
Conference on Disarmament

23 March 2010

English

Final record of the one thousand one hundred and eightieth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 23 March 2010, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Alex Van Meeuwen.....(Belgium)

The President (*spoke in French*): I declare open the 1180th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset of this meeting, allow me first of all to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to our new colleague, Ambassador Kennedy of the United States of America, who will represent her country at the Conference. I wish to assure her of our cooperation and full support in her new assignment.

I have on my list of speakers for today: Ambassador Laura Kennedy of the United States of America and Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada. I will now give the floor to Ambassador Laura Kennedy.

Ms. Kennedy (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President, for your very gracious welcome. It is indeed an honour to join you today as the new Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Conference on Disarmament. Let me assure you of my full support and cooperation in the work of the Conference and congratulate you on assuming your responsibilities. I look forward to working with everyone here and hope to call upon each person individually as their schedules allow.

I and my Government are eager for this Conference to again make an active contribution to disarmament. The Conference on Disarmament can and should be at the forefront, as President Obama said earlier this month, of “stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and seeking a world without them”.

The United States will continue to reduce significantly our nuclear arsenal. We welcome the steps taken in the same direction by other States with nuclear weapons. Our forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review will further reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.

It is time to begin the long overdue, serious work that is needed for negotiation on a treaty to end the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Last year, we welcomed this Conference’s adoption of CD/1864, a balanced and comprehensive consensus programme of work that would allow for the commencement of such negotiations. We regret that a small minority blocked implementation of that programme, causing further delay.

In Prague last April, President Obama outlined an agenda for international efforts to confront nuclear dangers worldwide. President Obama said that the United States seeks the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons, and committed the United States to pursue concrete steps toward that end. He identified a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons — a fissile material cut-off treaty or FMCT — as one of those steps. The United States agrees with the vast majority of members of this Conference that FMCT negotiations are long overdue and should be the top negotiating priority for this body.

Again to cite my President, President Obama made clear in Prague, confronting the nuclear danger requires concerted efforts on all three fronts: disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security. No country — none of us — is immune from these dangers, and all of us have a responsibility to work together to address them.

Each of these dangers has, at its core, the availability of fissile material, the basic ingredients in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. Therefore, a fissile material cut-off treaty, which would cap the amount of fissile material available globally for nuclear weapons, is an important step we can take toward reducing the danger of nuclear attack.

A fissile material cut-off treaty has long been one of the key goals of multilateral arms control. The 1995 Shannon mandate calls for the negotiation of a treaty to ban the

production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. This treaty should be “non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable”. Such a treaty could cap stocks of fissile material available for use in nuclear weapons, and thereby limit the potential number of nuclear weapons in the world.

A cut-off would provide a foundation for future disarmament efforts. Before reducing arms, we have to stop increasing them. Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons recognizes this logic, calling for negotiations, first, on an end to the nuclear arms race; second, on nuclear disarmament; and, third, on general and complete disarmament.

We have already achieved much on the disarmament front, though we have much yet to do. The cold war arms race is over. According to published estimates, the number of warheads in the world has dropped from a peak of over 70,000 to roughly 25,000 now.

Although an FMCT is now no longer needed to halt the cold war arms race, it would consolidate the arms control gains made since the end of the cold war.

But in some areas, nuclear stockpiles continue to grow, with the concomitant spectre of destabilizing regional nuclear arms races. An FMCT could help prevent that and would promote transparency and stability through international verification of fissile material production.

Looking further into the future towards the goal of reducing nuclear stockpiles to ever lower numbers — and eventually to zero — controls on fissile material are likely to play an increasingly important role. To achieve such reductions will likely require a much greater degree of mutual confidence among the relevant States. A verifiable FMCT will be an important foundation for that confidence.

An FMCT would also make an important contribution to nuclear non-proliferation. For the non-nuclear-weapon States parties to the NPT, it would reinforce their undertaking not to acquire nuclear weapons with a separate undertaking not to produce fissile material for that purpose. For the States with nuclear weapons, it would be a tangible demonstration of their commitment to nuclear disarmament and to reduce nuclear dangers worldwide.

