possibility of building up their own nuclear arsenals or at least to be less supportive of non-proliferation efforts. We have recently experienced the strain this has put on the NPT. In a regional context possession itself risks triggering weapons decisions in neighbouring countries, leading to increased regional and global tensions.

Thirdly, the existing arsenals. Notwithstanding serious disarmament efforts being made, which I do recognize, there are still almost 30,000 nuclear weapons in the world - and more than 25,000 of them are in the United States and the Russian Federation, this according to figures from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and I stand to be corrected if more authoritative data come up. We often hear that as long as nuclear threats remain, effective nuclear deterrents are needed. To my mind, this only underlines the imperative to pursue an energetic, systematic and coordinated build-down of existing arsenals. One particular concern is that more than a decade after the end of the cold war, large parts of strategic arsenals are still configured on hair-trigger alert, to be launched within minutes of the warning of an attack. This carries the risk of unauthorized or accidental launch or a launch set off based on flawed intelligence, or perhaps even by an intrusion into the computer systems. Much would be gained in terms of global security if the nuclear-weapons States could agree to stand down from hair-trigger postures.

Another important issue in relation to existing arsenals is the doctrines for their use. And here I would like to turn to those possessing nuclear weapons.

For decades it has been considered imperative to keep the threshold for possible use very high and to advance the norm against use. In principle the use of nuclear weapons was not considered other than in response to a nuclear attack. Thus it has been considered a taboo to use nuclear weapons in tactical missions. Is this still the case? What prompts the question are indications that nuclear weapons might be considered to be used pre-emptively to attack high-value targets. Also, we hear about plans to develop new kinds of nuclear weapons with more useable (low-yield) characteristics. Such developments would devalue rather than strengthen the norm against acquisition and use. But before we draw any conclusions it would be important to hear from those who possess nuclear weapons on how they see these aspects of the doctrine.

My delegation looks forward to a continued interactive debate on these and other issues and will come back and participate in the light of comments by others.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Borsiin Bonnier of Sweden for her statement and suggestions and for the kind words addressed to the Chair and the P6. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Mr. Johannes Landman.

Mr. LANDMAN (Netherlands): Mr. President, since this is not the first time I am taking the floor under your presidency, I can address the important subject on hand directly.

The Netherlands continues to consider the total elimination of nuclear arsenals as one of our most important objectives in the field of disarmament. As in the past we will continue to urge, for as long as it takes, the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear weapons. We shall go on demanding compliance by all States parties with article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that enshrines the following commitment: “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.” As a member of the European Union, we will continue to work with our EU partners to contribute to progress in the CD on this and other topics.

The Netherlands does acknowledge the importance of the steps the nuclear-weapon States have taken so far to reduce their nuclear arsenals. In this regard we welcomed the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation. We consider this Moscow Treaty a positive step in the field of international security, disarmament and non-proliferation and a clear sign of the end of the nuclear arms race, as so aptly illustrated before me this morning by our Italian colleague, Ambassador Trezza.

However, much more needs to be done. Despite substantial reductions - Russia and the United States provided some figures this morning - nuclear arsenals are still vast. Nuclear-weapons States - some more than others - still feel the need to maintain a high number of nuclear weapons. The Moscow Treaty lacks transparency and irreversibility, however important it is in itself. And implementation of the “13 practical steps” action plan for systematic and progressive efforts to achieve complete disarmament, contained in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, still has not taken off.

Non-possessors who were - rightly - expecting that the nuclear-weapon States would stick to their end of the bargain start questioning the validity of the Treaty. In some cases, countries have started openly or more covertly to pursue the possession of nuclear arms themselves.

Of course, we are not blind to the volatile international security environment. Ongoing reports of actual proliferation to countries with dubious records, the risk of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of non-State actors, the illicit trade in nuclear-weapon-related materials, will sooner or later lead to a catastrophe if nothing is done.

These are very serious challenges to international security that need to be tackled decisively - but not by diminishing commitment to one of the basic principles from the NPT. It is difficult to stick to one end of a bargain if it is perceived that others do not do their part. But in our opinion, the more trustworthy a State is in the international arena, the more benefit this will bring such a State in the medium and long term.

