

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 29 January 2004, at 11.15 a.m.

President: Ms. Amina MOHAMED (Kenya)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 944th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, allow me to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Dr. Kamal Kharrazi, who will address the Conference today. His presence among us today is a testimony of his personal interest in our work and of the commitment of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Conference on Disarmament and to multilateralism. We welcome the recent decisions of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to sign the Additional Protocol to its NPT safeguards agreement and to suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, as well as to accept IAEA verification of this suspension. I understand that this is not Minister Kharrazi's first visit to the Conference on Disarmament, and I should like to welcome him very much. I am sure that his address will be followed with great interest by all of us.

I now invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Dr. Kamal Kharrazi, to address the Conference.

Mr. KHARRAZI (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, it is a pleasure for me to address this august body, the Conference on Disarmament. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the first presidency of the 2004 session of the Conference. I am confident that with your experience, foresight and leadership, every effort will be made to steer the Conference on Disarmament back on track. You can rest assured of the full support and cooperation of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in carrying out your arduous task.

Since the early 1990s, three major developments have irrevocably changed our world. These developments are the demise of the bipolar system, the intensification of the globalization process and the events of 9/11. More than a decade after the end of the cold war, we are still in the transitional period. During this period the international system has been more influenced by multilateralism than by the conventional rivalries and confrontations of the two super-Powers. The concept of security threats has changed and concerns about military, and more specifically, nuclear threats have been superseded by the challenges of environmental issues, fatal diseases and the ever-widening gap between North and South.

This has provided the United Nations system with the opportunity to fill the vacuum created by the termination of the super-Power rivalries and to take steps in international norm-building and in addressing the many international concerns. The subsequent holding of numerous conferences and the codification of many international instruments is a testament to this. The change in the nature of threat perceptions has necessarily entailed a change in the manner of dealing with them, and multilateral approaches have been used to address the real security challenges.

The events of 9/11 created new challenges in the international environment. They gave way to further militarization of the international arena and fanned concerns over the very existence and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Today there is a genuine concern that the security priorities of States may change again and attention to military threats will gain the upper hand in security strategies. It should be noted that increased militarism does not necessarily translate into increased security. We should all be concerned about the destruction of our past achievements by the re-dominance of the military factor and the strengthening of unilateral approaches at the expense of multilateralism.

Militarization plays a decisive role in the existence and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It threatens international peace and security. Today, the production and further development of WMDs, together with the threat of their use, in parallel with the risk of non-State actors' access to them, is ever more alarming.

We now face this fundamental question: at this critical juncture, how should the Conference on Disarmament act for the most effective fulfilment of its duties?

Much has been said about the need for political will to reactivate negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. It is, however, more important to comprehend the prerequisites of such a political will, among them understanding our common responsibility and reviewing our past positions.

Due to its seven years of stagnation, the CD is now faced with a crisis. A critical situation can also be seen as an opportunity. The real task of every single member of the CD is to grasp it. Such a critical situation necessitates the introduction of new creative ideas. Now is the time to rethink our collective responsibility to enhance peace and security through the regulatory mechanisms of the CD and thus free the world from WMDs once and for all.

Ensuring that there are rules governing disarmament and arms control is a common responsibility, and the aim is the creation of practical mechanisms to implement the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament. The Conference, as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, should play its role in effective implementation of the priorities set forth in SSOD-1.

According to this common responsibility, CD members should double their efforts to devise a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. This should provide for the setting of norms and the drafting of international instruments, the need for which is ever increasing. Maintaining and strengthening international peace and security primarily depends on the efforts of each and every one of us to ensure a more secure world through the expansion of international rules and their implementation.

The CD's programme of work should bridge the international community's dire need for peace and security with the realities of the world. Thus, the five Ambassadors' initiative, a valuable cross-regional venture, is considered a remarkable step in the right direction that should be built upon.