By improving controls on fissile materials worldwide, an FMCT would also help prevent terrorists from gaining access to those materials. One way to make sure that fissile material does not fall into the wrong hands is to ensure that it is fully accounted for. By addressing the mechanisms to account for this material, an FMCT would contribute to security against nuclear terrorism.

The United States shares with the vast majority of members of this Conference — and others who are not members of this body — a shared conviction that there is a pressing need to strengthen controls on fissile material. Fissile material stockpiles represent a latent capability to produce nuclear weapons. Controls need to be strengthened systematically in order to build the confidence necessary to allow deep reductions in nuclear forces. As nuclear forces shrink, these controls become more important.

The United States will continue to do its part to address this need, and we hope this body, whose predecessors have produced a number of landmark treaties, will do its part. It has long been clear that negotiation of an FMCT will be difficult and that it will take years to complete. This makes it all the more urgent that we get started as soon as possible. Fifteen years of inaction is enough.

The United States is committed to working to make this long-standing collective ambition for a treaty to end fissile material production for weapons a reality. We welcome an active and open exchange of views and an early start to negotiations. We acknowledge and agree that the Conference on Disarmament, as the premier multilateral disarmament

negotiating body, should consider that all issues on its agenda could, at the proper time, lend themselves to “future negotiations” – as stated clearly in CD/WP.559. We look forward to participating in substantive discussions on all of the Conference’s “core issues” while ideally we commence negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

Looking beyond the Conference on Disarmament, let me note what my country is doing to reduce nuclear weapons and constrain proliferation. We will be seeking the consent of the United States Senate for ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We urge other States to complete their ratifications as well, especially those whose ratification is needed for the entry into force of the Treaty. We will continue our moratorium on nuclear testing, as well as our long-standing moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Our negotiators are hard at work with their counterparts from the Russian Federation to finish the follow-on treaty to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which will mandate significant cuts. We will also continue our global partnerships that seek to limit the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and associated delivery systems.

In May, I will be joining many of you in New York as we seek to strengthen the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. That Treaty negotiated here, reminds us powerfully of what can be collectively achieved in the beautiful and fair city of Geneva. It is the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and its article VI is our clarion call and commitment to nuclear disarmament.

This Conference will shortly recess. When the second part of our session begins, I hope that we will have agreement on our programme of work and be able to turn our efforts to negotiations and a full and substantive discussion of all agenda items. You will have an active partner in the United States in that effort and a full and substantive dialogue on the agenda of the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States of America for her statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Canada, Ambassador Marius Grinius.

Mr. Grinius (Canada): Mr. President, let me join you in welcoming our new colleague, Ambassador Laura Kennedy, to this august body.

This week we wrap up the first part of the 2010 session of the Conference on Disarmament, and we will not meet in this chamber again for another two months. We will be almost halfway through 2010 when we next return to this forum in June. Accordingly, now is an opportunity to take stock of where the Conference stands and to look to the future.

Mr. President, Canada commends your ongoing efforts to arrive at consensus on a programme of work based on CD/WP.559, and we pledge our full support. Canada is disappointed that we have squandered two consensus agreements that were achieved last year. The first of course was CD/1864. The second was last fall’s General Assembly resolution 64/29, which urged the Conference on Disarmament to agree early in 2010 on a programme of work that would include the immediate commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material. Worse still, in our view, some countries have drifted away from the broad acceptance of the Shannon mandate for negotiating such a treaty. If we move away from the agreed formula of the Shannon mandate, with its inherent flexibility, in search of something else that may offer the hope of greater certainty, Canada fears that our efforts to adopt a programme of work will continue to be fruitless.

As we depart this chamber, my delegation is not alone in leaving with a heavy heart. Two weeks ago, on 11 March, our Dutch colleague asked if the Conference on Disarmament had gone back to “shadow-boxing”, described as “shadow-fighting” by

Reaching Critical Will. I would suggest that the Conference is back to “shadow-playing”. I fear that consensus on a programme of work in the Conference on Disarmament may not be achievable any time soon.

