

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 18 March 2004, at 10.15 a.m.

President:

Mr. Pablo MACEDO

(Mexico)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 953rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is a privilege for me to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, Mr. Tyronne Fernando, who will be addressing the Conference today. His presence in this forum demonstrates once again the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka and the Foreign Minister personally to arms control and disarmament, and in particular to the work of our Conference. I would also like to welcome today Dr. Rolf Mützenich, a member of the German parliament, who is participating in today's plenary meeting.

It is an honour for me to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka to address the Conference. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. FERNANDO (Sri Lanka): It gives me great pleasure to address this unique forum, the Conference on Disarmament, on behalf of Sri Lanka. Let me at the outset congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in your endeavours to guide this Conference. It is our earnest desire to see that this year the Conference on Disarmament will reach consensus on its programme of work. In this regard, the proposals submitted by the five Ambassadors are very useful, and we must thank them for their untiring efforts. Sri Lanka fully supports these proposals.

Sri Lanka stands firmly against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Sri Lanka has always been supportive of the complete and universal elimination of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament is of great concern to the entire international community. Lord Bertrand Russell wrote in 1961: "The probability of thermonuclear war occurring appears to be significantly larger than the probability of it not occurring." It has not occurred for 53 years, but it can happen tomorrow.

Sri Lanka, like many other nations, is concerned that there has been slow progress made towards achieving nuclear disarmament. The nuclear-weapons States have a major role to play in this regard.

My country, Sri Lanka, and Egypt introduce traditionally at the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly a resolution on the "prevention of an arms race in outer space". The resolution calls for the recommencement, at the earliest, of the stalled negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space at your Conference.

Sri Lanka supports the establishment of an ad hoc committee in your Conference to negotiate a non-discriminatory and effectively verifiable multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, taking into consideration both disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives.

(Mr. Fernando, Sri Lanka)

Sri Lanka also supports the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and in particular the proposal of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to convene an international conference to focus on eliminating nuclear dangers.

We remain concerned at the lack of progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, in particular the 13 steps agreed upon to be taken by the parties to the NPT. There is no room for complacency. I think that during the time of the cold war there was no complacency. Now there is a more dangerous situation because we tend to be more complacent. Nigel Calder wrote in his book *Nuclear Nightmares*: “The Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Christopher Bertram, identifies as one of the worst consequences of proliferation the possibility that a minor Power may benefit by using nuclear weapons against a neighbour. If it achieved its military and political objectives without the sky falling in, the taboo that has operated since Nagasaki would be broken and nuclear war could then come to be regarded as a practicable way of settling international disputes. But what about the contrary menace, of the small regional war growing into a nuclear world war?”

Furthermore, pending the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Sri Lanka hopes that nuclear-weapon States and nuclear-weapon-capable States will continue to maintain a moratorium on nuclear-weapon test explosions.

The threat of terrorism, both perceived and real, has already had an adverse impact not only on the internal security of States, but also on international security relations. The danger that terrorists will acquire weapons of mass destruction no longer remains in the realm of imagination, as the world has already witnessed unprecedented devastating terrorist attacks in several countries. Therefore, all our multilaterally agreed conventions, frameworks and agreements, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and IAEA Safeguards Agreements, should be put into full use in order to consolidate our common determination to fight against terrorism. The establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones would also contribute immensely to achieving this goal.

Let me take this opportunity to outline briefly some of the important measures that Sri Lanka has taken in the field of conventional weapons.

We attach great importance to the prevention, combating and eradication of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and we actively participated in the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in 2001, and the first biennial meeting of States held in 2003. The outcome of the 2001 Conference and, in particular, its Programme of Action, played a key role in promoting awareness on the issue among government agencies and civil society. Sri Lanka has almost completed the setting up of a National Commission Against the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms.

(Mr. Fernando, Sri Lanka)

Action is also being taken in Sri Lanka to formulate national legislative measures in compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Sri Lanka is a party. The proposed national legislation, once enacted, will impose legal control on imports and exports of certain chemicals referred to in the Convention.

Although Sri Lanka remains outside the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines, it has always, in principle, supported the humanitarian objectives of this landmark international instrument. The Government of Sri Lanka has embarked on a comprehensive humanitarian mine action programme with the broad objective of making Sri Lanka a mine-free country by the end of 2006. A National Steering Committee for Mine Action has been set up to coordinate this programme.

In his address to the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2002, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka stated that Sri Lanka was reviewing its position on the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines with a view to becoming a party to it, as confidence in the peace process accrues. I might mention that the LTTE, our partners in the peace process, have been cooperating with us in the demining programme.