Nuclear disarmament should necessarily be the focus of any attempt here. It is an embarrassment that nuclear weapons still exist in defiance of the quest of human civilization. The Non-Proliferation Treaty is geared to eradicate nuclear weapons. We should all ask

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

ourselves how far we have come in that purpose and how clear a picture we have of the future. In the interim, the non-nuclear-weapon States do have a right to treaty-bound negative security assurances. The “13 steps” adopted by consensus at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, including the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States, appear to have been put on ice. The current unilateral and bilateral reductions in nuclear arsenals - though welcome - are unverifiable, limited and devoid of effective international guarantees of irreversibility. These reductions, therefore, may not properly address the expectations of the international community.

We should not and cannot let the current standstill go on indefinitely. It is already too late. Time flies and the momentum to reflect and devise common responses to threats common to all is being lost. The CD will die unless we act today. Let us all hope that when things change, the time loss will be our only regret.

The requisite balance between rights and obligations is the basis of any sound legal instrument. This balance guarantees the longevity of the legal regime by providing incentives for membership and compliance. The provisions of the NPT on the right to nuclear technology as well as the imperative of cooperation and sharing of technology among those who have accepted the obligations of non-proliferation were considered essential, during the negotiation of the Treaty, in order to establish and maintain the validity and viability of the NPT.

Iran, the last victim of weapons of mass destruction, has been a committed member of all major international instruments dealing with all classes of weapons of mass destruction. It is on this understanding that Iran has consistently been a fervent advocate of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation for decades and has actively and creatively contributed to international political and legal discourse in this area. It was Iran who initiated the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and has vigorously pursued it together with others ever since. And it is on this same understanding that Iran, as a member of the NPT, maintains that it has an inalienable right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Iran is entitled to pursue its inalienable right and no justification is required to pursue a right.

However, the protracted pattern of failure to facilitate Iran's access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, coupled with an illegal active campaign to deprive Iran of its right, has compelled Iran to protect its inalienable right and its vital national interests. Our experience has proved that undue sanctions, restrictions, impediments and obstacles to deny the rights of NPT member States run counter to the process of transparency and cooperation required under the non-proliferation regime. It is also wrong to consider them as effective tools to prevent member States from exercising their rights. Had it not been for the severity of the impediments, Iran would have pursued all its entirely legal nuclear activities with fuller transparency and in collaboration with other fellow members, as it has always sought to do.

The fact that Iran has remained compliant and loyal to the NPT and the objectives of the safeguards, despite the unwarranted deprivation of its fundamental right, demonstrates the depth of its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. It is difficult to imagine that any other member facing similar restrictions would have maintained this unreserved commitment to the Treaty.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Iran's quest for nuclear technology and its peaceful application has never been unqualified. The need for confidence-building, transparency and accountability has also been dear to us. We have recognized that more capability necessarily prompts more responsibility. That was why we reacted positively to IAEA's requirements for full transparency and cooperation.

On 18 December 2003 the Islamic Republic of Iran signed the Additional Protocol, while continuing to cooperate fully with the Agency in accordance with its provisions in advance of its ratification. Iran also decided to voluntarily suspend all its uranium enrichment activities to allay expressed concerns regarding its nuclear objectives. A robust verification mechanism is now in place to reassure IAEA and the international community of the absolutely peaceful nature of Iranian nuclear activities. My country will remain loyal and committed to its obligations and promises. We find no better framework than the NPT to protect our supreme interests in a secure environment while ensuring our sustainable development. We are keen to prove our determination and to examine the determination of others, too.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now suspend the plenary meeting for five minutes in order to escort the Minister from the Council Chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

The PRESIDENT: Our plenary meeting is resumed. I have the following speakers for today's plenary meeting: the representative of France, Ambassador François Rivasseau; the representative of Morocco, Ambassador Omar Hilale; the representative of Colombia, Ambassador Clemencia Forero; the representative of Slovakia, Ambassador Kálmán Petőcz. I should like now to give the floor to the first speaker, Ambassador François Rivasseau of France.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): Madam President, I would like to thank you for the wisdom and skill with which you have been guiding our discussions.

