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# Conference on Disarmament

28 February 2011

English

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## Final record of the one thousand two hundred and tenth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 28 February 2011, at 3.45 p.m.

*President:* Mr. Pedro Oyarce .....(Chile)

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**The President:** Good afternoon. I declare open the 1210th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. At the start of this meeting, I would like to offer a warm welcome to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, Mr. Lawrence Cannon. Your presence here today, Minister, is a clear testimony to the importance that your country places on the work of this Conference, and I would also like to take this opportunity, Minister, on behalf of the Conference, to publicly express our appreciation of the Canadian presidency, which I have had the honour to succeed. I hope to be able to make a similar contribution to the one your country has made. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to give the floor to the Minister. You have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Cannon (Canada):** Thank you, Mr. President. Dear colleagues, this year, Canada faces the same challenge that every recent incoming Conference president has confronted since the negotiation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT): our traditional multilateral disarmament machinery has effectively stalled.

Canada assumed the first presidency of the 2011 session of the Conference on Disarmament. As a country that has participated actively in all the multilateral disarmament bodies since 1946, Canada is one of the many States represented in this room that have been party to the landmark successes which the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessor bodies have achieved, from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to the CTBT. Today, more than at any time in our recent history, the threat that nuclear proliferation poses to international peace and security is alarming.

Having negotiated a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons, since 1998 the Conference on Disarmament has found itself unable to start negotiations on the next logical disarmament and non-proliferation measure: a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for such weapons.

Last September, I spoke at the high-level meeting convened by the Secretary-General in New York on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. I was joined there by many of my colleagues in calling for a follow-up process to that meeting. To that end, we agreed, just a few weeks later, on the text of resolution 65/93, which places this issue squarely on the agenda of the General Assembly. This follow-up must continue.

The longer the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament lasts, the more trust among its members is lost and the harder it becomes to build the spirit of compromise that is so necessary if States are to begin negotiations.

*(continues in French)*

While some countries try to impede consensus on a programme of work for the Conference, others are trying harder and harder to achieve progress in the sphere of disarmament in other forums, such as the General Assembly, where a unanimous vote is not required to pursue discussions.

On the other hand, it is only natural that some countries should want to avoid the risk posed by a majority vote within the United Nations on problems of national security.

The Conference's rule of unanimity was not established by chance, and we are aware that this negotiating forum has proven useful for all of us in the past.

*(continues in English)*

As some have said, if the Conference on Disarmament did not exist, we would have to reinvent it. Our challenge, then, is to reinvent our approach to our work in the Conference. Canada believes that we should focus on the Conference's four core issues in a new way based on the understanding that starting negotiations on one issue will not mean that we will neglect the other three.

Last September I called on all of us to think outside the box. It is in this spirit, and with a focus on the Conference's four core issues, that Canada approached its presidency. By working in plenary sessions open to civil society and the public, Canada sought to create a transparent space for discussion which we hoped would reveal common ground that could serve as a basis for an eventual compromise on a programme of work. Under the Canadian presidency, this chamber saw more than 100 substantive interventions which demonstrated the desire of member States to start work.

*(continues in French)*

We are, however, the first to admit that it will probably take time and patience over the course of several months and under the successive presidencies of several countries if we wish to once again come to an agreement on a collective tool — the programme of work — as we succeeded in doing in 2009.

This time, we are seeking the implementation of the programme of work or of any other proposal that would allow the Conference to begin negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty in accordance with the Shannon mandate.

*(continues in English)*

As I also said last September, Canada will do all that is in its power to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work and, in order to further this common endeavour, I would ask for the support of all of you represented here today.

Thank you very much.

**The President:** Thank you very much, Minister, for your observations. At this time we will suspend the meeting for five minutes in order to escort the Minister from the chamber and will reconvene shortly.

*The meeting was suspended.*

We will now resume the meeting, and I would like to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Conference to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Mr. Alexander Stubb. Your presence at this Conference, Minister, is a clear testimony to the importance that your country places on the work of this forum and on the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation system. I now invite Minister Stubb to take the floor. You have the floor, Minister.

**Mr. Stubb (Finland):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. Indeed, I am not Mrs. Hillary Clinton nor Lawrence Cannon nor Ahmed Davutoğlu nor Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo. I will put you out of your misery in about 90 seconds with a very short speech.

I remember speaking at the high-level meeting in New York in September, and we all heard the calls for the Conference on Disarmament to resume its work. We all know where we stand right now. It is quite simple: our efforts to revitalize the Conference and take disarmament forward seem not to have taken root. It is against this background that I will make three very brief points.

