

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND SEVENTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 21 August 2007, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Faysal KHABBAZ HAMOUI (Syrian Arab Republic)

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I declare open the 1079th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. At the very outset, on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, I should like to express my sadness about the tragic death and destruction caused by the powerful earthquake south of Lima, in Peru. I should like to extend our sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who died.

We are joined today by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Sergio Duarte, to whom I would like to extend a warm welcome. As today's meeting is the first one to be held under the presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic, before giving the floor to the High Representative I should like to make some opening remarks.

I am pleased to make these opening remarks at the beginning of Syria's presidency of the Conference for the second time in nine years. I should first of all like to express gratitude and appreciation for the excellent work accomplished by my predecessor, Ambassador Jürg Streuli, and for his sincere and patient efforts. I should also like to thank the Ambassadors of South Africa, Sri Lanka, Spain and Sweden. The cooperation between the six Presidents was extremely useful and constructive. Everyone expressed good intentions to overcome obstacles and showed patience and dedication in pursuing the work in the hope of achieving a positive outcome that would be satisfactory to all.

I am pleased that the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, has honoured us with his presence. We are grateful to him for all the valuable advice that he continues to give to us all. We have a great need of his long experience and rich knowledge.

I should also like to thank the seven coordinators for their efforts, which have enriched the work of our Conference. I should also like to thank the delegations that have helped actively and sincerely to enrich the work of the Conference and for the good will that they have shown to work constructively to overcome the difficulties that the Conference is facing. It is my hope that all those good intentions will continue and that the support of these States for the presidency will remain strong and sincere. An important stage is ahead of us and the road is long.

Strenuous efforts have been made at the 2007 session of the Conference on Disarmament to find common ground and to reach a possible consensus that can reconcile the different concerns of States, in order to establish a programme of work that will allow the Conference to find a way out of the impasse in which it has been for several years. This year's discussions have brought about a fair degree of progress and we all hope to be able to utilize this progress in the future in order to arrive at a programme of work and commence negotiations, in a positive and constructive spirit, with a transparent approach that enjoys consensus. This would be in keeping with the sentiments expressed by His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, in his message addressed to the Conference on 14 June 2007, when he urged everyone to make progress in a spirit of compromise and accommodation. The Middle East region is one of the tensest and most dangerous regions of the world. My country has always

(The President)

believed that ridding this region of nuclear weapons, as has happened in five other regions in various continents, will improve opportunities for the establishment of permanent peace and security. Syria will continue its efforts to make the Middle East a nuclear-weapon-free zone in order to achieve peace, security and development. Our Conference has difficult work that it must do. It must continue with consultations and contacts right up to the very last day of our presidency. We shall also submit a report on the third part of the Conference's 2007 session. I hope that we will all cooperate in preparing a comprehensive report on the 2007 session in a transparent and democratic manner, based on consensus. We shall also need to prepare the draft resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly. We all hope that this will be done by consensus and accommodation. Syria presided over the work of this Conference in 1998, two years after joining the Conference. During our presidency, we all managed to adopt a work programme for the Conference. Once again, Syria's presidency of the Conference is accompanied by high hopes for an end to the impasse in which the Conference finds itself.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate that the Syrian presidency will take an open and positive approach to all constructive and serious contributions. I shall devote all my time to working with my colleagues, the five Presidents, and with all the delegations in order to achieve these objectives. I appeal to you from this podium to give all your support and constructive contributions to the presidency so that we produce good work this year that creates optimism about reaching results that will satisfy everybody in the future. I thank you.

Allow me now to turn to our guest today, Mr. Sergio Duarte. Before being appointed as High Representative, Mr. Duarte had a distinguished career spanning more than 48 years in his country's diplomatic service. He is well known in disarmament circles as an experienced and knowledgeable representative attending the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the Conference on Disarmament and many other disarmament-related meetings and treaty bodies. His last high-profile assignment in multilateral disarmament was as President of the 2005 regional conference of the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I now invite the High Representative, Mr. Sergio Duarte, to address the Conference.

Mr. DUARTE (High Representative for Disarmament Affairs): Mr. President, I am grateful to you for this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament at this crucial time in its history. I also appreciate the support of members of this body conveyed to me by your predecessor upon my taking up my duties as the Secretary-General's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. And I welcome this chance to take a place on this podium alongside Mr. Ban Ki-moon's Personal Representative to the CD, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze.