France has called for and secured a debate on the "new issues". Why this debate, and why now? First, because for the last year, together with India, and also with other countries, we have been discussing the concept of new issues, those referred to as being "outside the box". The time seemed ripe to spell out our ideas progressively and gradually. We were encouraged to do so by the agreement which emerged in 2003 at the end of the last session of the Conference on Disarmament and at the United Nations General Assembly to raise by consensus, albeit in a tentative and elliptical way, the potential benefit for our Conference of dealing with new issues alongside more traditional matters.

More than a problem of substance, this is primarily a question of method. How can we revitalize discussion of the vocation of the Conference on Disarmament? How, failing - pending - a fourth SSOD, can we ensure that our Conference regains the sense of relevance without which the virtues of continuity cannot bear fruit? That is why we called for this debate before the adoption of our agenda - in order to highlight its methodological nature. The point is to revitalize the Conference, to test its relevance and better gauge what we can expect of it.

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

As a faithful advocate of multilateralism and of this forum, France is playing its role by seeking to measure and stimulate its ability to adapt with others. I am well aware that on such an important topic, no country has all the answers - quite the contrary. If we have been slow in setting out our approach to the new issues in greater detail, it was for a long time due to the fact that it is not our intention to act in isolation. The focusing effort can only follow a collective and substantive movement, together with a sufficient number of other major delegations, and on topics which would correspond to an emerging consensus.

The elements that we shared informally together last week remain working hypotheses. They remain flexible. Their primary purpose is to encourage reflection and discussion from the point of view of method.

I would like to proceed from a recognition that the current international context requires the Conference to consider new issues and new working methods. This is not a pessimistic position. I am encouraged rather than worried. I do not think that we can reduce the situation to that of a crisis in disarmament. The situation is not so simple. I think that we are seeing the conjunction of three major trends. First, we are returning to a normal situation in terms of multilateral approaches in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament. Following the cold war, we saw a proliferation of drafts or treaties which had been prepared long before. That "fabulous decade" corresponded to exceptional historical circumstances which no longer exist. Thus it is natural that the level of the Conference's output should have declined. At the same time, we must remember that in the past the Conference has worked without necessarily producing results for several years, but that did not mean that the work done was meaningless - far from it. That work involved sowing in order to reap in the future, and in that regard I think everyone will pay tribute to those who in recent years have been able to keep the flame burning, refuse to accept failure, from Algiers to Brussels, from Bogotá to Stockholm, Santiago or elsewhere.

However, new threats have recently appeared - terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, asymmetrical threats. If they have not all emerged recently, they have appeared in a new light recently and they change the strategic equation. They force us to rethink our concepts and our approach. As the Chief of the General Staff of the French Army recently declared in *Le Monde*, "we are experiencing an upheaval in the terms of our security". This also results, of course, in a change in the forms of disarmament.

The dominant mode of thinking in Geneva still stems from the cold war. Many projects conceived at the time of SSOD-1 remain dependent on the approaches of that age: international verification systems which are cumbersome and predictable, legally binding treaties based on formalized and codified negotiations. The fact that these concepts are not new does not mean that they have become irrelevant. France remains, as a matter of principle, devoted to universal, legally binding and internationally verifiable treaties.

But we should not be willing to blindly perpetuate our traditional concepts merely because they may have a venerable tradition. We must take a pragmatic case-by-case approach to see whether and to what extent our traditional agenda remains useful for the international

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

community. The recent conclusion of the fifth protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons last November shows that traditional approaches continue to have merit. We must not, however, ignore new forms of action in the field of disarmament: politically binding agreements, emphasis on the application and implementation of treaties before embarking on their verification, more informal, more flexible, more networked working procedures, often at the initiative of a coalition of particularly concerned countries, the importance of regional responses. The Conference on Disarmament should not remain on the sidelines from this powerful source of renewal in relation to disarmament issues. This is also its mission, this is also its mandate, and if our Conference, this fine but motionless vessel, is to enjoy favourable winds, it must change its course.