First, no real progress has taken place since the high-level meeting, and the situation here in Geneva remains deadlocked. Many delegations continue to resort to procedural hurdles, without offering any credible alternative means for beginning our real work, and I find this very regrettable, very bureaucratic and, in many ways, I think, quite dishonest. I join others, once again, in urging members of the Conference to take the necessary steps to move us forward. We think that the programme of work adopted in 2009 still provides the best available foundation for the Conference's deliberations.

Second, the Conference on Disarmament must begin, without delay, negotiations on key substantive issues, most notably on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). Launching

negotiations on an FMCT is a pressing priority, and it would not only take us closer to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, but also strengthen global non-proliferation and anti-terrorism efforts.

The threat of the proliferation of nuclear weapons is as topical as ever, and I think that recent events in the Middle East underline the need for action in this regard. A fissile material treaty would positively contribute to a climate of mutual trust and enhanced security, a necessity in times of political turmoil. Calls for its primacy and urgency therefore remain warranted.

My third and final point is that the swift resumption of negotiations would also allow the Conference to regain its authority as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament before it is too late for it to do so. Indeed, if the current stalemate continues, there is the risk that negotiations will move to other forums, which would lead to the permanent impairment of the Conference on Disarmament. This body has achieved much in the past, and there is no good reason why it should not be allowed to also do so in the future. The member States of the Conference must shoulder their responsibility and launch real negotiations.

So, these three points: first, there has been no real progress, and we need to make some; second, we must begin; and, third, there must be a swift resumption of negotiations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**The President:** Thank you, Minister, for your message and observations. We will suspend the meeting, hopefully for 5 minutes, to wait for our next speaker and to escort the Minister from the chamber. Thank you.

Distinguished delegates, we will now resume the meeting, and I wish to extend a warm welcome to the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Ms. Hillary Clinton. Your presence at the Conference, Madam Secretary of State, is a clear testimony to the importance that your country places on the work of this forum and on the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation system. I invite you, Ms. Clinton, to address the Conference. You have the floor.

**Ms. Clinton** (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for your leadership and your efforts to make the Conference on Disarmament an effective tool for addressing the critical challenges we face today. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for convening this important plenary session and for the opportunity to address you, and I owe special thanks to our Ambassador, Laura Kennedy, and the United States Mission here for their hard work in advancing President Obama's disarmament agenda.

Nearly 20 years after the end of the Cold War, the world has more than 20,000 nuclear weapons. As I speak to you today, centrifuges around the world are spinning out more enriched uranium, a still significant amount of which is of weapons grade. Plutonium is being churned out in reactors and separated from spent fuel in reprocessing plants. The world faces no shortage of ingredients for nuclear bombs. Yet more fissile materials are made every single day.

The question before us today is whether we will, at last, agree to end the dedicated production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Halting production is in the interests of every country, and I urge this Conference to end the stalemate and open negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) without further delay.

An FMCT would be an important step toward creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, a vision that President Obama laid out in Prague nearly two years ago, and it would build on the notable progress we have made together these past years.

The United Nations Security Council unanimously approved resolution 1887 to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime. The United States released our Nuclear Posture Review, which reduces the prominence of nuclear weapons in our national defence. We convened the Nuclear Security Summit, where 47 countries agreed to lock down vulnerable nuclear materials over four years, and we joined with other NPT members in a successful Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

And, of course, the United States and Russia brought the New START Treaty into force. That treaty will cut our deployed strategic warheads to the lowest numbers since the 1950s. It was my great pleasure to exchange the instruments of ratification with Minister Sergey Lavrov in Munich earlier this month. Our two countries are now positioned to discuss further arms control reductions, including non-strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons. We must not squander this momentum. We should continue to advance nuclear security by turning now to the negotiation of a verifiable ban on fissile material production for bombs.

The United States has been committed to the Conference on Disarmament as the logical forum for this negotiation. This Conference, after all, produced such landmark treaties as the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, but the last treaty was completed in 1996 and this Conference has been deadlocked ever since. The programme of work agreed to in May 2009 remains stalled. And one single country, a country that is a friend and partner of the United States, continues to undermine the international consensus in favour of an FMCT.

