

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.1064
29 March 2007

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND SIXTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 29 March 2007, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Ms. Sarala FERNANDO (Sri Lanka)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1064th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I would like to thank, on behalf of the 2007 Presidents of the Conference, the P-6, the many delegations across the regions who spoke at the last plenary of the Conference on 27 March 2007 in support of the Presidential draft decision contained in document CD/2007/L.1. In the Presidential statement of 27 March 2007, the P-6 addressed, in the spirit of transparency, points of clarification sought by delegations, mainly in relation to the methods of work and procedures, and since it was a statement made in the formal plenary, it is on record.

The 2007 Presidents of the Conference have undertaken to assess the work done during the first part of the session and to propose a way forward for the second part of the session. Our report, delivered to the informal plenary last Friday, was based on interaction with and inputs received from all coordinators, our own participation in the plenaries and the informal meetings, bilateral consultations with all delegations, and meetings with Groups and Group coordinators.

The process of bilateral consultations at the ambassadorial level, you will recall, started as far back as October 2006 under the leadership of the Ambassador of South Africa, which led to the P-6 initiative and the organizational framework agreed in January 2007. In the organizational framework, it was stated that an evaluation would be carried out in week 10 so that we would be in a position to decide on the way forward for the second part of the CD session. Following intensive consultations by the P-6 with the entire membership of the Conference in week 7 and week 8, a draft decision for the Conference was proposed, contained in document CD/2007/L.1. This draft decision was shared among the CD membership through regional consultations, conducted by the P-6 on 21 March 2007. The P-6 also held additional bilateral meetings this week in order to clarify any remaining procedural points.

The P-6 has striven in an impartial, objective manner to reflect the wish of the collective membership of the CD to return the Conference to work after 10 years of impasse. The momentum generated, which I reported in my statement to the informal plenary on 23 March, has resulted in the tabling of draft decision L.1.

In my statement at the plenary meeting on 27 March, I made some clarifications with regard to several points, which are procedural in nature, raised by some delegations. Since then additional clarifications have also been sought as to whether the draft decision will constitute a programme of work and whether the Coordinators would constitute subsidiary bodies. With regard to the first point, after the Conference has adopted the draft decision, we will be in a position to establish a schedule of activities. After that the decision taken together with the schedule of activities will for all practical purposes constitute a programme of work. With regard to the second point, paragraph 19 of the rules of procedure stipulates that the work of the Conference shall be conducted in plenary meetings, as well as under any additional arrangements agreed by the Conference. The appointment of Coordinators is such an arrangement. Their

(The President)

functions will be comparable to those of a subsidiary body. As we have previously stated, the rules of procedure would fully apply to the Coordinators and the meetings they preside over. With regard to the issue of the duration of the draft decision, I would like to reiterate that, in accordance with the rules of procedure, the draft decision will be valid for the duration of the 2007 session of the Conference.

At the plenary on 27 March 2007, I stated that in keeping with the undertaking given by the P-6, as well as the organizational framework, it is our intention to proceed towards action on the Presidential draft decision contained in document CD/2007/L.1 at the plenary today.

In order to ascertain that delegations are ready to proceed to take a decision today, I will now suspend this formal plenary and resume in an informal meeting in five minutes. Thereafter we will resume this formal plenary.

This meeting is suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 10.20 a.m. and resumed at 10.40 a.m.

The PRESIDENT: The plenary is resumed.

I wish to inform you that it will not be possible to proceed to a decision today. The next plenary will take place tomorrow, Friday, 30 March, at 10 a.m.

The meeting is adjourned unless any delegation wishes to take the floor at this stage.

Venezuela, you have the floor.

Mr. IBARRA MARTÍNEZ (Venezuela) (spoke in Spanish): Madam President, since my delegation is taking the floor for the first time during your term of office, allow me to congratulate you on taking on this very important task and assure you that you can count on the full support of the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

My delegation is grateful to the six Presidents for 2007 for introducing document CD/2007/L.1, which contains a proposal that would enable the Conference on Disarmament to emerge from the stalemate in which it has found itself for more than a decade and return to substantive work, carrying out the activity for which this forum was established - to negotiate.

No one is unaware that the delegation of Venezuela is committed to the commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, we view this document as a tangible effort and, though it does not fully satisfy our expectations, we consider that it would enable a number of steps to be taken towards disarmament and non-proliferation of deadly nuclear weapons.

(Mr. Ibarra Martínez, Venezuela)

Venezuela recognizes the merits of the proposal presented by the P-6. It would enable us to negotiate a treaty on fissile material while further progress is made in nuclear disarmament, Negative Security Assurances and PAROS, through discussions which smooth the path towards our major objective - general and complete disarmament, from nuclear weapons to small arms and light weapons.

I must inform you that document CD/2007/L.1 has been carefully studied by the competent authorities in Caracas. Nevertheless, and without prejudice to the possible amendments which may be presented, the delegation of Venezuela would go along with a consensus on document L.1 if one could be achieved.

