

Conference on Disarmament

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English

Final record of the one thousand two hundred and forty-seventh plenary meeting

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President: Mr. Hisham Badr(Egypt)

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The President: I am honoured to take over the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament affairs. It was the intention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt to address the conference next week. However, due to urgent matters he will not be able to do so. He asked me to convey Egypt's total commitment to the Conference on Disarmament and to the cause of creating a world free of nuclear weapons that would provide undiminished and increased security for all. Let me also thank the Ecuadorian presidency for all the efforts they have done in the last month.

Egypt has always been in the forefront of disarmament efforts and was one of the original members of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament created in 1961, the predecessor of the Conference on Disarmament. Throughout those years, Egypt has actively participated in negotiating different disarmament treaties and has continued in the collective efforts to reach such agreements. This in part reflects our national commitment to the multilateralism of disarmament negotiations, a commitment that is shared by the Non-Aligned Movement which we currently chair. Indeed, the Movement has consistently propagated the cause of nuclear disarmament in different forums. Moreover, Egypt as a member of the New Agenda Coalition has consistently sought practical ways for nuclear disarmament. As true believers in multilateralism in disarmament negotiations, we place a high value on the Conference on Disarmament, and let me assure you that the objective of the Egyptian presidency will be to preserve it as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament affairs by working towards adopting a programme of work.

Reaching a programme of work after 15 years of impasse may seem like a serious challenge. After all, as I previously noted, some of the actors have been sitting in their comfort zone for too long, not willing to move, while criticizing the inability of the Conference to break the deadlock. A serious challenge it is, but insurmountable it is not. I am a true believer of the Arab proverb which states that it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. Indeed, in Egypt we have recently been challenging a long-lasting status quo that seemed to be predestined. Certainly, if we were able to change a political system that was entrenched for 30 years, we are cautiously optimistic about reaching a compromise on a programme of work in the Conference.

As I said in the last plenary meeting, this session is truly a seminal one. There is an evidently growing frustration and unhappiness with the state of affairs. Some question the reasons for this impasse in the Conference; others suggest a cooling-off period where we freeze the Conference until external circumstances change; yet others question the utility of the very existence of the Conference. However, the Conference has worked in the past and has the potential to work in the present and the future. It is indeed the kind of forum that, if it didn't exist, we would seek to establish. Thus, it is our task — rather, our obligation — to act to break the impasse and to bring back the Conference to substantial work. Let me repeat: it is our task. And, while I recognize that the president of the Conference is expected to set the direction, it is our collective responsibility to work together to achieve the work of the Conference.

But first I have to make one note. While we do recognize the best intentions of everyone to preserve the Conference, we don't believe that setting aside substantive issues and concentrating on procedural adjustments will achieve this objective. The Conference was created to negotiate international treaties on disarmament and only by commencing substantial work on the items of the agenda can we reinvigorate the Conference. This is not to say that we do not need to deal with procedural issues at some time in the future — and nationally we have our own ideas of how and where we should do so. But, rather it is to say that procedural issues are by no means the priority or what will get us out of the current predicament. So reaching a programme of work remains the top priority of the Egyptian presidency in accordance with the Conference's rules of procedure.

Some say their top priority is one topic or the other and complain that their priorities are not being addressed, but it must be recognized that without starting somewhere nothing is going to be addressed. Others consider a certain prior agreement as the gold standard. Well, I am not an economist, but I do remember that even when the gold standard was deemed too rigid to deal with the rising crisis in the world financial system, it also was changed to cope with such developments.

What we need is to recognize that we have a problem, that we need to deal with the problem, and that dealing with this problem will require a collective willingness to compromise by everyone. We have to recognize that no one country or group of countries will achieve its objectives while ignoring the interests and priorities of others. We must seek understanding of others' positions, and craft a compromise accordingly. We have to recognize that if we hit a wall we should not continue trying to go through it or thinking it will go away. Instead, we should take a step back and see how we can go around it; as a Chinese proverb roughly says: taking a step back opens up one's horizon.

Now, many countries in this chamber want substantial work to proceed. Others want negotiations to start, while some exclude negotiations on one issue. I think the previous parameters do not constitute an impossible riddle. In fact, I think we can reach a compromise that may achieve the objectives of all countries.

During this week, I will be conducting consultations with regional groups on elements of a possible programme of work. The idea is to establish working groups on all four core issues and special coordinators on the other issues on the agenda. On the working groups for the core issues, I will be soliciting ideas as to the possible mandates that could be given. But, regardless of the words used for the mandates, I have to point out that the mere establishment of the working groups would not only provide for substantive work on the issues but also help in any future negotiations on the subjects.