(Mr. Landman, Netherlands)

The Netherlands has actively supported the establishment of a subsidiary body in the Conference on Disarmament to deal with nuclear disarmament in further detail and as a gradual process. It is our hope that these focused discussions initiated under your chairmanship, Mr. President, will pave the way to arrive, before the end of the year, at a common understanding of the threats we are facing and, above all, of what, realistically speaking, can be done immediately at the negotiating table. In that regard, we feel that starting negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty is the next step to be taken. After all, already a decade ago all of us agreed on the principle of starting these negotiations.

Agreeing to an FMCT is not only the most effective means for further reducing the threat of the illicit proliferation of fissile material, and at the same time imposing clear restrictions on nuclear-weapons States themselves. It would also form a direct contribution to nuclear disarmament.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Landman of the Netherlands for his statement and suggestions. I now give the floor to Ambassador Macedo of Mexico.

Mr. MACEDO (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all allow me to congratulate you on taking the Chair of this body and assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation. I would also like to thank Ambassador Rapacki of Poland for the manner in which he served as President, making it possible to reach agreement to carry out structured debates on the agenda items in a predictable and orderly way throughout the 2006 session. While we acknowledge that this was a continuation of the efforts we began in 2004, this does not settle the pressing need to reach agreement concerning the work programme and thus comply with the mandate of this forum, namely, to negotiate.

I should also like to associate my delegation with the condolences conveyed to the delegations of the Philippines, Bangladesh and the Russian Federation for the disasters they have suffered, and to the delegation of the United States for the loss of our colleague, Mr. Ed Cummings.

Lastly, to conclude this introduction, I should like to state that Mexico fully associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Iraq on behalf of the Group of 21 and reiterates its conviction that the only guarantee against the use of nuclear weapons is their total elimination and the certainty that they will never again be produced.

We hope that the exercise we are beginning today will not be confined to a mere exchange of opinions concerning the various items, but will enable us to make progress and to have an in-depth substantive discussion. We already know the positions of the delegations on matters of principle. We should now like to hear specific proposals.

Mr. President, you have suggested to us that today we carry out an assessment of the implementation of nuclear disarmament. We assume that that assessment refers specifically to the commitments entered into. Consequently, it is logical to expect, as the distinguished representative of Brazil said this morning, that it will be principally the nuclear-weapon States that will submit elements for an exhaustive assessment.

(Mr. Macedo, Mexico)

We are aware of the fact that, while there has been some progress in nuclear disarmament, it is clearly insufficient. It is obvious that much remains to be done to comply faithfully with article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the unequivocal commitment of the nuclear States to nuclear disarmament.

In order to be able to carry out a more objective assessment of the progress made, a greater degree of transparency is essential. Without that, the task previously described will become impossible. It is for this reason that, in the framework of the NPT, Mexico has supported the submission of regular reports on measures taken in order to achieve nuclear disarmament. Mexico considers that these reports should follow the logic of the “13 practical steps”. We consider that as States parties which are fully complying with the provisions of the NPT, it is our right to demand greater transparency.

In this context, we are grateful for the information provided this morning by the distinguished representatives of the Russian Federation, France and the United States. While we acknowledge and properly appreciate this positive attitude, we consider that the information provided is uneven and is still insufficient for a comprehensive evaluation. It is necessary to have even more precise information concerning the number of existing nuclear weapons, their state of alert and the existence of material capable of being used for nuclear weapons. In this way we can have a clear idea of what has been done and what remains to be done.

(continued in French)

If you will allow me, Mr. President, I should like to make a few brief remarks here in connection with certain comments made this morning by my friend Ambassador François Rivasseau, the Permanent Representative of France. I venture to take the floor in French to ensure that I am neither misheard nor misunderstood. Towards the end of his speech, the distinguished Permanent Representative of France stated, and I quote his words: “The call for an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament parallel to the ad hoc committee on a cut-off no longer makes sense in our eyes”. I must admit that I may not have completely grasped the subtlety of this comment, but this is a conclusion I cannot accept. In the eyes of my delegation, the setting up of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament is necessary whether or not we have begun the negotiations on a treaty to ban fissile material. To be very precise, the one is a complement to the other, unless, of course, these negotiations also cover the elimination of existing arsenals. With all due respect to my friend Ambassador François Rivasseau, I am obliged to note that his logic, which is meant to be very Cartesian, is too much for my tiny brain.