Although we give our support to document CD/2007/L.1, my delegation would like to reiterate a number of our positions of principle. Venezuela, as a country which does not possess nuclear weapons and which has to face a confrontational stance by a nuclear Power, observes with concern the threat for mankind implicit in the existence of such weapons and their possible use or the threat of their use. In that respect, it hopes that in the near future negotiations will begin on a treaty providing for effective international arrangements to assure the non-nuclear-weapon States against the threat or use of nuclear weapons against them (negative security assurances).

Likewise, concern persists at the manifest tendency to concentrate the efforts of the international community on non-proliferation and conventional weapons, disregarding disarmament and weapons of mass destruction, issues of fundamental importance for the present and future generations. In view of the above, it is hoped that shortly negotiations will finally begin on what is perhaps the most longed-for instrument of the past 60 years - a legally binding instrument which will decree an end to the arms race and nuclear disarmament.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize that during the negotiations on the treaty on the prohibition of fissile material for nuclear weapons, thought should be given to the inclusion of a verification mechanism to ensure that it is fully respected.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Venezuela for the warm words addressed to the P-6, and I now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the Ambassador of Romania, who will be followed by Belarus.

Mr. COSTEA (Romania) (spoke in French): Madam President, I would like, in this formal context, to congratulate you on chairing the Conference on Disarmament, and also to express my gratitude for the outstanding work which each of the six Presidents of the current session has accomplished in order to offer the Conference a new and important opportunity to break its impasse.

Romania has already made its position known concerning the six Presidents' draft decision contained in document CD/2007/L.1 during the informal plenary meeting on 23 March. As Romania is a member of the European Union, that position was also expressed by Germany on behalf of the EU at the formal plenary meeting on 27 March.

(Mr. Costea, Romania)

Today, following the first part of the 2007 session, allow me to share with you and the members of the Conference some views on what we have accomplished so far this year. It is my humble hope that you will find therein arguments which will persuade all the members to adopt the Presidential draft decision before us, or at least not to oppose it.

(spoke in English)

For the last 10 years, each and every delegation has already moved once in this vicious circle called the rotating presidency. Many have thus tried more or less individually to propose a solution for the resumption of the substantive work of the Conference. I think it is high time for us to make a collective move at the same time and in the same direction and finally break the deadlock.

Let me recall a very eloquent example for the situation we are facing today. The A-5 proposal did gain a lot of support when it was launched. Nevertheless, it was not consensual, and the time that has passed since its introduction has not brought us any closer to its adoption. Important developments have occurred since that moment, including challenges to the security environment, and they have steered us to where we are today. Especially during the last three years, we have witnessed significant signs of flexibility from certain delegations. The CD as a whole should not reject such an attitude, and it should prove to be able to take this chance.

Compromise means indeed to accept that there is no good in trying endlessly to work on a proposal that will never be endorsed by everybody. This is similar to Sisyphus' labour of lifting the rock to the top of the mountain. Camus saw merit in this torment, but I would refer to others who saw it as merely a bodybuilding exercise. There is a time when a make-it-or-break-it solution is on the table, and the time for being bold is now.

Responding to a concrete, reasonable and most of all doable proposal by permanently asking questions and waiting for instructions hardly seems consistent with the classical pledge that reads "President, rest assured of the entire flexibility and the full cooperation of my delegation". Let us not complain about a lack of political will. There is certainly a very strong political will in all corners of the Council chamber, no matter whether delegations support the P-6 Presidential draft decision or not.

Then again, let us look around. We deplored at length the 2005 NPT Review Conference, the outcome of the United Nations Summit and the 2006 Small Arms and Light Weapons Review Conference, but we applauded the positive results at the 2006 CCW and BWC review conferences. Surely there are lessons to learn from all these events. Last Tuesday, the Italian Ambassador reminded us of the successes of the French and Pakistani presidencies of the last-mentioned meetings. The keys to these achievements were setting out realistic aims and making the best of the flexible and constructive attitudes of States parties. We strongly hope that the CD will have the wisdom to do the same.

(Mr. Costea, Romania)

Consensus in the CD has lately become the rule of imposing the will of a very thin minority over the entire membership. Of course, this is not what a consensual approach consists of. When the rules of procedure come to the fore, let me emphasize that questioning the conformity of the P-6 Presidential draft decision with the respective rules of procedure of the Conference is an ominous sign of a lack of confidence in the Presidents' intentions. For, after all, they are the first to take into account such positions. Let me add that your intervention, Madam President, this morning has proved my point.

Finally, I hope that the States that are not ready to compromise today will take full responsibility for their actions, bearing in mind that there are going to be few reasons to complain about "unilateral" decisions when due to the perpetuation of the CD, some delegations disengage from the CD way.

We still have one more day and a night between us and tomorrow's plenary. Let night bring good counsel.

The PRESIDENT: I thank you and I give the floor to the next speaker, Belarus, followed by Ukraine, and I will close the list of speakers.

Mr. GRINEVICH (Belarus) (spoke in Russian): Allow me once again to announce - this time to the plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament - that our delegation has clear instructions from our capital to support document CD/2007/L.1. In order to save time, I will not read out again the statement that we made a few moments ago. The text will be transmitted to the secretariat.