Probably all of us in this chamber have been involved in multilateral negotiations and possibly negotiations of international treaties. We are aware that such endeavours take many years, and in fact the first few years are usually spent hashing out and clarifying concepts and terms as well as haggling over what is to be included in such a treaty and what is not. These working groups will serve as avenues to do exactly that. I learned in Japan that to open a door it is sometimes advisable not to push but rather to slide it open. Indeed, this metaphor is very relevant for work in the Conference.

But above all we have to first ask ourselves whether we truly mean business when we say that we need substantive work to commence in the Conference. Are we just trying to score points? If we are interested in the former, namely really to commence work, I believe we can achieve an agreement on a programme of work, though I know it will involve tough negotiations. But this is our job, and it is the challenge I lay before you. After all, as the President, I can only help in suggesting a way forward. The onus of getting the Conference back to work is on all of us. I am going to exert all my effort to create this momentum.

I am looking forward to our consultation later this week and hope that it will be fruitful.

I thank you, and now I would like to invite the Conference to consider one more request by a State not member of the Conference to participate in our work as an observer. This request is from the Kyrgyz Republic and is contained in document CD/WP.570/Add.2. May I take it that the Conference decides to invite this State to participate in our work in accordance with the rules of procedure? It is so decided.

Now I would like to welcome Ambassador D'Alotto of Argentina, who has joined us as representative of his country. I assure him of our fullest cooperation in the execution of his duties.

Now we will proceed with the list of speakers. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Argentina.

Mr. D'Alotto (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, it is a great honour for me to address the Conference at this, my first session as Permanent Representative of Argentina, and I thank you for your words of welcome.

Allow me to wish you every success as President of this forum, and to express my hope that in the coming weeks you will be able to steer us to what must be our priority goal, the early adoption and implementation of a programme of work that will allow us to begin substantive work during the first session of 2012.

My delegation recognizes the importance of coordination between the six Conference presidencies. It would therefore be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the preliminary work done by Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador over the past month or to express the hope that the work of the other presidents due to take on this task this year will bear fruit.

My delegation had the honour of speaking on 24 January on behalf of all Latin American member countries and observers at the Conference. We drew attention then to our commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, expressed by the establishment of the first nuclear-weapon-free zone in a densely populated region. With the signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco 45 years ago, we sealed a complete ban on such weapons throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

The treaty is also legally binding for other States that, by acceding to its additional protocols, have undertaken to respect its purposes and goals with regard to the denuclearization of Latin America.

For my country these commitments have become particularly significant in the light of recent developments in the South Atlantic, which the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Héctor Timerman, addressed in a speech on 10 February of this year at United Nations headquarters in New York. Argentina would not wish to see the principles of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, so entrenched in our region's culture, challenged.

We believe that the continued existence of nuclear weapons could, with time, come to constitute a permanent threat to international peace and security. We must therefore yet again urge the nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their obligations under article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to strive for general and complete disarmament. We also reiterate our call to States that have not yet done so to they accede to this instrument.

It is imperative that we begin to work seriously and responsibly, with a universal vision, on nuclear disarmament. My delegation believes that, as was acknowledged in the NPT and in the action plan adopted at the most recent NPT Review Conference, the Conference is the most appropriate forum in which to make progress on disarmament.

Our position regarding what is required to begin this work is unchanged: a flexible approach allowing all agenda items to be addressed and a willingness to make progress in negotiations on nuclear disarmament, fissile material, negative security assurances and outer space. However, we all know that these negotiations cannot start today.

Argentina made plain its views on the current situation of this forum at the high-level meeting of September 2010 and in subsequent discussions. Without wishing to repeat our position, let me join others in asserting that stalemate cannot be the natural state of the Conference, nor may it become a pretext for serving any particular national interests.

Whereas in 2009 we managed to overcome these differences and find some minimal common ground with the decision contained in document CD/1864, today we face a situation that requires from us still greater effort, flexibility and creativity. In that light, and as our country stated in discussions in 2011, we would like to move forward with proposals for a programme of work that are simple enough to accommodate the positions of various delegations.

We understand that the goal of this Conference is to negotiate. However, any substantive work whatsoever that helps us move in that direction should be encouraged.

This is a unique forum in terms of its membership, mandates and rules of procedure. It cannot, therefore, be compared with any other body in terms of the effectiveness of its results.

The conclusion of binding disarmament instruments is vital to us, but a nuclear disarmament treaty should not be an end in itself. Rather, the aim should be to have a real impact on existing nuclear weapons stockpiles.

We therefore need to be cautious and responsible when assessing options that, although they might appear to be an appealing way of obtaining new instruments, would fall well short of our goal of achieving a world truly free of nuclear weapons.