It is no accident that I have already made mention twice in this address of the United Nations Secretary-General. The importance he attaches to the work of this body will be evident from the several statements he has made to members this year. Members will recall that in June, the Secretary-General, anticipating a turning point in the fortunes of the CD, said that a breakthrough would "demonstrate to the international community at large that the security challenges before us are not overwhelming, but can be addressed collectively".

(Mr. Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs)

Despite the collective efforts of this year's Presidents, of their seven coordinators and of the entire membership, the Conference stands tantalizingly one short step away from resolving its long-standing impasse. From the relative luxury of a perspective at arm's length from the intense efforts that preceded the draft Presidential decision that lies before you, permit me to offer several observations.

The investment that has gone into reaching this year's effort to find common ground deserves careful analysis. This investment represents surely a common desire to fulfil the CD's mandate as a negotiating body rather than a forum for debate. It signifies, too, that members are prepared to direct their energies, to a greater or lesser degree, towards four pre-eminent security priorities derived from the agenda of the Conference.

This year's investment, under the guidance of the Presidential coordinators, has shown as well that the Conference can work to a comprehensive, calibrated timetable or schedule of activities - dare I say a "programme of work"? - in which engagement may be measured by the level of commitment to the issue of the moment.

I appreciate that for such engagement to be sustained, members have been anxious to ensure that their security priorities are adequately reflected. This has been so despite the fact that the rules of procedure guarantee that each member can protect its concerns at any decision point along the way. As the Secretary-General noted last June, "finding a fair accommodation now would deprive no member of the ability to assert its national position" in phases that follow. The way forward surely depends on the ability of the Conference to forge common ground on a progressive basis, issue by issue. In the broadest sense, that dynamic is the very art of negotiation, the fundamental lifeblood of this body.

The other observation I feel emboldened to make is that members, I hope, will bring to the General Assembly in October a report and a resolution that truly reflect the intensity of the Conference's determination to demonstrate that its potential as a negotiating body is not only alive but that it is capable of realization in the near future.

I cannot let this opportunity pass to deviate from the prepared text without a very personal note. Forty-one years ago, in 1966, I sat in this chamber as a very junior member of my country's delegation to the predecessor body, the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee. It was my first time in a multilateral international meeting. Since then, over the years, that body and its successors have successfully negotiated several important international agreements. I would only mention the NPT and the Chemical Weapons Convention, but there have been other realizations that have been made over the years. And I am sure that this body will continue its history of success in the years to come.

Finally, let me assure the broader Geneva disarmament community, including civil society, that in addition to offering my full support to the Secretary-General of the CD and its members, I pledge my strongest commitment to all the other disarmament and non-proliferation activities that are conducted in Geneva.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I thank Ambassador Duarte for his important and valuable statement and for his commitment to supporting our efforts at the Conference on Disarmament.

On the list of speakers we have no requests to take the floor. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this meeting? The representative of South Africa. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. KELLERMAN (South Africa): Mr. President, I would just like to point out that I am taking the floor in South Africa's capacity as Coordinator of the Group of 21 and not in my national capacity. In that regard, may I first of all, on behalf of the members of the Group, congratulate you as a member of the Group on your assumption of the presidency of the CD and pledge the full support of the members of the Group to you for your endeavours during the last part that we have embarked upon during this 2007 session.

In addition, I would just like to express the Group's gratitude and thanks to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Sergio Duarte, who is indeed very known and respected amongst the members of the Group and merely to thank him for his observations, his words of encouragement and also his pledge of support to both the CD and its members.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I thank the representative of South Africa, who was speaking on behalf of the Group of 21, and I thank him for his kind words to the presidency.

The Ambassador of Italy. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. TREZZA (Italy): Mr. President, I too, wish to congratulate you since this is the first time I take the floor in a plenary meeting under your presidency, congratulate you on your presidency and assure you of my full support in your coming endeavours. I believe that this is a significant moment. First of all, we have a new President; we are entering into the final phase of our deliberations for this year; and we also have the privilege of having with us the High Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Disarmament Affairs. So, as I said, it is an important moment.

First of all, I would like to concur with your general evaluation of the work done so far in the Conference on Disarmament this year. Indeed, one can say that good progress has been made towards achieving the goal which we are pursuing, which is to start real negotiations in the CD. I think, as Mr. Duarte said, and you said, too, we are getting very close to a compromise. Mr. Duarte mentioned that a breakthrough is one short step away. Indeed, we have made significant progress.

You mentioned in particular and focused your attention on one regional area of concern. We certainly share this concern. Other regions in the world as well deserve our attention when it comes to disarmament and non-proliferation and international security.