So just as we look to the future, it is also worth looking back and recalling that the Conference on Disarmament, and its rules of procedure, took shape during the cold war, a time of a bipolar world dominated by two blocs facing each other, with lots of nuclear weapons on either side. In that period, now long past, it has been said that the Conference on Disarmament functioned when the permanent members of the Security Council agreed amongst themselves that it would function. Back then, the consensus rule was not an obstacle to the ability of the Conference on Disarmament to fulfil its negotiating mandate.

In today’s multipolar world, however, the Conference on Disarmament enjoys active participation by all of its members, whether they be part of alliances or non-aligned, however defined. But when we walk inside this room, we still try to operate the Conference along the lines of the cold war, working in archaic regional groups, with 65 potential vetoes hanging over the conduct of the work of the Conference. The consensus rule that now blocks our progress is paradoxically a rule we cannot apparently change without consensus.

Eleven years of no negotiations — and even before then, the negotiations lasted for only a few weeks — has led Canada to consider — and we are not the first to do so — that our disarmament work in this place is at a stalemate that may require new ways forward. The most important word in the “Conference on Disarmament” is “disarmament”, not the word “conference”. This forum is just one means to make progress towards the end goal of disarmament. The items on our agenda remain important. Prospects are not good that substantive work in the Conference will commence in the near future. If we truly care about disarmament, we must be ready to look for alternative ways forward outside this body. One such alternative was explored in 2005. Five years later, it may be time to re-examine it.

Canada would like to invite each member of the Conference to use the coming two months to examine creatively new approaches to disarmament – to “think outside the box”. Ideally, when we return in June, we will do so with consensus on a programme of work. But if that is not the case, we should be prepared to explore other ways through which we can carry on the work of the disarmament agenda.

The United States, for example, has proposed an initiative with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research that strikes us as a useful activity and worthy of broad support. However, it is noted that discussions are not a substitute for formal negotiations. It is vital that work continue on getting down to the business of treaty-making.

This room is full of capable and creative individuals. Now is the time for good ideas, and more importantly, for action. Let us return to the Conference on Disarmament in two months prepared to work creatively to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the distinguished representative of Canada for his statement.

This concludes my list of speakers. Does any delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Croatia.

Ms. Žunec Brandt (Croatia): Mr. President, since this is the first time that I have taken the floor under your presidency, allow me to congratulate you on behalf of an informal group of observer States to the Conference on Disarmament on your assumption of the post of President of the Conference. We wish you all success in your endeavours to bring the Conference to engage in substantive work during your mandate. Our thanks go to you, and your predecessor, distinguished Ambassador Khostov of Belarus, for your engagement.

I have the honour to deliver this statement to endorse the content of a letter from a number of observer States which was sent to you, Mr. President, yesterday.

In our letter, we stated that this informal group of observer States, coordinated by Thailand, was formed at our first meeting, on 9 March. This step was motivated by two things: in the medium term, by the common goal of the applicant observer States to become members of the Conference on Disarmament; and, in the short term, by the immediate need felt by all observer States to improve their access to information regarding the work of the Conference on Disarmament. As many of you are aware, the modalities for including or informing interested observer States of developments in the Conference on Disarmament by their respective regional groups vary greatly. Based on these common motivations, the informal group of observer States has been established under the able coordination of Thailand.

As stated in rule 2 of the rules of procedure, “the membership of the Conference will be reviewed at regular intervals”. The period of 11 years that has elapsed since the last enlargement in 1999 could comfortably qualify as “a regular interval”. To those who reason that there is no place for discussing enlargement when the Conference cannot even agree on a programme of work, I would say it might be no accident that the stalemate in the Conference coincides somewhat with the stalemate in its enlargement. To those who have voiced their support for the enlargement of this body, as well as for enhanced transparency, we would like to extend our thanks.

Mr. President, on behalf of the informal group of observer States, I would like to assure you, as well as the incoming presidents this year, of our full cooperation.

The President (*spoke in French*): Are there any more requests for the floor? It does not seem to be the case. With respect to the substantive work of the Conference, I should like to inform you that the presidency is currently scheduling bilateral consultations with all the members of the Conference. They will start as soon as possible and will continue during the intersessional period both here and in New York, on the sidelines of the NPT Review Conference.

This concludes our business for today. The next formal plenary meeting of the Conference will take place after the spring break and will be announced by the secretariat.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.