

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 5 August 2004, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Omar HILAË (Morocco)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I call to order the 963rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset I would like to extend a cordial welcome to Ambassador François Roux, who has recently taken up his duties as Permanent Representative of Belgium and head of the delegation of Belgium to the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to take this opportunity to assure him of our cooperation and support in his new assignment.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our sister from South Africa, Ms. Claudine Mtshali, who has recently taken up her duties as Permanent Representative of South Africa and head of the South African delegation to the Conference on Disarmament. I take this opportunity to assure her too of our cooperation and support in her new assignment.

Before giving the floor to the first person on the list today, I give the floor to Ambassador François Roux of Belgium, who has requested it.

Mr. ROUX (Belgium) (translated from French): I wished to say a few words this morning, first to thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words and to convey greetings to you, Sir, as well as each of you, dear colleagues. In the coming years I will have, among other tasks, that of representing my country in this august assembly. The Conference on Disarmament - and I would like to repeat this at the outset - is an institution to which Belgium remains very committed, and this is therefore a great honour for me. And there too it is my intention to follow the path followed by my predecessors and to be fully involved in the work of this Conference so as to help to ensure, together with each one of you of course, that it returns to its calling, which is to work for a better world.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank our new colleague from Belgium for his kind words and for reiterating the commitment of his country's delegation to the cause of disarmament, which has never been doubted in the past. I now give the floor to Ambassador Yoshiki Mine of Japan.

Mr. MINE (Japan): Mr. President, since this is my first time to take the floor under your presidency, allow me to express my sincere appreciation of your efforts to move the Conference forward at this very crucial juncture, and I would like to assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation.

Japan welcomes the statement made by the United States last week about the result of its long-awaited policy review of the FMCT, because Japan places the utmost importance on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices. We believe this decision has opened a new window of opportunity for the CD and sincerely hope that it will lead to the commencement of negotiations on a legally binding FMCT, as agreed at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences.

(Mr. Mine, Japan)

The United States also mentioned that realistic and effective verification is not achievable. Japan believes that the FMCT should be effectively verifiable, as referred to in the Shannon mandate. An effective verification regime is essential to enhance the transparency and accountability of fissile material production in each country, thereby ensuring the credibility of the treaty. We look forward to further discussions on the outcome of this policy review during the upcoming visit of United States experts to Geneva.

Japan supports the United States view that the FMCT is ripe for negotiation and that it should be delinked from other issues. Japan has made its position clear, on numerous occasions, in its support for the A-5 proposal as a basis upon which the CD can resume its substantive work. Each issue should be addressed at the appropriate time, according to its level of development. Japan sincerely hopes the CD can reach consensus on a programme of work that enables us to commence FMCT negotiations.

As to the United States proposal for a ban on the sale and export of persistent landmines, it may have a certain significance among States non-parties to the Ottawa Convention. Nevertheless, the majority of the CD member States have already adhered to the Ottawa Convention, which stipulates a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. Thus, Japan is of the view that it is important to work first towards the reinforcement and universalization of existing frameworks, including the Ottawa Convention.

Japan calls upon all States to harness the momentum created by the United States proposal on FMCT and to utilize this last session of the year to focus our energy on agreeing on a programme of work which will enable the commencement of FMCT negotiations.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Ambassador Mine for his statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair.

We have reached the end of the list of speakers. Would any other delegation like to speak at this point? It seems not.

As you know, I have held some consultations concerning the convening of three additional informal plenary meetings during the remainder of my term of office. On the basis of the results of these consultations, I intend to convene the following meetings: an informal plenary meeting following the adjournment of this plenary meeting, devoted to new and additional issues related to the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, and two other informal plenary meetings on Tuesday 10 August 2004 and Thursday 12 August 2004, for consideration of the methodology of the programme of work. In order to facilitate the discussions and ensure they are interactive, I have given the coordinators of the various groups a questionnaire which has been passed on to every delegation, and, I hope, will streamline our deliberations. The plenary meeting scheduled today, as well as the two other meetings, will be open only to member States of the Conference and States with observer status.

(The President)

In view of the foregoing, the timetable of meetings of the Conference for next week will be as follows: on Tuesday 10 August 2004 at 10 a.m., an informal plenary meeting on the methodology of the programme of work; on Thursday 12 August 2004 at 10 a.m., the 964th plenary meeting, followed by an informal plenary meeting on the methodology of the programme of work.

Before adjourning this meeting to hold our informal meeting on new and additional issues related to the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to make a few comments in my capacity as President.

First of all, in a few minutes the Conference on Disarmament is going to have its first meeting on these topics. This will be a great moment for our Conference and a first in the annals of this multilateral negotiating body for disarmament. The meeting that we will hold in a moment will embody the opening of the Conference to the realities of our world. In addition it will be an adaptation of our body to the international environment with the risks, threats and challenges which confront it. It will also be a sort of symbol of the maturity of the Conference on Disarmament, which, we hope, presages a certain revitalization subsequently.

My second comment is that our informal meeting to be held in a few minutes is the result of a hard-won consensus, a consensus achieved after marathon deliberations and consultations. This is not my achievement - it belongs to all of you. And as Plato said, a consensus is a union of persons of good will. For my part, I would say that this consensus has been the union of political will on the part of all of you. I was merely the modest servant of that will. Allow me, then, to commend all of you for this achievement and this agreement.

First of all I would like to congratulate everyone who has worked to initiate these issues and all who have also worked with patience, perseverance and diplomacy and skill in order to put them on our Conference's programme and to make them visible during the consultations and over the months. I would also like to congratulate all of those who hesitated, quite legitimately, and who were afraid that the Conference on Disarmament would become a debating body, or who also had some concerns, also legitimate, that the new issues might overshadow the traditional agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. Finally, I would like to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, for his efforts and his support for the Chair in consultations both discreet and effective, fully respecting the positions of all parties.

Thirdly, the new issues, as you know, are controversial. Hence our meeting today will be an opportunity to achieve our objectives, identify them and also draw up a sort of inventory of these issues. The second objective is to deliberate together, jointly, on how they should be dealt with subsequently. The Conference, or rather the meeting that we are going to have in a few moments, is not an end and will not be an end in itself, but rather the beginning of a process which, we hope, will be positive for all. For that reason I hope that this process, this exchange, will be as productive, as imaginative and as open towards the future.

(The President)

My fourth and final reflection or comment: the new and additional issues are very sensitive, very complex issues. I would therefore like to appeal to all of you to raise the level of reflection, to hold an interactive debate, a dispassionate debate, a calm debate and a debate in which both sides are heard. I also appeal to you to set aside any particular situations, avoid polemics and exclude no country (member, observer or non-member of this Conference). Our goal is an exchange, reflection, debate, and especially to build, I hope, a sort of process for the future.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that consensus, or rather the spirit of openness, moderation, flexibility and responsibility which has made it possible to reach this consensus today, will prevail during our discussions. The way in which the new and additional issues related to the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament are handled in the future will depend on your deliberations.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.