As a third element, perhaps, I would like to stress the fact that it is possible to make progress, because we must not artificially exaggerate the opposition between the old and new forms of disarmament. Today, we can review the recent crises with greater objectivity and calm. I note a renewed interest in the multilateral approach to disarmament and non-proliferation, as the debates in the First Committee have shown. Thus, there are three reasons not to be pessimistic. Three reasons to want to make progress in the new issues within our Conference.

During the informal discussion which was held with the agreement of the entire Conference, this delegation presented a few ideas on procedural and substantive approaches which we have considered. With regard to our agenda, it was our wish that the Conference on Disarmament should have the courage to send the right signal, that of an innovative and creative approach, which can allow, if only in a modest way, for this source of renewal constituted by the new issues. And this is what we have begun to do.

As of now, my delegation welcomes the modest progress made in three areas. First, the very rich informal discussion which we were able to have on Thursday enabled each and every one of us, and particularly this delegation, to gather the initial reactions to our ideas. We also hope that they will attract some attention in capitals and that we will thus be able to evaluate the degree of interest in this approach, which is complementary to traditional approaches.

Secondly, our discussion was reflected in a limited but nevertheless positive manner in the adoption of our agenda. You, Madam President, noted a number of elements of consensus concerning the new issues, and the progress made in the consensus on this last year has placed our work in the First Committee, the intersessional consultations held by the Ambassador of Japan, in a particularly constructive atmosphere. By situating the adoption of our agenda in a renewed context, we have improved our chances of future success. I am convinced that this gesture, which cannot be prejudicial to the efforts under way to make progress on the work programme, will highlight the ability of the Conference to ensure that the wind of reform which produced progress in the First Committee will also blow in Geneva.

Thirdly, it is the French delegation's expectation that this discussion will continue. That it will continue beyond the adoption of our agenda and that, through periodic exchanges of views on the new issues, we will preserve the ability of our Conference to adapt and respond to the requirements of our times. This is what is at stake for us, and it is the importance of this which led us to request a debate.

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

In a message to the diplomatic corps two weeks ago, Dominique de Villepin said that urgent imperatives must not prevent us from looking far ahead to confront the threats and regulate a world which risks running out of control. The international community must be gathered together in a spirit of collective responsibility which will confer full legitimacy, and hence effectiveness, on its actions. We will not escape the need to reconstruct the international machinery by improving, in particular, the representativeness of the Security Council by creating world economic governance and - this is of particular concern to us - new monitoring mechanisms in the area of proliferation. It is this sense of urgency which I wanted to transmit to you. In responding as it has, the Conference on Disarmament has placed our future work under better auspices.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to thank Ambassador François Rivasseau for his comprehensive statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is Ambassador Omar Hilale of Morocco, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. HILALE (Morocco) (translated from French): Madam President, I am pleased to extend to you my warm congratulations as you take the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. Your qualities, both human and professional, your diplomatic skill, as well as your intellectual style, are all guarantees of a successful term of office. Morocco, you can be assured, will spare no effort to ensure that success.

I take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi of Japan, for the energy, perseverance and creativity with which she led the Conference.

I wish every success to your colleagues and friends who have been called to other duties. To those who have just joined us, in particular our colleagues the Ambassadors of the United States, Syria, Romania, Sweden, Sri Lanka and Belgium, I would like to express a warm welcome and assure them of my delegation's sincere readiness, and mine personally, to cooperate with them in order to move our work forward.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the Secretary-General of our Conference, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, as well as the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Enrique Roman-Morey, for the devotion and zeal they have displayed in order to guarantee the best possible working conditions for our Conference.

Finally, I would like to address my sincere condolences to our colleague, the Ambassador of Algeria, Mr. Mohammed Salah Dembri, following the tragic fire in the gas complex of his native city, Skikda.