To be effective, we need to involve countries that possess such weapons in negotiations. This is not to say that, for Argentina, some States are more important than others. On the contrary, one of the safeguards provided by this forum is that it enables us all to present our points of view in equal measure.

As a non-nuclear-weapon State, Argentina has done all in its power with regard to disarmament and believes that it is time for countries that still possess such weapons to make a real commitment and sit down at the negotiating table in order to cut back their weapons stockpiles and the materials used to produce them, and to adopt measures to prevent them from falling into the hands of others.

This position does not mean that Argentina intends to wait for the nuclear-weapon States to display the necessary political will, but rather that we must restate our demands with still greater energy. As I said earlier, the stalemate in the Conference must not be used as a pretext for perpetuating the existence of nuclear weapons.

We should not, however, confuse the need to demand more progress from the nuclear-weapon States through multilateral negotiations with the inability to channel such negotiations through any particular body. It is not the institution but the lack of even the slightest common ground that stands in the way of starting negotiations, whether in or outside this Conference.

Mr. President, let me finish by reiterating that, as far as my delegation is concerned, the most effective way to revitalize the Conference is to adopt a programme of work, and that all our efforts should be directed towards that goal. We appreciate your commitment to devoting the four weeks of your presidency to the search for new areas of consensus.

We agree on the need to make certain procedures more flexible in order to help revitalize the Conference. We believe that the most effective internal reform we could now undertake would be to address the way in which we see the Conference's programme of work.

I am aware of the challenge involved in beginning work as the head of the Mission of Argentina before the Conference at a time when it is going through such a profound crisis. Nevertheless, I believe there is a chance that a programme of work will be adopted, and we are confident that you will lead our discussions this month in a way that will foster a real commitment to achieving this goal.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for his statement and for his kind words. Now I give the floor to the representative of Russia, Ambassador Vasiliev.

Mr. Vasiliev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Ambassador Badr, allow me to welcome you as the President of the Conference on Disarmament. We are pleased to see a representative of Egypt, a country with which we have close ties, in this important post. You may always count on our continued support and cooperation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga of Ecuador for his work as President.

The Conference already took a first step forward this year by rapidly agreeing on an agenda. We all know that, to begin substantive work, we need to agree on a programme of work, which, unfortunately, has not occurred for many years. The worrying plight of the Conference on Disarmament needs to be resolved without delay. The international community has begun to make wholly justified demands of us, indicating that maintaining the status quo is not an option. Overcoming the stalemate in the Conference and strengthening other multilateral negotiating forums are assuming ever-increasing importance on the international agenda. Serious steps must be taken forthwith to rectify the present situation.

Russia is in favour of preserving the Conference on Disarmament as the forum for multilateral negotiations on disarmament. We are sure that this view is shared by the overwhelming majority of the parties to the Conference and its observers. Our principal goal is that patient, respectful dialogue aimed at alleviating the national security concerns of the various members of the Conference should yield a positive outcome and that the Conference should begin to work at full strength.

Many ideas on how to overcome the stalemate in the Conference have been put forward and a number of specific proposals made, including at the high-level meeting on 24 September 2010. The Russian delegation has also had the opportunity to state its position at that forum and later. Today I would like to comment on the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Tokayev, at the plenary meeting of 14 February. Russia welcomes his determination to break the deadlock in the Conference and agrees that, in order to do so, urgent measures are required. We support Mr. Tokayev's view that efforts should be intensified to seek a way forward at the political level. We deem worthy of attention the ideas of calling a special high-level meeting on the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament, and of implementing the recommendation by the United Nations General-Secretary's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters regarding the establishment under the auspices of the Secretary-General of a group of "wise persons" whose task would be to study innovative ways of improving the situation. We are not opposed to the idea tabled by Mr. Tokayev to appoint three special coordinators to address chronic structural issues: the agenda, various elements of the rules of procedure related to the preservation of the consensus rule, and broadening participation in the forum.

However, we stress once again that we do not consider procedural issues to be a stumbling block for the Conference. On the contrary, it is precisely those current rules of procedure that have, in the past, made possible significant success in safeguarding the principle of equal and indivisible security for all States. Russia wishes the work of the Conference to resume as quickly as possible. Mr. President, we support your declared aim of striving to find a compromise on the programme of work and are ready to help you in this.