I know this Conference has always cherished the principle of consensus, which ensures that every State can defend its national interests at the negotiating table, but our patience is not infinite. There is no justification for a single nation to abuse the consensus principle and forever thwart the legitimate desire of the 64 other States to get negotiations under way on an agreement that would strengthen our common security. It is clear that there is a wide range of views inside the Conference, and these views will have to be accommodated through the process of negotiation. That process will be difficult, and it will take a number of years, and that is all the more reason to begin negotiations now. If we cannot summon the shared will even to begin negotiations in this body, then the United States is determined to pursue other options. Global nuclear security is too important to allow this matter to drift forever.

An FMCT is critical to our broader agenda. If we are serious about reducing the possibility that fissile material could fall into terrorists' hands, then we must reduce the amount of such material that is available. For that reason, the United States also supports reducing stocks of separated plutonium and highly enriched uranium and minimizing the future use of highly enriched uranium for civilian purposes. The United States has made significant progress toward those goals — both bilaterally with Russia and multilaterally — and we will continue to make them an important focus of our nuclear diplomacy.

The United States is deeply committed to reducing nuclear weapons and the risk of nuclear proliferation. Our long-term goal, our vision, is a world without nuclear weapons. Now, we understand this will be difficult and it will certainly take time, but we believe it is attainable if we tackle each piece of the problem step-by-step.

Therefore, I ask each of your nations for support in strengthening global security by taking the next step: beginning negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. No nation has to agree to the treaty, but it is unacceptable for any nation to prevent other nations from pursuing what such a treaty could look like and what benefits it could produce for the world.

So I hope that we will see action now from this esteemed Conference, which has meant so much to the world over so many years. This is the forum; you are the leaders who should be making these decisions. It would be unfortunate if that were not to be pursued in terms of this particular treaty. And the United States stands ready to support the beginning of negotiations, to do whatever is necessary to try to accommodate legitimate national interests, and then to reach a resolution and produce such a treaty. Otherwise, we believe this is too important a matter to be left in a deadlock forever.

So we thank you for your attention to this critical issue and we look forward to working with you as we continue the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you very much.

**The President:** Thank you very much, Madam Secretary of State, for your kind words for the presidency and also for your observations and message. We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes in order to escort the Secretary of State from the chamber and will then hear directly from the Under-Secretary of Mexico.

*The meeting is resumed.*

I would like to give a most warm welcome to the Deputy Foreign Minister for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of Mexico, Mr. Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo. Your presence at this Conference, Deputy Foreign Minister, is a clear testimony to the importance that your country places on the work of this forum, on the contributions that Mexico has made to this forum, and on the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation system. I invite you, sir, to address the Conference. You have the floor.

**Mr. Gómez Robledo (Mexico):** Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, distinguished members of the Conference on Disarmament, Mexico welcomes Chile to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and expresses its firm support for steps aimed at moving forward with the substantive work of this negotiating forum. We must take advantage of the opportunity that presents itself at this juncture. As you will all recall, in 2009 and 2010 we witnessed initiatives in the field of disarmament — some unilateral, others bilateral, and still others of a broader nature — that were intended to enable our Conference to serve as a catalyst for negotiations and decision-making concerning the future of this great institutional mechanism. Let us be true to our purpose and let us not open the way for a paradox whereby, in the midst of renewed momentum in the multilateral disarmament agenda and recent modest but encouraging signs pointing towards the reduction of stocks, the negotiations that ought to take place in this Conference are not even able to begin.

Mexico applauds the work carried out by the last six presidents of the Conference, who, in the absence of substantive work, at least made it possible to hold substantive discussions through informal meetings (an exercise that incidentally began under the Mexican presidency in 2004), or even in plenary meetings, in an effort to lay the groundwork for the start of negotiations. However, we cannot overlook the somewhat mythical status attributed to this forum, the way in which its agenda and rules of procedure have been framed or, above all its lack of a defined programme of work, all of which has ultimately eclipsed the substantive work of the Conference for the past 15 years.

Mexico has always been respectful of the institutional structure of the Conference and of the rules which govern it, but we cannot allow its working methods to paralyse progress or stand in the way of the achievement of our ultimate objective. This Conference must not continue to block the general and complete disarmament to which we all aspire. While we do not wish to enumerate or explain to you all the different aspects of the impasse that this Conference is facing, it seems to us that it is important to at least analyse the problem in general terms and the options for helping to find a solution.

Firstly, Mexico considers that the debates and discussions we engage in at this Conference do not represent substantive work and do not constitute a proper area of endeavour for a permanent negotiating forum such as this. On the contrary, by limiting itself to deliberations, the Conference fails to fulfil its mandate and duplicates the solutions offered by the Disarmament Commission and by the General Assembly itself.