Madam President, thanks to your wise leadership, our Conference adopted its agenda at the last meeting. While welcoming this prompt adoption, we are not able to resist the temptation to ask: What now? Are we going to respond positively to the appeal made by the

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his inaugural message to the annual session of our Conference, by taking political steps which will break the deadlock that has the Conference in its grip? Or, as in previous years, are we going to settle into a sterile and repetitive debate punctuated either by alarmism or by frustration at lost opportunities?

Obviously, our Conference's record over the last seven years gives us no reason for being optimistic. Especially as, far from being a starting point for a fruitful session, with the initiation of negotiations on the priority themes of the Conference, the negotiations surrounding the adoption of the agenda suggest that 2004 will be like previous years.

For its part, the Kingdom of Morocco cannot resign itself to such a fate. The perception of international responsibility stemming from its membership of the Conference on Disarmament presents it with a dual challenge to persevere with other countries in efforts aimed at reducing the differences of view about the programme of work and, in parallel, to explore the avenues which have been marked out by the report of the Conference on Disarmament to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2003.

At the turbulent beginning of this century, where international peace and security are in the eye of the hurricane, the Conference on Disarmament is called upon to be in step with the legitimate expectations of both the international community in general and its members specifically. More than ever, our Conference, the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, is being challenged to fulfil its mandate. The persistence of several regional conflicts, the creeping proliferation of nuclear weapons, the militarization of space, non-compliance with international commitments stemming from sovereign decisions to sign the key disarmament instruments - all these are threats to our world and challenges for our Conference. This is why the Conference finds itself today at a turning point of its existence, a quarter of a century after it was set up.

As a member of this body, Morocco cannot but wonder about the surrealistic gap between the serious and disturbing realities of our world today and the lethargy into which the Conference has settled over the course of the last few years. Yet its founding text, the Decalogue, has much to say about both its mandate and its vocation. The Conference, which enabled historic compromises to be achieved during the cold war era, has been incapable of adopting its work programme for seven years, and is wasting precious time in incomprehensible horse-trading over the adoption of its annual agenda.

The Conference on Disarmament, which is a product of the cold war, survived the ordeal of the ideological and military confrontation between East and West. What is more, it survived the collapse of the bipolar era. But its inability to adapt to the unipolar world and the requirements imposed by international security and peace, which are now under threat, offer grounds for concern for many of its members. At the last United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Secretary-General, aware of this situation, drew up an alarming diagnosis of the state of the world characterized by the breakdown of the collective security system set up under the United Nations Charter and the failure of the United Nations machinery to respond in a satisfactory and appropriate way to the realities of the twenty-first century.

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

In the face of such a situation, a very important question arises: what are we to do?

For the Kingdom of Morocco, the answer is simple. We must go back to fundamentals by supporting the virtues of collective dialogue and multilateralism and reaffirming the central role of the Conference as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body. At the same time, we must strive for the Conference's adaptability to the major challenges of our century so that it can respond appropriately to the perils that go hand in hand with an international situation which is shifting and turbulent and fraught with many dangers, and address the challenges of this new century in which international peace and security have never been as precarious. The risks of traditional military confrontation have been compounded by new, complex and often interconnected threats.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the double standard in the perception of such weapons, the international trafficking in fissile material, the spiral of the conventional arms race in certain regions of the world where there is a very high risk of conflict, the problems of verification, the arms race in the area of missiles, the obstacles facing those legitimately aspiring to set up zones free of weapons of mass destruction at both regional and international levels, the growing threat that terrorists will resort to weapons of mass destruction - these are all real and daily threats to national and international security. The international community cannot stand by passively and await the cataclysm of a nuclear, chemical or biological 11 September before it finally decides to act. Obviously it cannot do this because security in the world situation in the third millennium is now measured on the basis of our capacity as States and United Nations institutions to respond swiftly and appropriately to the new threats. This is why the Conference on Disarmament has both a moral and a political obligation to open itself to its international environment and no longer remain strait-jacketed in an agenda which is certainly still valid and relevant but which needs to be readjusted to the complexities of a world where globalization extends even to its needs and security imperatives.