During the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly, Russia distributed its own proposal with regard to the programme of work of the Conference. It remains on the table. In the framework of such a programme, we are ready to hammer out the fundamental elements of a universal, equitable and verifiable treaty banning the

production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Its adoption would constitute another step forward in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

A treaty to prevent the spread of weapons in space remains a key priority for us. We believe that the draft proposed jointly by us and China would benefit the entire international community. We are ready to engage in substantive discussion in the Conference on proposals regarding security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States, including the development of a legally binding agreement. Russia is also prepared to discuss all aspects of nuclear disarmament in the context of maintaining and boosting strategic stability.

The President: I thank the representative of Russia for his statement and for his kind words.

(spoke in Arabic)

I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al-Hakim.

Mr. Al-Hakim (Iraq) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. President, I would like to warmly congratulate you on your appointment to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I am particularly pleased to see the representative of Egypt taking the helm at the meetings of the Conference. Egypt has long played an important role in the various processes and measures on disarmament and non-proliferation. We are quite confident that, under your wise, knowledgeable and dynamic guidance, our work will bear fruit. I assure you of the full support and cooperation of the Iraqi delegation during your term as President as you strive to accomplish this complex task. We appreciate the invaluable efforts of your predecessor, the Ambassador of Ecuador, and I would also like to express my deep gratitude to your colleagues on the six-president team. I also take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Tokayev, for his unstinting efforts and his tireless devotion to restoring the effective capacity of the Conference on Disarmament to carry out its true mission of addressing disarmament and non-proliferation. I support the proposals on procedural reform that have been made with a view to breaking the deadlock.

We must not ignore the fact that in the past 13 years the Conference on Disarmament has failed to yield any result in the course of negotiations, which have been characterized by stagnation and an inability to accomplish the tasks entrusted to the Conference in its capacity as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. However, it is within the capacity of its member States to reverse the impasse and enable the Conference on Disarmament to fulfil its mandate, provided that they show flexibility, sufficient motivation and the political will to make compromises that will necessarily have an impact on and significantly boost other multilateral disarmament initiatives within and outside the United Nations. I take this opportunity to congratulate yet again Ambassador Jazaïry, who regrettably will be leaving us soon, for all he did, with his characteristic zeal, and for bringing to bear his talents and experience to secure the adoption of a Conference programme of work in 2009 (documents CD/1863 and CD/1864).

We must pursue efforts to explore options and mobilize the political will needed to create momentum and begin substantive work. We need to move beyond the narrow issues that have hampered progress in the Conference and to meet the particular challenges associated with the security environment. We must do this in order to reach agreement on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that addresses the concerns of all the member States and is in line with the rules of procedure. We must move forward on the key issues, giving priority to the issue of nuclear disarmament. It is to be hoped that members of the Conference will reach agreement on this as soon as possible, so that we may achieve the goals of international peace and security.

In conclusion, Mr. President, permit me to welcome our new ambassador colleagues who have taken up their functions. I wish them success and look forward to working together with them. Let me reiterate my wish, Mr. President, for your every success in the task before you. We look forward to your wise leadership of this Conference.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the representative for Iraq for his statement, for the kind words addressed to the Chair and for his firm support.

(*spoke in English*)

Now I give the floor to the representative of Germany, Ambassador Hoffman.

Mr. Hoffmann (Germany): Mr. President, at the outset I wish to congratulate you on behalf of my delegation on the assumption of the presidency. I wish to assure you of our full support in the important task before you. I say this also in view of the fact that during this session Germany belongs to the informal group of the six presidencies which is meant to ensure a degree of continuity in our work.

The most deplorable fact that the Conference on Disarmament has, for 15 years in a row, not done what it is mandated to do, which is to negotiate legal instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, has been the subject of countless statements in this chamber. Indeed, many efforts have been made to overcome the persistent deadlock, but regrettably so far to no avail. As a result of this, a deep sense of frustration has started to pervade this chamber.

It is not surprising that in this situation wholly new approaches have come to the fore with a view to getting the disarmament and non-proliferation work, which urgently needs to be tackled, at long last under way.

I would remind colleagues that the First Committee of the General Assembly last October held engaged discussion not only on one but indeed on four draft resolutions which dealt in various ways with the stalemate in the Conference. What clearly emerged from these discussions was a determined willingness to consider "options" in case we do not make progress during this session.

So, clearly, patience is running out. The clock is ticking.

It is often said that the Conference on Disarmament is the sole multilateral negotiating body dealing with disarmament and non-proliferation. I believe it is fair to say that many deem it desirable to maintain the Conference as an institution. Germany shares this preference. We will do our utmost to work towards a functioning Conference on Disarmament.

But the Conference must deliver; if it continues to fail in this, its credibility and its legitimacy, which have already suffered a great deal, will erode in a way which can indeed threaten its very existence. That is why we cannot afford to give up our efforts to seek a solution on the programme of work which is aimed at starting substantive work in the Conference. In fact, we must step up our efforts to this end.