The PRESIDENT: I thank you, and I give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the Ambassador of Ukraine.

Mr. BERSHEDA (Ukraine) (spoke in French): Madam President, allow me to inform you that in our view, the draft you presented last week on behalf of the six Presidents, while not the best possible solution, offers the best opportunity for ensuring that the Conference on Disarmament resumes constructive work. We consider this document to be an important step towards arms limitation, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all their aspects. We all seek flexibility, and my country supports your excellent proposal concerning the programme of work. After the discussion which took place today, I would like to express the hope that those who have not yet taken a decision on this subject - and we have all been able to see that there are not many of them - will spare no effort to ensure that the draft is considered in a constructive manner and support the efforts of the six Presidents, including yourself, Madam. We hope that all this will make it possible to boost confidence in the Conference on Disarmament.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ambassador. I give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. LANDMAN (Netherlands): Madam President, of course we can postpone a decision, and actually, we are doing that from now until tomorrow, and we can theoretically postpone it again and again. But I ask you, I ask colleagues, will circumstances really be different next week or next month? It is true, I realize, formally we have a proposal on the table only since last Friday, but really, we have been working towards this compromise since January last year. We have all seen that the whole process has been accelerating since the South African presidency of the Conference. That is why postponing a decision will not really benefit anyone. Whatever we decide on the package that is now before us, it will essentially be about the same question: do we agree to start the work we are supposed to do?

As one politician I greatly admired in my youth put it a half a century ago, in 1954 - and I am referring to Adlai Stevenson, the then United States Ambassador to the United Nations: "All progress has resulted from people who took unpopular positions". But at the same time, please let us keep a realistic perspective. We are at the start of new processes, not at the end of them. It means that every one of us can still influence any progress and any process, disagree fully with anything proposed and steer all discussions on negotiations. No one gives up anything at this moment. Rather, all of us win by finally showing the world that we are serious at last on the issues of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.

Therefore, it is now that we should agree on the package of our six Presidents, or, if in some capitals a final round of inter-agency deliberations needs to be organized, tomorrow, or at the latest, Thursday next week at a special session. After that date, there is simply nothing else to say.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands, and I give the floor to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Mr. DUNCAN (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Madam President, I will endeavour to be brief, as you clearly wish to close the proceedings.

The decision by the end of this week on your proposal is certainly proving difficult, but I believe we are very close. There is certainly no element of bullying involved. It is a collective decision and it is based on your initiative as the P-6, a body reflecting the many regions in this organization. The United Kingdom very much supports the P-6 initiative and the way in which you have consulted with the membership and tried to harness the collective will of that membership.

Many colleagues have spoken over the last two weeks and underlined the importance of taking a decision during this window of opportunity. We do hope the capitals are quite clear that the decision, while it covers a number of very important issues for the disarmament agenda, is, as my Russian colleague earlier explained and the Algerian representative explained on behalf of the Arab group so eloquently, a decision about getting the CD back to work so that we can shoulder our collective responsibility to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

(Mr. Duncan, United Kingdom)

It has taken us nine years to reach this point. The decision text has been known for two weeks and is not dissimilar to the P-6 text agreed in January. Civil society, the public, the press, are expecting us to take a decision, a decision which, as I say, has implications for the wider multilateral disarmament and arms control agenda.

We do hope that our successors will conclude that the legacy of this organization has been a positive one, and in this context, let me quote the reflections of a noted writer and politician on the discussion in this very venue some 71 years ago: "Upon what force can this organization count at this cardinal moment? Is she to be left alone, impotent, a hollow mockery among the lip-serving platitudes of irresolute or cynical devotees? On every side of Geneva stand great nations whose interests as well as obligations bind them to uphold the public law. This moment may never come to pass again. The fateful moment has arrived for choice between the new age and the old." (Winston Spencer Churchill, 13 March 1936.)

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and for underlining that the P-6 has always worked in an inclusive manner to harness the collective will of the Conference.

I now give the floor to the last speaker on my list, the Ambassador of China.

Mr. CHENG (China) (spoke in Chinese): Madam President, I would like to suggest that this is not the time for us all to engage in a contest in oratory. If we were to mount a contest in that discipline, our meeting would last a very long time. Very well, let us continue with this contest. I should also like to point out that, if we are to start quoting the utterances of the wise and famous, I can adduce a great many such quotations, I can cite the sayings of Chinese philosophers from 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. I imagine that you too can quote from the ancient Greek sages, though I wonder if this will help solve our problems. If, however, this contest in oratory is capable of solving our problems, then let us proceed with the contest.

I would also like to say that each member State is entitled to carry out a study of this issue. Some members may not need much time for this, while others might need a rather longer time. This is perfectly natural. I object to any State challenging or casting aspersions on other States that wish to raise this issue.

The PRESIDENT: I thank you.

The next plenary meeting will take place tomorrow, Friday, 30 March, at 10 a.m.

This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.