(continued in Spanish)

As you will recall, in the framework of the 2005 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, my delegation submitted a document on compliance. In it emphasis was laid upon the need to reach a common understanding concerning the meaning of compliance and the implementation of the commitments derived from the NPT in order to be able to evaluate them objectively. A common understanding should take as its foundation not just the Treaty but also

(Mr. Macedo, Mexico)

the agreements reached during the Review Conferences. Unfortunately, as we all know, the Conference was not only a failure, but was not even able to address the substance because of the time lost in futile discussions on procedure. My delegation hopes that in 2010 we will not miss one more opportunity to make progress on this issue.

Lastly, we hope that in the context of the exercise we are beginning today, we will be able to hear replies to our questions.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Macedo of Mexico for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Mr. Kjetil Paulsen of Norway.

Mr. PAULSEN (Norway): Mr. President, in case I have not said it before, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. You have my delegation's full support in your endeavours.

After having listened to the statements this morning, it has been increasingly difficult to distinguish between your two sub-items, so my remarks will, to some extent, address both of them.

A lot more needs to be done, but considerable reductions in nuclear-weapons arsenals have taken place since 1990. But we had in relation to this a very interesting discussion this morning about transparency. Greater and more systematic transparency about specific disarmament action, as well as about production and stocks of fissile material, would be a significant confidence-building measure, conducive also to action in the field of non-proliferation, as pointed out by many this morning, including the Ambassador of Brazil. Needless to say, a dismantled and destroyed nuclear weapon cannot be proliferated.

While greatly appreciating the United States and Russian statements this morning on specific nuclear disarmament measures, we nonetheless call on the nuclear-weapon States to be more systematically transparent about their disarmament efforts. We assume that there must be an inventory of all nuclear weapons. Consequently, when nuclear weapons are moved or eliminated, this inventory must be modified. There must, in other words, be records. And it is not obvious and evident for non-nuclear-weapon States why such records cannot be made public - sanitized, if need be, for any sensitive classified material, for instance, on weapon details. In effect, the information procedure should in principle go like this: warhead A was or will be sent to facility B on day C and destroyed on day D.

In more general terms, Norway has pledged support for several years for the destruction of nuclear weapons and nuclear material, not least, financially. Since 1995, we have spent about US\$ 150 million on nuclear safety projects in north-western Russia, and in this context I would echo the representative of Italy in expressing support for the G8 global partnership for eliminating nuclear arsenals and other weapons of mass destruction.

(Mr. Paulsen, Norway)

The principle of transparency certainly also applies to the dismantling of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Again, clearly, progress has been made, as pointed out by the Russian Ambassador this morning in a very interesting and substantive statement, but it would nevertheless be useful to measure this progress even more accurately in order to sustain a sense of greater security. Because the destruction of these weapons does indeed provide us with enhanced security, particularly in neighbouring non-nuclear-weapon States, but also in the international community as a whole because of the reduced proliferation risks.

I encourage the parties concerned to update, on a regular basis, the international community on the implementation of the Presidential initiatives of 1991-1992 concerning reductions of non-strategic nuclear arsenals.

A longer alert time for use of nuclear warheads and the deactivation of nuclear systems are positive elements in the disarmament context, but our ultimate goal is indeed full irreversibility. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty is a much-welcomed disarmament initiative, and it is our hope that this instrument can be strengthened with irreversibility and verification provisions.

Finally, the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones was raised by many this morning. Clearly my Government supports the establishment and sustainability of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Ambassador of Syria recalled that the international community on numerous occasions has encouraged the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Obviously, this is also a goal strongly supported by my Government, and I would like to reiterate that the countries should ratify and implement the NPT and all other treaties addressing weapons of mass destruction.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Norway, Mr. Paulsen, for his statement and for the kind words address to the Chair. I now give the floor to Ambassador Caughley of New Zealand.