This is where I would like to express our particular appreciation and gratitude to Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga of Ecuador for tackling the issue of the work programme head-on as the first President of this year's session.

Yes, it is true, delegations had different views on some of the new ideas Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga put forward, so in the end it became clear once again that consensus remained elusive. But we must continue our efforts towards a programme of work; there is no other way. If we want to arrive at our goal we cannot just sit in our seats as in trenches and simply repeat old formulas which, as we all know very well, have not proved successful over many years.

So presidents should be encouraged as a matter of principle to try out new paths, even if it is only nuances here or there which may do the trick, to arrive at a situation where no one raises their nameplate when the President speaks the critical words that he takes it that the draft programme of work he has put before the chamber can be adopted and the gavel can then fall.

It is important to remind ourselves that consensus does not necessarily mean that everybody is happy with an outcome. More often than not, consensus only means that one can live with an outcome and that the pain is shared by all in equal measure.

Actually, it is only in this way that multilateral bodies can be productive at all. All States have a heavy responsibility and also a duty to make their contribution to make multilateralism and its institutions function.

Clearly, some of the rules under which the Conference has to operate are anything but ideal for effective work. With his thoughtful remarks last week, for which I thank him, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Tokayev, put his finger into the wound in this regard. In this connection, the Secretary-General also touched upon the question of enlargement. I would therefore like to state here that Germany fully supports the positive position the European Union has taken in this regard.

Now, when it comes to the Secretary-General's list of problematic procedural issues, I would add the consensus rule as it has unfortunately developed in the Conference, turning into a virtual right of veto.

Now, I do not intend to dwell much on this subject, because I can already hear the familiar chorus that this body has managed in the past to work successfully with the consensus rule and that what is allegedly really needed is political will. Let me just say this: Who can deny that without such a de facto veto right it would be impossible for one member State to prevent 64 member States from starting a negotiating process? Who can deny that we would have started our substantive work already a long time ago?

As far as political will is concerned, is it not the case that 64 States have indeed shown political will to actually implement the programme of work contained in document CD/1864 as it was adopted in May 2009? Frankly, I am not quite sure what the talk about the need to show political will is actually supposed to mean under these circumstances.

My delegation does not exclude the possibility that there may be merit in looking into procedural weaknesses of the Conference in parallel to our endeavours to agree on a programme of work. Indeed, if we continue to fail in implementing our mandate, a situation may arise where a rethink of the United Nations disarmament machinery as a whole might become urgent. In such a discussion, which would have to be taken up in another place in the context of the so-called revitalization debate, suggestions such as those put forward by the Secretary-General of the Conference will undoubtedly evoke much interest. But in this chamber our primary task remains to find a compromise on the programme of work which allows us to do the substantive work we are mandated to do.

As I stated before, no one can deny that there is broad political will to start substantive work in the Conference. The adoption of the programme of work in document CD/1864 in May 2009 was clear evidence of this.

The corresponding political will was demonstrated again, and very impressively, when the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which represents almost three times as many States as the Conference, expressed in its final document the determination that the Conference on Disarmament should begin negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, and that it should immediately establish a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament. Germany firmly supports this call.

As the final document makes clear, these objectives need to be pursued within the context of an agreed, comprehensive and balanced programme of work. The Review Conference put its expectations vis-à-vis the Conference into the perspective of seeking a safer world for all without nuclear weapons.

It is our task in this chamber to find the necessary elements for a comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

Now, in light of many years of discussions, it appears that the key elements of what needs to be put into such a programme of work are not really such a huge mystery, provided the task is approached with a determined will to succeed and with a mindset which does not ask what one's preferred outcome is but rather what all can live with.

In light of well over 15 years of failed efforts, it would therefore, generally speaking, appear advisable not to overburden the manner in which we describe the objective of the work we endeavour to mandate. In other words, we should find formulations which are sufficiently generic so as to leave the necessary degree of useful constructive ambiguity, which would make it politically very difficult indeed for any delegation to raise a nameplate and to say "no".

What is essential is that the Conference give itself a clear mandate for substantive work, and that can only be, at a minimum, to work on new instruments. This is what our mandate is fundamentally about.

After the accomplishment of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, it is more than obvious that the next stop on the difficult road to a world free of nuclear weapons is the issue of fissile material for nuclear weapon purposes. Logically, this must mean to prohibit its further production in the first instance, because otherwise such an instrument would not make any sense. All of us in this chamber are aware that any instrument in this complex field will also need a host of regulations and provisions commensurate with the complex nature of the subject in order to create an effective instrument in the field of disarmament and arms control. If we tackle our task starting from such an understanding, it should be possible, with goodwill, to find formulations which protect everybody's concerns and interests.