Secondly, Mexico considers that the composition of the Conference does not correspond to the current international situation, and we are especially concerned by the adamant opposition of some countries to the direct and active participation of civil society. The world has changed; civil society has gained more ground in ways that enrich our work. The Conference on Disarmament cannot remain oblivious to the winds of change.

Thirdly, Mexico considers that the rules of procedure of the Conference, and particularly the rule of consensus, impede decision-making. Such a rule has merit when seeking general agreement but should never be used as a right to veto. What is more, veto power runs counter to democratic decision-making within any multilateral forum.

Among the factors impeding the work of the Conference, we should perhaps focus our attention on the lack of political will in certain areas or the absence of suitable conditions within the forum. These circumstances hinder States Members not only from agreeing on specific instruments, but also, as I said before, from even starting negotiations.

The possibility that the Conference might improve its working methods seems very remote. In order to do so, the Conference must be seen for what it is: a vehicle for reaching a destination that it has not managed to move towards in the past 15 years. Mexico considers that now is the time to be honest, to face things head on and to take the necessary decisions to overcome this inertia and build a framework within this Conference to underpin a disarmament agenda whose implementation cannot be deferred any longer.

My country has been emphatic on this point and expressed this view during the high-level meeting on revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament held in September 2010. We also emphasized this view during the work of the First Committee at the last General Assembly and in the statement my delegation made in the first part of the 2011 session. On each of these occasions we pointed out that the ineffectiveness of this forum is unacceptable and that we cannot continue to allocate enormous human, financial, professional and political resources to an institution that does not fulfil its mandate and that, on the contrary, indulges in an exercise in empty diplomacy. In these circumstances, Mexico reiterates its call for an ultimatum to be delivered to this forum that will set a time limit for the performance of the work that is its true *raison d'être*.

In order to move forward we must be proactive, and my delegation believes that the suggestions I will outline now could help to define options for overcoming the paralysis affecting this Conference.

As you know, my country has tried for several years to devise means of building trust and understanding around procedural issues and central themes of the agenda of the Conference. In 2005, in cooperation with other countries, we attempted to launch disarmament negotiations in the General Assembly in the hope that the Conference would adopt its programme of work. This initiative was unsuccessful, but it is worth considering the possibility of resuming it at some point. We consider that this proposal is still valid, and Mexico is willing to put it forward again, along with any other proposal that offers real possibilities for initiating negotiations on disarmament either within or outside the Conference in ad hoc forums, as we have done on previous occasions.

In this respect, Mexico wishes to thank Australia and Japan for promoting substantive parallel discussions. These efforts strengthen mutual understanding of our

respective positions. Nevertheless, discussions outside the Conference occupy our time and, in some ways, take the place of the substantive work of a negotiating forum.

We have reached a juncture that provides an opportunity to revitalize our negotiating forum. Let us embrace the commitment that we made in the principles and objectives document adopted at the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1995 and in the final document of the Review Conference in 2010. We made a commitment to address these issues in the Conference on Disarmament, and we cannot continue to delay honouring that commitment. Only by developing these positions will we be able to reach agreement. Negotiation is our best option for improving nuclear security throughout the world in order to prevent terrorist groups from gaining access to nuclear materials. A freeze on the production of nuclear weapons will contribute to disarmament and non-proliferation while representing a fundamental step in making our system a fairer and more equitable one.

Mexico has insisted that a key element of the “great bargain”, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, was the commitment made by the nuclear weapons States to disarm, and for more than 40 years now we have waited for the start of negotiations in good faith on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. As we all know, this obligation is stipulated in article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and was referred to in the historic advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice some years ago.

In 2009 there was a fleeting possibility that the Conference on Disarmament might begin its substantive work, when, for a few days, we managed to approve an agenda for our forum. Unfortunately, ultimately these efforts did not materialize. Let us therefore join efforts and take action to deal with the risks and threats posed by the sheer existence of nuclear weapons, given their humanitarian consequences – weapons whose mere use would constitute a crime against humanity.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**The President:** Thank you, Deputy Foreign Minister. I thank you for your kind words about the presidency, and we are also grateful for your analysis and message. I wish to suspend the meeting for a few minutes in order to escort the Deputy Foreign Minister from the chamber.

Thank you very much for your patience. As we have no more guests today, I invite you to resume the meeting tomorrow at 10 a.m. to hear first from Minister Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs from the Russian delegation.

*The meeting rose at 5 p.m.*