In this context, it is urged to rethink the cosmogony of "aut Caesar aut nihil" - the emperor or nothing - in other words, the Decalogue or nothing, which has paralysed its work for the last seven years, and focus on an open and non-restrictive approach to its mandate, whose *raison d'être* is peace and security in the world, as confirmed in fact by the first phrase of this very Decalogue. While the perception of peace is universally agreed, there is less consensus on the perception of security, because (as His Excellency the Iranian Minister mentioned a moment ago), the parameters by which it should be measured, which are evolving all the time, differ in time and space. This is why our Conference should not sidestep the urgent need for collective thinking on the topics whose emergence and acuteness were barely foreseen by our States when the Decalogue was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly's first special session in 1978 devoted to disarmament, but which now constitute threats that are new, it is true, but are real because of their constant and disturbing character. Has the history of humankind not taught us that peace is not the absence of war? The same is true for international security, which is no longer perceived only in terms of the absence of imminent military threats. Hence it is imperative to anticipate these complex and globalized perils by means of a collective and responsible approach. In order to do this, we consider that the French proposal for a discussion on these topics offers a significant opportunity for our Conference to be in step with the concerns and worries which have been expressed at the international level. The Conference could, in a

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

creative initiative, address these topics in an interactive, responsible, serene and global discussion in order to better understand their complexity, their global nature and the way in which they are interconnected, even with the traditional subjects of the Conference on Disarmament. However, in order to reach these objectives, such an approach should have a few safeguards.

First of all, the new topics or threats should not replace those that are still pending under the Decalogue, such as nuclear disarmament, PAROS or security assurances. Secondly, the questions to be discussed should be neither exclusive nor restrictive, but should stem from a logical approach where there is symmetry between concerns and direct or indirect threats to security - both national and international. Thirdly, identification of the new threats to the international security environment and establishment of an order of priority among these threats, in order not to dissipate our efforts or waste the time allocated to our formal or informal sessions in academic discussions. Fourthly, the purpose of this exercise should not be discussion in itself but the triggering of a thinking process or Socratic inquiry whose ambition is to seek unified, collective and appropriate responses to these new challenges.

In arguing in favour of efforts to find an innovative approach in order to agree on ways and means to thwart the new security challenges of the twenty-first century, the Kingdom of Morocco remains attached to its traditional stance of moderation, open-mindedness and a constant commitment to strive and contribute to everything which will strengthen international peace and security. To this end, Morocco would like to call on the political will of member States, their flexibility and their sense of responsibility as members of this Conference, in order not only to promote this global dialogue but to contribute to it in a substantive fashion. This will certainly once again restore the Conference on Disarmament's dimension as the sole multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to thank Ambassador Omar Hilale for his statement and for the very kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is the representative of Colombia, Ambassador Clemencia Forero.

Ms. FORERO (Colombia) (translated from Spanish): Madam President, since I am taking the floor for the first time in this important forum, I would like to congratulate you and wish you every success in carrying out your mandate. The delegation of Colombia will always be prepared to help you in your work in the best possible way during your term. I would also like to mention the brilliant and active work accomplished by Ambassador Inoguchi during the last session.

I am making this statement from the perspective of a non-nuclear State which has made disarmament one of the priorities of its foreign policy. We have developed this policy in accordance with the basic principles and objectives of our region of Latin America and the Caribbean. We form part of a nuclear-weapon-free zone, we are guided by the commitments adopted in the Treaty of Tlatelolco, and we have worked in harmony within the framework of the Organization for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America. In the words of the

(Ms. Forero, Colombia)

Declaration of the Summit of the Americas, which was held recently in Nuevo León, we are convinced that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction constitutes a grave threat to international security and the well-being of peoples. We are committed in our hemisphere to strengthening cooperation in this area.