Mr. President, I listened with great interest to your introductory statement. You have expressed your determination to make an engaged effort at finding a workable solution for the programme of work. We encourage you in this endeavour, and we are confident that you are particularly well qualified and, as representative of Egypt, particularly well placed to achieve success.

Let me conclude by expressing our hope that your suggestions and proposals will be examined by everybody in this chamber with an open mind and the necessary flexibility without which no solution can be found in this difficult matter. I can assure you that my delegation will work in this spirit.

The President: I would like to thank the representative of Germany for his statement and for his very kind words. I see that he is already preparing for his seat here, as President, from the language he used in the speech; that is good. I give the floor to the representative of Serbia, Ambassador Zvekić.

Mr. Zvekić (Serbia): Mr. President, first of all congratulations to you on assuming the presidency of the Conference. In view of your experience and personal dynamism, I am convinced progress will be made following the most inspiring chairmanship of Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga of Ecuador.

Serbia, a country observer to the Conference and a member of the informal group of observer States, believes a lot in the potential and the capacity of the Conference as the sole

multilateral body dealing with disarmament issues. Otherwise, why even bother to stand in the queue for membership?

Serbia, a member of most of the disarmament treaties and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, also strongly believes in efforts to deal with disarmament and non-proliferation issues. But we also strongly believe in the need to take an impartial look at the disarmament machinery. In all likelihood, such an impartial appreciation will reveal a need to stand up to the challenges of the twenty-first century. To come closer to a world at peace, we need a commitment and instruments attuned to a changed political, economic, military and ethical environment with respect to those in which the commitments and instruments originated.

This is why, Mr. Secretary-General, we welcome your most inspiring call for an exploration of ways to advance the operationality, relevance and membership of the Conference. Such an exploration needs to be inclusive in order to reach inclusive results. However, it should not and cannot bypass, or be divorced from, the efforts regarding the much-needed advance with respect to the core issues, namely the programme of work. The procedural and substantive must be focused but flexible, complementary but distinct, and both indeed inclusive. We fully support the President's proposal to continue with the working groups on core issues and the Secretary-General's proposal for special coordinators for procedural issues.

Serbia stands ready to work with all members and non-members towards this common purpose.

The President: I thank the representative of Serbia for his statement and for his kind words. I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Romero Puentes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, let me first congratulate Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador for his excellent work as President. His courageous and thought-provoking initiative will no doubt serve as a guide in the future work of the Conference.

We would also like to welcome you as President of this important forum. We would like to draw attention to your extensive experience and the excellent work you did as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, which, by the way, is committed to general and complete disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament.

My country is ready to work closely with you, and we offer our cooperation and support in connection with your presidency and the consultations planned by you, which are aimed at making progress towards the adoption of a programme of work.

I congratulate you again on becoming President of this forum and wish you every success, which should be all the more attainable given your vast diplomatic experience, preparation and intelligence.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement and his kind words, and I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Ambassador Gómez Camacho.

Mr. Gómez Camacho (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico is pleased to welcome you as President. We in Geneva have long admired and appreciated your various management skills, and if anyone here can, as it were, pull a rabbit out of his hat, it is you. Perhaps that is what we need now.

I did not ask for the floor in order to repeat my country's position on the Conference, nuclear disarmament negotiations or the role that the Conference has either perhaps refused to play or been structurally incapable of playing in such negotiations. Mexico's position on

these matters is well known. It is equally well known that we think that perhaps it is time to explore other avenues, but I am not going to go into that either.

I asked for the floor to say that Mexico is always open to and supports any imaginative, creative or original effort to view things from a different angle. That is how we understand at least parts, or the central part, of your message, and I would like to tell you that we are very open and interested, and will of course work with you during your presidency in the search for new, creative and imaginative options. Indeed, that is the most important message for me. Otherwise, our position on the Conference is perfectly well known.

The President: I would like to thank the Ambassador of Mexico for his very kind words. I can tell you I have had the hat; I am still looking for the rabbit, but we might be flexible and find a pigeon instead of a rabbit to take out of the hat. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the Ambassador of Turkey.

Mr. Demiralp (Turkey): Mr. President, since you are in the chair, I have to speak, first of all, in order to congratulate you. We are happy to see you in the seat of the presidency as a highly appreciated colleague and as the representative of a brotherly country. Indeed, it gives us a feeling of assurance to see you at the helm of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you all success in your endeavours to advance the work of the Conference.

