
Conference on Disarmament

29 February 2012

English

Final record of the one thousand two hundred and fiftieth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 29 February 2012, at 3.10 p.m.

President: Mr. Hisham Badr(Egypt)

The President: I declare open the 1250th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to extend a warm welcome to his Excellency, Mr. Urmas Paet, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia and I have the pleasure and honour to invite His Excellency, the Minister, to take the floor and give us Estonia's view.

I had the honour of meeting the Minister when I was Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was the first ever political consultations between Egypt and Estonia in 2008 and I travelled to this beautiful country and had the honour to meet him. And, so, it is a great honour to meet you again Minister here and the floor is yours.

Mr. Paet (Estonia): Thank you very much and thank you for this piece of our joint history. Let me also first congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. And, I would also like to extend our best wishes to the five other presidents of the 2012 session.

Disarmament issues affect the security of the international community and all countries, regardless of their membership in the Conference of Disarmament. Let me join numerous other speakers during the last days who have called on the Conference to commence substantive work without further delay.

I believe that the long-term deadlock of the forum testifies not only to a lack of political will to deal with substantive security issues, it also puts the credibility and legitimacy of the Conference itself at stake. It is most regrettable to learn about the core disarmament conference only in history books and in dictionaries, where it is used to explain the meaning of the word "impasse". The Conference has a clear purpose and I am sure that it can fulfil those tasks for which it was created – to negotiate international treaties on disarmament.

I fully understand that a continued stalemate leads States to consider alternative venues for negotiating disarmament treaties. However, I believe that working within the Conference on Disarmament offers the best prospects for reaching durable and comprehensive agreements. In practical terms, reaching consensus on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that addresses the interests of all States concerned would mark the first concrete step to starting substantive work in our opinion.

I also encourage the Conference to engage in the debate about expansion. I would like to ask for your support on it.

As an observer State, Estonia appreciates the support expressed by a number of member States, both individually and regionally. At this point, let me briefly repeat just one of the reasons why Estonia requests to become a member of the world's sole multilateral disarmament forum. We consider that participation in negotiations on nuclear issues, space security, and a variety of related questions with universal impact, should not be limited to only 65 countries. The Conference agenda encompasses global concerns and I believe that those concerns should be negotiated on a non-discriminatory, transparent and multilateral basis, with wider participation of States. Given the universal nature of the United Nations, we don't see any reason, or moral justification, why an interested State should not be allowed to participate fully and equally in the disarmament discussions and to contribute to its aims.

As of today, 38 States have shown their interest to become members of the Conference. I believe that advancement of the membership could become an achievement for the Conference and enhance its relevance.

Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, put several good options on the table two weeks ago. One of his proposals suggests that, in the absence of agreement on a programme of work, the Conference should focus on alternative issues where common ground might be found, such as a longer presidency and broader

membership. From that perspective, I call on the members of the Conference to appoint in 2012 a special coordinator on the expansion of membership, in line with General Assembly resolution 66/59 on the report of last year's session.

I would also like to support further considerations on the issue of broader involvement of civil society in the work of the Conference as appropriate. I believe that a stronger contribution of NGOs and research institutions will add value to the work of the Conference as well.

And, finally, Mr. President, I appreciate your efforts and personal engagement to help the Conference to find common ground and solve the longstanding impasse by the end of this year. I am optimistic and confident that membership issues can then be solved to the advantage of the Conference as well.

The President: I would like to thank His Excellency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, for his intervention and for the kind words to the President. Now allow me to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort the Minister from the Chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 3.15 p.m. and resumed at 3.20 p.m.

The President: I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Minister and President of the eleventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, and I welcome you Minister, and give you the floor.

Mr. Sokhonn (Cambodia): Thank you Mr. President. It is an honour for me to address the Conference on Disarmament in my capacity as the President of the eleventh Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the 2012 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is my pleasure to speak to you today on the eve of the thirteenth anniversary of the entry into force of this landmark humanitarian, development and disarmament instrument. It was a proud moment for all Cambodians to host the world for the eleventh Meeting of States Parties last November and December in Phnom Penh. The Convention was born from the human tragedy caused by mines in Cambodia as well as in so many other locations around the world. And thus, with the eleventh Meeting of States Parties, the Convention returned to the place where it all started about 20 years ago.

The Meeting was a chance for the international community to recall how far we have come. It was also our chance to show the world that this is an issue we still live with today.

It was the largest international meeting ever to take place in Cambodia, and it marked impressive progress toward a mine-free world and saw us make a strong recommitment to overcome remaining challenges. Please allow me to share some highlights.

Thanks in large part to the many landmine survivors and non-governmental organizations that took part in the Meeting, we indeed drew strength from this movement's past to make an equally strong commitment to the future. Perhaps this instrumental role of civil society in disarmament is a lesson this Conference may wish to learn from.

The Meeting's recommitment included a strong appeal to the international community to honour its promise to landmine survivors and mine-affected communities. At the Meeting, several States parties to the Convention heeded this call. This was illustrated by funding declarations and announcements of South-South initiatives.

At the Meeting, we celebrated the fact that Tuvalu and South Sudan took their seats as the Convention's newest adherents and the announcement that Finland was on the verge of becoming the 159th State to join this movement. Finland has since acceded to the Convention and I welcome Finland to the family of States parties. We urge all other States to accede to the Convention, including those members of the Conference on Disarmament that have not yet done so. By exercising your leadership in joining with us, you have an opportunity to contribute to a disarmament success story.

At the Meeting, Turkey reported the destruction of all stockpiled anti-personnel mines with approximately 3 million mines having been destroyed. Together, the States parties have now reported having destroyed more than 44.5 million stockpiled mines. Burundi and Nigeria also declared completion of their mine clearance obligations, and just weeks after the Meeting, Guinea-Bissau reported complete clearance of all known mine areas.

More than 20 States parties responsible for significant numbers of landmine survivors reported on efforts to respond to survivors' needs and to guarantee their rights. Cambodia, as one of these States, highlighted that we are assessing our national action plan on disability with a view to preparing a revised plan in 2012.

Thirteen years after its entry into force, it is heartening to be able to stand before you to proclaim that the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention has been an unprecedented success. Notwithstanding this success, it is abundantly clear that it will take many more years for the Convention to live up to its promise to end, for all people for all time, the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. An ongoing commitment to this effort is required and this often means a financial commitment.

Of course, coming to Europe where economic challenges weigh heavily on the minds of many, I am realistic about certain present-day realities. Nevertheless, we accepted solemn obligations that, for some, it will take many years to implement and we agreed, without deadline or expiry date, to support one another. And therefore, while Governments must not turn their back on financial realities, equally we must not default on our obligations to assist in the effort to support survivors and to free mined land from its deadly bondage.

In closing, let us recall that disarmament has a human face. It is the face of the innocent women, girls, boys or men who now live with a disability as a result of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. It is also the face of any individual who wants to live to fulfil her or his potential in peace and security.

Let us not forget that the deliberations on disarmament that take place here in Geneva and in other arenas are a means to a humanitarian end. There is an expectation that disarmament forums will produce results and that these results will make a difference in the lives of people everywhere. I therefore urge you, distinguished diplomats, to work to ensure that we rid this beautiful world of those hideous weapons of mass disability and mass destruction.

The President: I would like to thank His Excellency, Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Cambodia and President of the eleventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, for his statement today. Now allow me to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort the Minister from the Chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

The President: Does any delegation wish to take the floor? I don't see that any delegation wants to take the floor. Therefore, this concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 6 March at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.