

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 2 September 2009, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Christian STROHAL (Austria)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1157th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is a particular honour and pleasure for me to be able to welcome the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria, Mr. Michael Spindelegger, to this Conference. Mr. Spindelegger has had a long career, in spite of his young age, in the Austrian Parliament and the European Parliament. He has been the Second President of the Austrian Parliament and the foreign policy spokesperson of the People's Party, and became a minister last year. We are delighted that he has made it to Geneva, where he has arrived at a busy time when we are preparing not only for the closure of this year's session of the Conference on Disarmament but also for the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as for the relevant activities of the Security Council, on which Austria will be represented next year as a non-permanent member.

I now give the floor to the minister.

Mr. SPINDELEGGER (Austria): Mr. President, Thank you for this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament today.

Austria has assumed the presidency of the Conference at an important point in time. This year the Conference finally adopted a programme of work after more than a decade of stalemate. This is a positive, long overdue development. So I do not need to speak about deadlocks or the missed opportunities of the past. Let me focus on recent positive developments in arms control and disarmament and their implications for our future.

The year 2009 has seen one paramount development: the goal of nuclear disarmament and the eventual total elimination of nuclear weapons has been put back on the global agenda. I welcome the five-point plan for disarmament proposed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, which I had the opportunity to discuss with him a few days ago in Austria.

I also welcome the recent positive statements that have been made by United States President Obama in Prague and Cairo and by Russian President Medvedev. And only a few weeks ago, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang underlined China's goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world here in this very room.

Austria promoted the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons throughout the cold war, when only a few countries possessed nuclear capabilities. Since proliferation has introduced new threats from States and non-State actors, striving for this goal is now all the more necessary.

Our vision is now shared by the most important nuclear powers. But how far has this vision been translated into concrete action? We can identify two developments. First, direct bilateral negotiations: we see a renewed readiness to engage in bilateral negotiations. The commitment by President Obama and President Medvedev to negotiate a new strategic arms reduction treaty by the end of this year is a good example. Second, the global atmosphere in multilateral arms control negotiations has changed: preparations for the 2010 Review Conference

of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) show a markedly better atmosphere. Initiatives by States and civil society all around the world, such as the Security Council summit on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament due to be held on 24 September, ensure global ownership and demonstrate a new readiness to engage in dialogue.

But let me be clear: positive declarations, a good atmosphere and universal interest also need real implementation and compliance. The NPT can only fulfil its promise of peace if all States adhere to their obligations. Similarly the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament needs to be implemented if it is to become a real achievement.

This brings me to my next point - our expectations for the future. First let me start with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), a treaty which originated in this chamber. The deplorable nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in May has made clear that the entry into force of the CTBT is overdue. As Co-Chair, together with Costa Rica, Austria has been deeply involved in efforts to secure this goal over the past two years.

Let me thus use this opportunity to appeal once again to those States that have not yet done so to accede to the CTBT as soon as possible. I am encouraged by the recent commitment of President Obama to pursue ratification by the United States, and also by China's comments in this regard. Let me appeal to all States to show their support for the treaty at the Article XIV conference in New York later this month, and to all delegation's present to help ensure that their country participates.

Second, Austria believes that a comprehensive fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) - a treaty that still has to emerge from this chamber - would significantly contribute to nuclear disarmament. Reliable techniques for monitoring and verification have been developed over the past years. The potential positive impact of such a treaty has been confirmed many times. The IAEA is ready to make an important contribution. It now requires the political will of Governments and the efforts of skilled negotiators to make it a reality. It is my sincere hope that the new spirit in the Conference on Disarmament will soon enable it to proceed with actual work and start negotiations on an FMCT.

Finally, when we talk about expectations for the upcoming year, we must mention the NPT Review Conference, which will take place next May in New York. The Preparatory Committee has shown a willingness to achieve a meaningful outcome this time. Today, we see a broad understanding that the dangers of nuclear technology need to be contained in a manner that creates trust and confidence among all States. The Review Conference will demonstrate whether we are capable of transforming this positive atmosphere into real progress.

Austria will present and support initiatives aimed at making substantial progress in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and a global system to effectively control the nuclear fuel cycle. This should help to avoid tensions such as the ones we are currently witnessing in regard to the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

(Mr. Spindelegger, (Austria))

Austria attaches great importance to arms control also in the area of conventional weapons such as landmines, cluster munitions and small arms and light weapons. Let me make three brief comments in this respect.

First, with regard to landmines: Austria's objective for the Second Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, to be held later this year in Cartagena, Columbia, is to work for a strong Cartagena action plan, which will serve as a clear guide to States and bring us closer to a world free of mines. One priority for us is to improve assistance to landmine survivors.

In this respect Austria has sponsored - together with Norway and civil society partners - a project to examine the global impact of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and what remains to be done to improve the situation of survivors. The report will be presented here today right after this meeting. Let me just use this opportunity to encourage all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. It is time for the international community not only to review its stance on nuclear weapons but also to finally eradicate this terrible weapon.

Second, with regard to cluster munitions: I encourage States to ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions. So far 17 States have ratified it. It is our strong hope that the Convention will receive the necessary 30 ratifications to enter into force before the end of this year. To support this, Austria has engaged in a worldwide campaign and will support a conference on cluster munitions in Indonesia in November.

Third, with regard to small arms and light weapons: these are a major security threat in parts of the world. Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once called them the "real weapons of mass destruction". Every year, hundreds of thousands of people are killed by them. The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is a significant step forward. Austria supports its implementation on the ground, especially in Africa.

To stop the illicit arms trade, Austria supports the conclusion of a legally-binding international arms trade treaty. As a producing and exporting country of small arms, Austria feels a special responsibility to engage in this process and will also host the concluding conference of the global joint project of the European Union and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in February 2010. We hope that the conference in Vienna will provide positive momentum and enable the conclusion of a treaty in the near future.

One thing is clear: there is no lack of work in the field of arms control and disarmament today and the international community is responding positively. In order to succeed, I count not only on the new flexibility of the nuclear-weapon States and the constructive contributions of all the other States, but also on the commitment and expertise of civil society. Throughout the years, non-governmental organizations and private citizens have remained important motors of the disarmament and arms control process.

(Mr. Spindelegger, (Austria))

Austria has always underlined that disarmament and arms control must be an open, participatory process if it is to succeed. Protecting the world from the harm caused by weapons is a global project and needs active support from all of us. In this respect, I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference for his tireless efforts, and this year's other presidencies - Viet Nam, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Argentina and Australia - for their excellent cooperation in the Conference on Disarmament. I wish the Conference the necessary energy for a good conclusion to this year's session and an early and effective resumption next year.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the minister for his statement. Before adjourning this plenary meeting, let me just make two brief announcements. The first is, as mentioned, at 11 a.m. in this chamber, the minister will launch the report "Voices from the Ground", a report in which victims of landmines and explosive remnants of war will speak out on victim assistance.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held tomorrow at 11 a.m. in this chamber. At that time, the Chairman-Designate of the First Committee of the General Assembly, Ambassador José Luis Cancela of Uruguay, will deliver a statement.

This plenary meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.