In recent decades Colombia has participated wholeheartedly and enthusiastically in the negotiation and adoption of the conventions on chemical and biological weapons. And, as a country whose civilian population has suffered the devastating effects of anti-personnel mines, we take part in the Ottawa process with great commitment, and we have also tried to contribute to playing a leading role in the area of small arms and light weapons and the development of the plan of action on this subject.

In this forum, as in other international forums, our traditional position has been and continues to be that of fostering convergence and consensus. My predecessor, Ambassador Camilo Reyes, devoted himself to contributing over a period of two years to devising a formula that could free the Conference on Disarmament from deadlock, through the adoption of a programme of work which would give the Conference renewed vigour after a long period of stagnation which was undesirable from all points of view. The delegation of Colombia attaches great importance to the various efforts that have been made in recent years to launch this programme of work and, among these, I would like to highlight the proposal made by Mr. Celso Amorim, then Ambassador and now Foreign Minister of Brazil. In pursuit of the objective of consensus, this work has been evolving and today in this room, through the proposal known as the five Ambassadors' proposal, of which Colombia is pleased to be one of the sponsors, we have what I consider to be a unique and special opportunity to achieve a meeting of minds which could prove historic as far as the progress of the work of this Conference is concerned. The consensus has been growing in a way which is so significant that, without excessive naivety, we could say that we are practically on the verge of a solution. The five Ambassadors' proposal has been moving along, thanks to the fact that it is comprehensive and flexible. This flexibility is precisely the factor that has made it possible to incorporate adjustments which bring adoption by this forum closer and closer.

Colombia would like to reiterate its confidence that it will be possible to achieve the goal of consensus and that in her consultations our President, with her usual diplomatic skill, in a reasonable period of time and in the not too distant future, will be able to bring us the good news for this Conference and for the international community as a whole that a programme of work has been agreed and is under way.

Finally, my delegation would like to make special reference to a topic which was referred to by the Ambassador of France - terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. We are pleased that in this room there is a favourable attitude to the holding in plenary sessions of these discussions which are so important in the current international situation. The serious concern when we take up the dramatically real topic of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is: how can we prevent terrorist groups from acquiring nuclear, chemical, radiological or biological materials or weapons? How can we cooperate effectively on practical steps in this area? There is significant work and there are principles that have been put into practice, for example in the G8. The debate in itself is extremely interesting. Let us not forget that terrorism enjoys solid

(Ms. Forero, Colombia)

funding based on its links with organized crime and transnational criminal activities. Colombia, which, as a nation, is suffering from the scourge of terrorism financed by the unimaginably vast resources generated by illicit drug trafficking, is particularly sensitive to and aware of a topic which is as delicate as the diversion of materials and weapons of mass destruction towards terrorist groups in various regions of the world.

I would like to welcome you, Madam President, to this debate.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to thank Ambassador Clemencia Forero very much for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker is Ambassador Kálmán Petöcz of Slovakia.

Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia): Madam President, since this is the first time I am asking for the floor under your presidency, I would like to express my pleasure and satisfaction to see you in the Chair of this Conference. The last couple of years we have worked together at various United Nations forums where you have shown your real and diplomatic skills. I am sure that you will continue to lead our work with dedication and charm, as you have done so far. I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi of Japan, for her untiring efforts during her tenure. May I also take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues who have joined our club recently, and extend my best wishes to the secretariat?

On Tuesday, we adopted the agenda of the Conference. Let me congratulate you on your efforts that led to this approval, and let me commend the spirit of compromise shown by the delegations of member States that made the agreement fly. The Eastern European Group, as often before, showed a flexible approach and joined the emerging consensus. Let me, however, refine the position of my delegation a little bit more. Since I did not take the floor during the very interesting exchange of views in the informal plenary a week ago, you can take my intervention as an “explanation after the vote”, and as an early contribution to the debate on the programme of work. I am, of course, aware of the fact that Slovakia is not a heavyweight in this “arena”, but still, I hope that our presence here has some meaning.