(Mr. Trezza, Italy)

As I said before, the presence of Mr. Duarte is meaningful to my delegation, not only because of the new function that he now exercises as High Representative but also for - 1 would say - personal reasons, knowing him and knowing his long experience and wisdom in this field.

Throughout this year we have listened to the active engagement of the new Secretary-General of the United Nations when it comes to disarmament, and this has been expressed by the Secretary-General himself through his statement to the CD, by his Personal Representative and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Ordzhonikidze, and his team who have actively supported the work done by delegations.

Again, when we say that progress has been made, we believe that it is not progress of only the presidency, which I salute, of the coordinators, but progress has been made by the Conference and its members altogether, and this I think is what we have achieved.

Sergio Duarte mentioned that a big investment has been made. Again, the investment has not been an individual investment, it has been an investment of the whole Conference.

What I think at this stage we need is to keep this momentum, not to abandon our efforts during this period when, after the report, there will be a certain recess, and our interest might be directed to other issues. We hope that all the Presidents and the future Presidents as well will be uniting in their endeavours to maintain this momentum.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your kind words to the presidency, and for your valuable statement.

On the list of speakers I have the distinguished representative of Peru. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. NEYRA SANCHEZ (Peru) (spoke in Spanish): First, Mr. President, we would like to endorse the congratulations expressed by the delegation of South Africa on behalf of the G-21 for our country. As a member of the G-21, it is an honour to have you presiding over our work. We would also like to congratulate the delegation of Switzerland on the excellent work it has accomplished, as well as on the term in the Chair it has occupied this year. Similarly we welcome Mr. Sergio Duarte, whose personal reflections are of real help to us, particularly the young diplomats here, in understanding the importance of our work. Many thanks for your comments. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your expression of condolences on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament following the tragedy in my country caused by the earthquake last week, but above all to thank you for the support, solidarity and cooperation which all friendly countries and the international community have shown following this disaster, which led to 500 deaths and incalculable material losses in my country. These natural disasters are inevitable. We can only regret them and prepare for them. However, I think that this type of event also makes us think of another type of tragedy which we can prevent

(Mr. Neyra Sánchez, Peru)

- those caused by other factors, for example the arms race, which produces no positive result. In that regard, my delegation's only wish is to take advantage of this sad occasion to reiterate our hope that this Conference on Disarmament will quickly be able to agree on a programme of work which will enable us to get back down to work together with an objective we all share, that of preventing those disasters, those deaths and victims, which can be achieved with a commitment from all of us.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I thank the distinguished representative of Peru for his statement and kind words to the presidency. I agree with what you said about the pressing need for us all to stand together in the face of disasters, whether they be natural or man-made disasters, and first and foremost, nuclear weapons.

I now take pleasure in giving the floor to the distinguished Secretary-General of the Conference, who always gives us useful and valuable advice. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): Let me begin by congratulating you on the assumption of this important position at the very end of the Conference session of this year.

Obviously, how you steer the Conference with the help of other colleagues of the P-6 will depend a lot on the presentation of our results, and we are all interested that what we have achieved, particularly in June, will not be lost. As my colleague mentioned the word "investment", it was a good "investment", good progress, and Mr. President, I think you have a good basis for presenting to the General Assembly that this year's Conference has made certain progress.

Of course it is my pleasure to welcome the High Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Duarte, here, who risked joining this Conference, although there is no progress. Usually people from New York come when there is progress. But Mr. Duarte is a true friend of this Conference and disarmament efforts, and that is why he is sincerely interested in the progress of this Conference.

Anyway, I think, as I mentioned a couple of times during my very short statement the word "investment" and the word "progress", it would be a good thing not to lose that but rather keep it with a certain aim for the future, but definitely reflected in our minds, maybe on paper as well, because sometimes paper reflects what we think, sometimes it does not, but my wish would be that in this case, the report would reflect the enormous efforts that we have undertaken during the session of the Conference on Disarmament, and particularly during the summertime.

I wish you, Mr. President, well in steering the efforts of the Conference in a President-like way to agree on that report.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): Thank you, Your Excellency the Secretary-General, for your statement, which was brief but very valuable. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this time? I do not see anyone asking for the floor. This concludes the list of speakers for today. Allow me to inform you that the next plenary meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 30 August 2007 in this room.

With regard to the draft of the report which the Conference on Disarmament will submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, we hope that it will be available by Thursday, 30 August 2007 in the pigeonholes of the members located on this floor. On this occasion, I should like to thank the secretariat for its efforts to prepare the final draft report. With this, this plenary meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.