Mr. CAUGHLEY (New Zealand): Mr. President, I congratulate you on the manner in which you are presiding over this Conference under the presidency of the Republic of Korea. I am pleased to take the floor today to discuss nuclear disarmament, an issue to which my delegation has attached the highest priority ever since the use and testing of nuclear weapons in the region from which I come.

I want to begin by mentioning some of the legal underpinnings for nuclear disarmament as an end in itself, and then I wish to explain why we see nuclear disarmament as a real tool in the crucial campaign against proliferation.

The legal imperative for nuclear disarmament is clear. Over the years, a significant body of international law and treaty obligations has accumulated, supporting effective progress towards nuclear disarmament. Key amongst these, as others have already noted,

(Mr. Caughley, New Zealand)

was the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Building on this finding was the 2000 NPT Review Conference consensus outcome, which as we all know outlined practical steps for the achievement of nuclear disarmament, and under which nuclear-weapons States gave an “unequivocal undertaking” to eliminate nuclear arsenals.

Unfortunately, nuclear disarmament proceeds much too slowly for my delegation. Progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons will inevitably be hampered while individual security doctrines continue to argue a military utility for nuclear weapons, whether in active use or as a deterrent force. We thank France for the recent clarifications on its nuclear deterrence policy offered in this chamber, and we are encouraged that other nuclear-weapon States are already actively contributing to this nuclear disarmament debate. Mutual understanding of security doctrines provides a valuable step in encouraging States to examine ways in which their doctrines could be reconfigured without compromising security.

In the pursuit of such an exercise, we would need to take a hard look at nuclear deterrence from a numbers standpoint. The numbers are coming down, as I will acknowledge shortly, but how many of these hugely destructive and toxic weapons are needed to deter a potential adversary - tens of thousands (as at present), thousands (perhaps by 2012), hundreds, a handful?

What about the size and sophistication of existing conventional weapons in the arsenals of those that also possess nuclear weapons? The answers to these questions are profoundly relevant for most if not all members of the international community.

We need to examine not only individual security doctrines, but also regional strategic alliances. NATO would be a useful case study in this respect. We would be interested to learn how the continuing justification of nuclear deterrence is reconciled within the alliance, given the overwhelming collective conventional force power held between its members. We commend those countries that are working to question and diminish the role of nuclear weapons in collective military doctrines.

I now come to my second point.

We remain convinced that positive progress on nuclear disarmament would improve global security with respect to proliferation.

As we have said before, with the New Agenda Coalition, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes. Without for a moment subjugating our proliferation concerns, we all continue to insist on systematic and progressive efforts to implement the obligation in the NPT’s article VI to pursue negotiations on effective measures for nuclear disarmament. We cannot accept that the unequivocal undertaking for the elimination of nuclear weapons, given to this end in the year 2000, was lightly made or was contingent in any way - the very word “unequivocal” brooks no such conclusion.

(Mr. Caughley, New Zealand)

It has been asserted by some that our focus on nuclear disarmament equates to a de facto argument that the retention of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States or the inadequate rate of elimination of those weapons is somehow an excuse for proliferation by others. Let me make clear in this forum that the continued retention of nuclear weapons or the unsatisfactory rate of progress in the elimination of those weapons is not a justification for proliferation by other States.

We also reject the argument that those of us who attach a high public priority to nuclear disarmament causes are failing to take into account the geopolitical realities of today's world. Nuclear disarmament encompasses the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons no matter in whose hands they are held. We no more wish existing nuclear arsenals to be sustained than we will tolerate parallel development of such arsenals by additional States.

In this context, the commentator, Joseph Cirincione made a useful observation in the publication Disarmament Diplomacy last year, when he asserted that to obtain full cooperation against the spread of nuclear weapons, "the nuclear-weapon States must show that tougher non-proliferation rules not only benefit the powerful, but constrain them as well ... It is difficult, if not impossible", he continued, "to demonstrate either [notion] when immensely powerful nuclear-weapon States reassert the importance of nuclear weapons to their own security".