The views of Turkey with regard to issues like the future and revitalization of the Conference have time and again been covered in our previous statements, the most recent being on 24 January. Needless to repeat, this delegation hopes to see tangible progress in the Conference, especially in a year where the new NPT cycle will begin and the Nuclear Security Summit will be held.

As I stated on an earlier occasion, Turkey wishes to see the immediate resumption of substantive work in the Conference with its present membership. We see an urgent need to come up with a consensual programme of work. Such a development will pave the way not only for the commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty but also for parallel advances on other agenda items. At this critical stage, where the challenge at hand is considerable, we should not lose more time. We believe that our collective efforts should be geared towards maintaining the relevance of the Conference by fulfilling its fundamental task. Nevertheless, reaching the intended destination safely becomes all the more burdensome and difficult if one begins the journey from the wrong starting point and continues along that path.

Turkey believes that the problems faced by the Conference are not created by its procedures or its internal dynamics. I would dare to say that, if there is a belief that the Conference is prevented from promoting important issues just because of procedural obstacles, such important issues can be taken to the United Nations Disarmament Commission, where all United Nations member States are represented and the procedures are much more relaxed. Unfortunately, the Commission is not functional either. We have to acknowledge that there is a certain malaise throughout the disarmament forum and machinery, both at the international and regional levels. Stalemate in the Conference is the reflection of these strategic bottlenecks at different but interrelated levels.

For instance, if the international community fails in its initiative to successfully convene a conference on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, this will have negative repercussions on all disarmament forums. Therefore, we need to see the big picture and not assess the work of the Conference in abstraction from the other disarmament efforts and forums.

Certainly, the resumption of the substantive work of the Conference with the consent of all its members will contribute to the improvement of international efforts for nuclear disarmament. To this end, we should try within the Conference to generate more mutual understanding and confidence while not ignoring developments outside the Conference. At this stage, we should not dilute our focus on the main substantive issue by introducing into our deliberations additional points of contention. With this understanding, Mr. President, we welcome your suggestions, which we will study very carefully, and I reiterate my wish for success during your tenure and the support of Turkey in your endeavours.

The President: I thank the representative of Turkey, Ambassador Demiralp, very much for his statement and for his kind words. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, Ambassador Kennedy.

Ms. Kennedy (United States of America): Mr. President, if I might, I would like to first extend our warmest welcome to our new colleague from Argentina.

Mr. President, of course you have our wholehearted support during your presidency. Of course also, as you noted, responsibility for the task ahead of us is collective and not one that you alone must shoulder.

Your statement today contained a number of key, and I think very sage, points, as well as many colourful proverbs. We agree with you that, while we continue to consider procedural issues that could benefit this body, we should focus our energies on the substantive core of our work. We also agree that it should not be the goal of any of the members to score points, as you said. We have also demonstrated our willingness to, as you called on all of us to do, move out of our comfort zone – for example, our willingness to join a consensus on the new Russian proposal, which, as our Russian colleague has reminded us, is still on the table.

I also wanted to again acknowledge the vigour and creativity of our previous President, Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga, and to welcome your similar energy and commitment.

Now, our German colleague pointed out today that a compromise would entail pain for all: a true point. I would prefer to end on a more positive note today and say that, if we are to reach a constructive and positive way forward, then all of us will equally share in the satisfaction that such an outcome would bring us all, and indeed the international community.

So, Mr. President, with your help, *inshallah*, we will find such a constructive and substantive way forward.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States for her statement and for her kind words. I give the floor to the representative of South Africa, Mr. Combrink.

Mr. Combrink (South Africa): Mr. President, my delegation did not plan on taking the floor at this time, but, following your inspiring opening statement, we wish to firstly congratulate you as a fellow African country, of course, as a fellow member of the Non-Aligned Movement and as a partner in the New Agenda Coalition, for taking up this responsibility as President of the Conference. We are convinced that with your level of commitment and diplomatic skills, we will be able to overcome the challenges facing this body.

Mr. President, the revitalization of the Conference, which remains the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is of vital importance to my delegation. We agree with many others in this chamber that the most effective way in which to revitalize this body is through the resumption of substantive work

that can be achieved only through the adoption of a programme of work. My delegation therefore stands ready to support your efforts aimed at achieving this goal.

While the Conference's structure and working methods are geared towards providing the necessary means for States to protect their national security interests, the disarmament agenda is geared towards addressing issues of global security concern. The Conference should therefore not be a victim of extraneous security realities, but rather an instrument that can play a positive role in addressing our common security interests.

There is not a single member of the Conference that does not support the goal of achieving a world free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons. It is in this context that the Conference has a special role and responsibility. It is this body that can, and must, work continuously towards achieving this goal through the adoption of legally binding instruments that are mutually reinforcing and serve the objective of achieving a more peaceful and prosperous world for all.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and for his kind words. I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, Ambassador Oyarce.