Interministerial consultations are being held to work towards Sri Lanka's accession to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, including its Amended Protocol II on landmines, as a first step towards fulfilling our commitment to address the issue of landmines. We are also exploring the possibility of sharing information, as appropriate, under article 7 of the Convention.

Finally, the creation of safe havens for individuals or groups of nations protected by weapons of mass destruction has become a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, we join those who reaffirm the efficacy of multilateral approaches as a means of achieving greater security for all. In our view, multilateral measures, in particular on disarmament and security issues, by their nature, favour dialogue over monologue, accommodation over domination, consultation over prescription and cooperation over confrontation. We strongly believe that individual as well as collective security needs and requirements are best met through multilateral measures as well as consultation processes that enjoy international legitimacy and support.

I pray that weapons of destruction will "rust in peace".

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I will now suspend the plenary meeting for a few minutes in order to escort his Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs from the Council Chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 10.25 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I now call on the distinguished representative of Spain, Ambassador Carlos Miranda.

Mr. MIRANDA (Spain) (translated from Spanish): On 11 March this year, two and a half years after 11 September 2001, an attack took place in Madrid which claimed the lives of more than 200 individuals and left 1,400 injured. Whatever may have been the origin of the terrorist group, this attack highlights once again that terrorism, which is always unjustifiable and unacceptable, has no borders and threatens all of us. For this reason, I believe that I can affirm that those of us who are in the Conference on Disarmament must be increasingly aware of the need to prevent terrorists from gaining access to weapons of mass destruction.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to press even further in three directions. First of all, so as to assure ourselves that when weapons of mass destruction exist, these weapons must be subject to security and safekeeping measures which will guarantee that terrorists cannot acquire them. A second avenue is, certainly, continued strengthening of policies aimed at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their components. It is possible that these two areas should be assigned priority. However, they should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that measures directed towards the elimination of these weapons of mass destruction should also be studied.

Mr. President, last Tuesday, on behalf of the Conference, you extended words of condolence for the victims of the attack in Madrid, who were not all Spanish, and the Conference on Disarmament lodged in its memory a moving minute of silence brimming with solidarity, for which I would like to thank you once again.

Today, the task of agreeing on a programme of work is still pending before us in the Conference on Disarmament. I am convinced that you, Sir, have the necessary skills to take us in the right direction, towards approval of this programme of work, adding your efforts to those that have already been made by the Presidents who have preceded you in your present post.

Some see the brief Presidential term as a functional weakness. However, we should also consider the fact that the rapid rotation in the presidency has a political virtue, that of involving all the delegations of the countries that are members of the Conference in the leadership of the CD in a more collective way.

Given the deep ties linking Spain to Mexico, nothing would make me happier than to see the Conference succeed in approving a programme of work during your term as President - an appointment on which I congratulate you. I believe that approving a programme of work would be the best tribute that this Conference could pay, not only to victims of the Madrid attack but also to all victims of terror whoever they may be.

Over the past three days we have seen various Ministers coming to this very room to call on the Conference to resume its negotiations on substantive issues and stress that at this time the Conference cannot remain on the sidelines from the collective effort in which all our countries are engaged to bring about a safer world, which includes the struggle against terrorism.

(Mr. Miranda, Spain)

If the Conference continues to remain silent, the main damage will not only be to the Conference, as a tool which has been cast aside, but to the credibility of the countries making up the Conference on Disarmament. Lack of credibility is always a weakness, an Achilles heel. In the case of security issues, this type of weakness helps only terrorists and States which do not respect the commitments they have undertaken or do not want to enter into them.

Therefore, as I wish you luck in your endeavours, Mr. President, in which you can count on cooperation from the Spanish delegation, allow me to make an appeal to all the countries which make up the Conference to make a decisive effort to arrive at a programme of work.

In order to make progress in that direction, Spain is prepared, as I have already had occasion to point out earlier, to support the proposal that we should hold informal sessions of the plenary of the Conference for the purpose of exchanging views on the topics in the agenda which we approved at the beginning of the year, and which, as you will remember, was supplemented by a Presidential statement. This proposal was initially put forward by the Chair in the person of Ambassador Amina Mohamed of Kenya, whom I congratulate on her work.

My delegation has a flexible attitude and seeks to be constructive. My country understands, therefore, that the new issues cannot be left out of the informal debate that has been proposed, without prejudice to the formula which makes it possible.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished representative of Spain for his statement and for the very warm words of encouragement addressed to the Chair and to my efforts. There are no further speakers on today's list. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? It seems not, so this concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 25 March at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.