Even a perception of the reservation of a right to develop or test new weapons has the potential for undermining the cause of non-proliferation.

In any debate on nuclear disarmament, the principles of transparency and irreversibility are essential constructs of good-faith negotiations.

We welcomed the conclusion of the Moscow Treaty in 2002 as an encouraging first step in nuclear disarmament processes. The readiness of the United States and Russian Governments to formally contemplate reducing their arsenals from tens of thousands of nuclear weapons to single thousands by 2012 was an achievement to be commended, but the next step of the process, the application of transparency and irreversibility measures, would produce real gains in terms of delivering on disarmament obligations. The upcoming renewal of the Moscow Treaty provides Russia and the United States with the opportunity to make an effective concrete contribution to nuclear disarmament, by agreeing to destroy rather than stockpile the weapons covered by the Treaty.

In response to a comment made this morning, I can assure the Russian Ambassador that it is always extremely interesting to my delegation to hear about irreversible reductions in nuclear arsenals, whether through the microphone on the record of this Conference or in any other formal transparent way. The details provided by the leader of the United States delegation are also welcome.

(Mr. Caughley, New Zealand)

There is much that nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States alike can do to contribute to confidence-building on nuclear disarmament. Although it has not yet entered into force, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty has created a strong international norm against testing, guarding against future development of weapons. We urge all States to maintain the current moratorium, pending the Treaty's formal entry into force. And we urge China and the United States, through an exercise of their leadership, to become party to this Treaty, paving the way for ratification by all outstanding annex 2 States.

In addition to the CTBT, the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones acts as a powerful symbol for demonstrating renunciation of weapons of mass destruction to the international community. This is particularly valuable at a regional level. Nuclear-weapon-free zones' potential to contribute to nuclear disarmament is most comprehensively illustrated in the case of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, where Latin American countries moved together to discard the nuclear weapons option as a region. We will continue to work towards a collective nuclear-weapon-free zone encompassing the entire southern hemisphere. Surely, the entry into force of the CTBT and the extension and deepening of nuclear-weapon-free zones are cases in point in our argument that nuclear disarmament can serve the cause of non-proliferation.

In addition to the work of governments, notably through the G8 initiative, which New Zealand actively supports, we need to facilitate the continued engagement of civil society in nuclear disarmament processes. Not only does civil society have a wealth of technical expertise to contribute to our work, but their ability to maintain pressure on governments from an accountability standpoint is also valuable. NGOs provide a much-needed reminder of our ultimate goal - a world free of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament obligations are undisputed and long-standing. They were reaffirmed by all NPT States in 2000. The good-faith negotiations envisaged by the NPT's article VI should begin as soon as possible. As an added boost to this end, we place strong priority on the immediate commencement of a treaty banning the production of fissile material. While differences remain as to the relative priorities of disarmament and non-proliferation, it makes sense to move forward on a negotiation which will produce gains for both sides of the debate. We firmly believe that an FMCT would not only constitute a significant gain for non-proliferation, but it would also move us further towards our nuclear disarmament objectives. We are pleased that this point of view is gaining real currency in this Conference.

Finally, we welcome the structured approach you, Mr. President, have provided for our discussion of this topic. The challenge now for the Conference is to deepen our treatment of nuclear disarmament by incorporating it in an agreed work programme. A continuation of our current impasse on the programme of work prevents us from taking any form of treatment of this vital issue in this body. This debate is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, as you yourself so wisely put it in your opening statement, Mr. President.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Caughley of New Zealand for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair.

This concludes my list of speakers for this afternoon's session. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this time? That does not seem to be the case.

This concludes our business for today.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Coordinators of the Groups and China, on Thursday, 2 March 2006, the Conference will hold two plenary meetings, at 10 a.m. and at 3 p.m. The suggested sub-item will be "Future nuclear disarmament measures".

As I clarified from the beginning, you can raise or revisit the other sub-item as you please. I encourage all member States to actively participate in the second part of focused debate on nuclear disarmament. Both meetings will be held in the Council chamber.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.