Mr. Oyarce (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation did not intend to take the floor either, but, having listened to your words and to various expressions of political — I repeat, political — support that you have just received, I want to voice two ideas. First, however, let me repeat to Ambassador Gallegos what I said at the last meeting: You provided initial momentum for the work of this year's Conference on two levels, both in a reflective way and in terms of concrete proposals.

I would also like to warmly welcome Ambassador D'Alotto, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, who will, I am sure, continue that country's tradition of contributing to the Conference and to the United Nations.

Like the Ambassador of Mexico, I have not requested the floor to repeat assessments that have been made over and over again in this forum. However, I would like to say to you, Mr. President, that you have awakened, in a word, expectations. Those expectations stem from your talent as a negotiator and the wisdom of your country.

Mr. President, you will need political support, because there is a fundamental issue here that does not derive from internal, external or procedural issues but is rather a problem of political will. As a result, you will need political support and, in addition, flexibility. We, a humble country of the South, have also repeatedly pointed out — and this was highlighted by the Ambassador of the United States — the value of collective responsibility. Collective responsibility is essential in multilateral negotiations, and this may well be a key moment in which a basic agreement could be reached. Not a "gold standard" agreement, just a basic agreement. The ideas that you have presented to us could open the door to a basic agreement. To open the door with the wisdom of the Japanese — slowly — in order to reach a political compromise — that is what we need to do.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference for the ideas that he shared with us at our previous meeting. One may differ on given options, but the fundamental idea, as I see it, is the show of political support aimed at reactivating this Conference, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations has, in this room and in New York, repeatedly urged us to do. I wish you every success, and my country will, to the extent that it can, stand by you in all your endeavours.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Chile for his statement and for his very strong political support and kind words. I will need the help of everyone, but I promise you that I will do my best.

(spoke in Arabic)

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, Ms. Adamson, who speaks Arabic better than I.

Ms. Adamson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. President, I would like to express my appreciation to you and welcome your accession to the presidency of the Conference.

(spoke in English)

I have just returned from New York, where I was working on the arms trade treaty, and it cheered me up. It cheered me up that we can negotiate. I think we can negotiate in New York, but we can also negotiate in Geneva. We negotiated together in December at the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, some of us late into the night, so I think we can do it.

I found there were two new rules of procedure that came up in New York. They were rather informal. The first is that delegates shall gather around a coffee table in the Vienna Café until they are exhausted under the gaze of public scrutiny and must agree. The second was that delegates shall huddle in a room which is both too hot and too small for them until they either faint or agree.

I am not suggesting that we immediately depart from this chamber, but I think that over the next four weeks, under your guidance, we may find times when we need to get into a more informal mode. I want to assure you that my delegation is ready for that, and ready for you to take us to places which may be outside our comfort zone.

I don't want to comment on the substance, only to say that we indeed have a new NPT cycle ahead of us soon, starting in April, and many in the room did agree a comprehensive menu from the NPT. I really just want to reiterate from my perspective that I think it is time for us to negotiate. The world is watching us, as it was watching us in New York last week when we thrashed out rules of procedure for a conference on the arms trade treaty, which showed that, with enough will, we can do it.

The President: I would like to thank Ambassador Adamson very much for the message of support and for the kind words. Starting tomorrow, we will be working in smaller rooms, so hopefully we will be able to get some results. I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Daryaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference. I would like to emphasize that we are very pleased to see that one of the active members of our group, the friendly country Egypt, is presiding over this august body. We really very much appreciate your diligent efforts in trying to get this body to start substantive work. We appreciate your efforts, and we assure you of the full support and cooperation of our delegation.

I would also like to use this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the brilliant ideas that were raised by the Ambassador of Ecuador, your predecessor, which really sparked a very useful discussion in the Conference.

Mr. President, our position was outlined during the speech delivered by our Ambassador last week. Next week we will also have the honour of having our minister here to address the Conference. So I limit myself to this point, and I use this opportunity to again express thanks and appreciation for your work.

The President: I thank the representative of Iran for his statement and for his kind words. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? As that does not seem to be the

case, this concludes our business for today. I would like to inform you that the next plenary of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 23 February at 3.30 p.m.

At that time, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, Ms. Dipu Moni, will address the Conference. The Ambassador of Bangladesh has asked me to urge you to try to attend the meeting.

I would like to thank again Ambassador Gallegos Chiriboga of Ecuador, who has blazed the trail along which we hope to continue, and to thank all the other presidents of the session for their cooperation. We will work to try to fulfil some of the expectations that we heard today.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.