My delegation could have imagined a little bit more ambitious wording of the relevant part of the Presidential statement attached to the agenda. The Conference on Disarmament cannot, in our view, let the new security threats and new challenges pass by without addressing them properly, because then it can easily be faced with the risk of being marginalized. Nevertheless, we sincerely welcome the adoption of the agenda and we are ready to take a step forward towards adopting the programme of work.

In this regard, I can reiterate the priority of the Slovak Republic, which is that of negotiating an FMCT, based on the already once approved mandate as a starting point. We believe that this mandate can be further elaborated in a way that would address all aspects of concern and interest to both individual member States and regional groups, including new threats. We believe that this would be the most logical reopening of the game in the CD after a seven-year break in negotiations. (I am deliberately not using the words “stalemate”, “deadlock” or “impasse”, because I am not sure whether it would be of any help.)

(Mr. Petöcz, Slovakia)

On the other hand, Slovakia has queued up with those delegations that favour the adoption of a complete programme of work on the basis of the A5 proposal. On the basis of the A5 proposal viewed as a framework with no rigid linkages, but taking into account the legitimate expectations of the whole international community - because peace and security are the concern not only of the 65 members of the CD but of all. As some of our colleagues mentioned at the last informal session, the CD rules of procedure and its established practice provide ample tracks on how to address all the issues of concern within an appropriate time frame and in the most appropriate way.

In conclusion, let me inform you about important legislation adopted in my country, related to our work here in Geneva. On 23 January the Slovak Republic completed the process of ratification of the amendment to article 1 of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW), and its national instrument of ratification is on the way to the depositary of the Convention, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Slovakia continues to stand firmly behind its commitment to restrictions on the use and eradication of inhumane weapons, taken up by it in the late 1990s and at the beginning of this century by its active engagement in the Ottawa process, the CCW Amended Mines Protocol follow-up process and the CCW review and follow-up process.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to thank the representative of Slovakia for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. This concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I recognize the representative of Algeria.

Ms. BAGHLI (Algeria) (translated from French): First of all, on behalf of my Ambassador, I would like to express our warm gratitude to the Ambassador of Morocco, Mr. Omar Hilale, who offered his condolences following the disaster that struck the Algerian city of Skikda. We expected no less from a worthy representative of a brotherly neighbouring country for which we have the greatest respect. We are profoundly touched by his expression of sympathy. Allow me also to pay tribute to the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Iran for the quality of his statement and to thank him for his assessment of the five Ambassadors' initiative aimed at promoting a general and balanced programme of work. In this regard, my delegation takes this opportunity to indicate that this proposal has received broad support and that consultations are still continuing and that we are prepared, like other delegations associated with this proposal, to receive all suggestions or views on this subject.

The PRESIDENT: I thank you very much for your comments. If there are no speakers, I should like to invite the Conference to take a decision on the request for participation in our work from Iceland, a State not a member of the Conference, without first having considered it in an informal plenary. The request is contained in document CD/WP.534/Add.2.

May I take it that the Conference decides to invite Iceland to participate in our work, in accordance with the rules of procedure?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: This concludes our business for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor?

I should like to say a few words at this stage on the status of our work. I should like to inform you that I will be continuing with my consultations on the elements of a possible programme of work on the basis of the A5 proposal and any other proposals that may be tabled, and I encourage all delegations to work constructively in that direction and to continue to exercise flexibility. I also intend to take up the proposal that was made by the representative of Norway to have informal plenary meetings some time next week on the basis of the results of my continuing consultations. I will also continue consulting on the engagement of civil society in the CD, following on the excellent work done by Ambassador Mary Whelan and Ambassador Yaakov Levy.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I should like to appeal to delegations that have not done so to present their letters of accreditation as soon as possible in order to expedite the publication of the list of participants.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 5 February 2004 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.